

# HOW BEAUTIFUL IS CHRISTMAS!

Pastor Colin Rieke ~ December 25, 2016



<sup>7</sup> How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, “Your God reigns!” <sup>8</sup> Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for joy. When the LORD returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes. <sup>9</sup> Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. <sup>10</sup> The LORD will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God. (Isaiah 52:7-10)

Today, in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you, he is Christ the Lord,

Merry Christmas! It isn’t all that often that we get to pair Christmas Day with our Sunday worship, but we do in 2016, and it’s wonderful. It’s wonderful as we consider the Christmas story and celebrate the birth of Jesus. It’s a story that we know pretty well, right? It’s a story wrapped up in many of the Christmas carols we hear on the radio. Mary and Joseph travelling to a small town of Bethlehem where Mary gives birth to her firstborn child. Angels sing about his birth, shepherds come and find him. Wise men journey from afar. It makes for a wonderful story, right? Absolutely.

And if that were all Christmas were about, it would be a wonderful story. But what makes that story better is that there’s so much more to it. It was a story that was several thousand years in the making. It’s a story that ripples across the fabric of time. It’s a story about so much more than a little baby boy born in a manger, but who that little baby was and what he came to do. In the opening part of the service this morning, we confessed who that baby was: “ruler of ages eternal...chose to be born an infant in time,” “[he] who the heavens cannot contain...rest in the arms of Mary.” We confessed what he came to do, “he became poor...so that you might become rich.” This elevates the Christmas story from merely a wonderful story to a beautiful story. HOW BEAUTIFUL IS CHRISTMAS:

1. So lift up your voices
2. God’s plan is revealed

(1)

If you didn’t know any better, you might think that Isaiah was there on that first Christmas, and that he was describing the wonderful Christmas story, “**how beautiful...the feet of those who bring good news,**” describing the angel’s message to the shepherds. “**Those who proclaim peace.**” Does that sound familiar to the angels’ song, “**Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests?**” “**Those who proclaim salvation**” parallels “**A Savior has been born to you, he is Christ the Lord.**” Almost to the line, you can look through Isaiah 52 and see Christmas all around it.

But we know that Isaiah wasn’t beside the manger, he wasn’t in the fields with the shepherds, he didn’t trek alongside the wise men. Instead, he lived 700 years before all of this took place. And even

though the scene he describes perfectly lines up with the Christmas story, Isaiah had in mind a more immediate fulfillment of God's plan.

Isaiah lived during a time when it seemed like God had abandoned his people. Israel was not the world power, but rather quite the opposite, being tossed back and forth by more powerful nations surrounding it. But it was Isaiah who prophesied that God had not abandoned his people, and that there would be hope. There would be hope of a God who would win the victory, who would be a champion for his people. And this was all true. While the nation of Israel went through their tough times, God would bring them back to the Promised Land, he showed his control in convincing a foreign ruler named Cyrus of Persia to bring his people back to Israel.

But far from being the final result of God's plan that was only a step leading up to the culmination of God's plan. Remember, I told you the Christmas story was thousands of years in the making. God bringing his people back to Israel from Babylon, was one step in that plan. It was a plan that was repeated and repeated with promise after promise in the Old Testament. A promise about a Savior, a Messiah, someone chosen by God. Because of all of these promises, the Old Testament believers lifted up their voices constantly pointing everyone to God's promise of a Savior to come.

How spectacular that coming was. Certainly, it did not come as many were expecting it. It came in a little town, wrapped in strips of cloth, placed in a manger. But that birth was special. So special that the angel chorus lifted up their voices to announce to poor shepherds in the fields about this beautiful story. The shepherds went and saw all the angels had told them, and then they went home and stayed quiet about it. No, of course, not. They went out and told everyone what had happened, everything they had seen with their eyes, and everything they heard with their ears. You couldn't stop them from lifting up their voices. Old Testament believers, the shepherds, the angels all knew this was no just an ordinary nice story, but that this was A BEAUTIFUL STORY.

(2)

IT WAS A BEAUTIFUL STORY because God's plan was revealed. The angels and the shepherds, yes, even Mary and Joseph were seeing God's plan unfold before their very eyes. Once again, Isaiah describes it like he was there. "The Lord will lay bare his holy arm." It's the picture of a holy God breaking into history, controlling all the events for his purpose. And God revealed his plan by sending his Son to earth as a baby.

There was no more wondering when God's plan was going to come, there was no more wondering where God's plan was going to come, there was no more wondering how God's plan was going to come. God laid bare his arm - he sent his Son. Jesus was and still is the only truly perfect baby (I know many parents will say their baby's perfect, but believe me, they're not). Christmas is the story that that baby's birth. Over the next several months we will hear the rest of the story. We will hear the story of this baby who grew up to be a man. A man who did some incredible miracles, who preached some incredible sermons, but who most of all came as a substitute and a sacrifice for us.

That's why I love the image that is on the front of your worship folder covers. Yes, at Christmas time our focus is drawn to the little baby, held in the arms of his mother. But down the line, his life was always leading to the cross, which you see there in the center of the picture. It is the cross that is at the center of God's plan. It is at the cross that God's plan is completed. It is at the cross where God laid bare his holy arms and had nails driven through for me and for you. This is why CHRISTMAS IS SO BEAUTIFUL.

This is God's plan which he revealed to the world at Christmas. This is God's plan and there is no other, at least not another plan that will save. This is why Christmas is more than just about a baby born in a manger that we come to hear again year after year. This is why CHRISTMAS IS SO BEAUTIFUL. Because God's plan is revealed.

Today, we celebrate Christmas in any number of ways. We have a nice meal, we get together with family and perhaps a few friends. We decorate our house, we open presents. We get to relax and enjoy everyone's company. And that's what makes Christmas wonderful. But what makes Christmas beautiful is that little baby born in a manger. That little baby that God promised to send for thousands of years. That little baby who revealed God's plan to the nations. That little baby who would save us from our sins.

HOW BEAUTIFUL IS CHRISTMAS! We were not there by the manger side, we were not there with the shepherds, we did not trek with the wise men. But we know it happened, because the people that were there have told us. They lifted up their voices. Now it's our turn to lift up our voices, because God's plan is revealed. HOW BEAUTIFUL IS CHRISTMAS! Amen.