

Isaiah 52:7-10 THE PROPHET'S WONDERFUL ANNOUNCEMENT OF SALVATION!

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!” 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. Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. 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.

Have you ever wondered what people you've read about in the Bible looked like? God tells us that Sarah was “**an *extremely* (Hebrew) beautiful woman (Genesis 12:14).**” God describes young David as “**ruddy, with *beautiful eyes* (Hebrew) and *pleasant to look at*” or “handsome” (1 Samuel 16:12).” Of course God doesn't describe everyone in the Bible. In this first lesson, though, we hear that Isaiah had beautiful feet! No ancient drawings of the prophet's feet are necessary to confirm this truth because it says right here, “**How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation...**” Isaiah brought Good News to the people and God says that when people bring good news—when they proclaim salvation—they have beautiful feet!**

Isaiah foresaw the restoration of the kingdom of God's people, saving them from their enemies and he looked forward to the day the LORD would send his Messiah with spiritual salvation. And when Isaiah told the people and wrote it down, he did so as if it were already an accomplished fact. Given a prophetic view of a double prophecy, to him, it was as if God's nation was restored and as if Jesus was already born—even though that manger in Bethlehem wouldn't hold a baby for another 700 years!

Why could he write like that? Because when God promises something, it is as good as done! He said he would send a Savior from sin, someone who would live and die as a perfect sacrifice, paying for the world's sin and bringing peace and salvation to a world of sinners. The God who promised this would bring it to pass—Isaiah trusted that and so did the people of his time and those who lived for hundreds of years after them. So even the thought of God doing this in the future was something that made God's people rejoice and have confidence!

So Isaiah's announcement includes these words: **good news, peace, good tidings, salvation, shout for joy, comfort, redeemed.** These are all wonderful things! This is Old Testament gospel preaching by Isaiah. “Gospel” means “good news” and Isaiah's good news was that in the promised Savior the people found peace with God.

Just as you and I confessed our sins again this morning, those people confessed their errors against God on a daily basis too. Just as you and I find forgiveness in that Bethlehem baby, so did they. We trust that God did follow through on his promises of a Savior; they trusted that he would. Either way the focus was on Jesus, the One who brings salvation to a world separated from the Holy God by their sins.

No wonder Isaiah told the people “**Burst into songs of joy...for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed**” them! And isn’t that why we sing today? Isn’t that why there are so many parts to our Christmas celebration? We have parties, a beautiful Children’s Service, a Christmas Eve service and worship again on Christmas Day. And you work so hard as accompanists, instrumentalists and singers on music that proclaims the joys and promises of God through Jesus. We all join in the celebration because we are filled with joy at the redemption that comes through Jesus!

We just sang about how Jesus came from heaven to live and die for us as true God and true man: *“He veils in flesh his pow’r divine A servant’s form to take; In want and lowliness must die Who heav’n and earth did make... A wondrous change which he does make: He takes our flesh and blood, And he conceals for sinners’ sake His majesty of God...”*

You know, in the chapter that follows our lesson this morning, Isaiah wrote about Jesus’ servant form and how he concealed his majesty. He wrote: “**He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him.**” And then he goes on to describe how Jesus suffered abuse and shame and death, but would rise to life, bringing forgiveness and salvation. The beauty of Jesus is seen not in Christmas-baby-cuteness but in the fact that God came to earth to save us. That is the wonderful announcement that brings peace and comfort and joy.

With all of this in our hearts, we—like Isaiah—must also have beautiful feet—right? We do when we bring this Good News to those around us. When we sing “Go Tell It on the Mountain”, we sing it loudly and with joy, not just because it is a catchy tune, but because we “get it”. We believe that forgiveness in Jesus Christ is Good News and we want to tell it!

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs. For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father"? Or again, "I will be his Father, and he will be my Son"? And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him." In speaking of the angels he says, "He makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire." But about the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy."

How do you beat the radiance of the beaming father of a newborn child—like Joseph? Maybe with the glowing of a first-time mom, Mary! On that first Christmas, perhaps you would make the case that they were outdone by a group of excited shepherds running off to the manger and then running out to share the news. But then again, it would be hard to compete with the glorious angels sent from heaven with the glory of the Lord shining there, wouldn't it?!

I do believe that if you or I had wandered into that cattle stall and peered into the makeshift cradle, it's not likely that we would have looked at the messy, frail, little newborn baby nestled there and said, "*That little one is the most radiant thing I've ever seen,*" even though we sing, "*Silent night! Holy night! Son of God, love's pure light, RADIANT beams from thy holy face...*"

Looks can be deceiving, can't they? The truth was that even at his birth, Jesus was **THE WONDERFUL RADIANCE OF GOD'S GLORY**. How do we know that? Only because God had foretold where this child would be born, who this child would be, and what he would do. And even after all that was done—after Jesus had grown up and gone to the cross and risen from death and gone back into heaven—God continued to tell us the importance of this Savior.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews tells us: **The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being (1:3)**. And this: **About the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom (1:8)."**

Even as a little baby, Jesus was the radiance of God's glory! But it was about who he was and not what he looked like. He was true God even in the manger! Mary knew it; Joseph knew it; the angels knew it; even the shepherds knew it! The little baby was God in the flesh, *Emmanuel*, "God with us". Because he was willing to be born as a human being, you couldn't always tell by looking at him—not at his birth, not during his suffering and death. But he was truly God in the flesh also. Even when others couldn't see or didn't notice, his Father did. He could see the perfect, sinless life and pure heart which went to the cross. In fact, the Father saw this radiance from all eternity. Those gathered in Bethlehem on that first Christmas caught the first glimpse of this radiant Son of God and they pondered and protected and proclaimed and praised him!

The account of Christ's birth and this explanation from Hebrews encourage us to give the same things to the radiant Son of God at Christmas and always:

Just as Mary pondered the Savior's birth, ponder his love and greatness.

Just as Joseph protected Jesus as a baby, protect the Savior's reputation as you boldly defend his name.

Just as the angels proclaimed his arrival, proclaim to others that Jesus is the world's Savior.

Just as the shepherds praised their Savior, praise him with your heart and voice and life.

John 1:1-14 TWO WONDROUS BIRTHS!

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all people might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

On this Christmas Day we are reminded that Jesus' birth was not his beginning! John writes in his gospel that the Word (that's what he called Jesus) always existed, that he was God, that he created all things. But when Jesus came into the world to do his saving work, his was not some grand entrance. In fact, it likely went unnoticed by almost everyone. Sure, we've talked about how important and wonderful Jesus' birth was to Mary and to Joseph and to the shepherds and even to the angels that proclaimed: **"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."** And of course we know how important his birth is to us, but really, who else in and around Bethlehem even noticed? And if they did see the baby Jesus, was it anything more than, *"Oh, what a precious baby!"*? Probably not.

That may have been the case as he grew up also and even as he embarked upon his ministry—his radiance didn't always shine through his humanity. So God had a man named John the Baptist prepare people to meet the Savior. He pointed the people to Jesus. But even as Jesus became known around the Sea of Galilee and in Jerusalem and throughout Israel, some did not recognize that Jesus was the Light of the world. Because their hearts were darkened with sin, they *would not* see Jesus as the Light of salvation.

You and I, without the gift of the Holy Spirit, could not see this Light of the world either. We too would pass by his manger and merely comment on what a cute child he was and offer congratulations to the parents. Then our Christmases would not really celebrate his wondrous birth. We would be left with mere traditions and opportunities to see family and friends. How sad and empty that would be. How sad and empty Christmas *is* for many who do not look into that manger and see a wondrous birth and the radiant Light of salvation.

Since you and I do see Jesus for who he is, we praise and thank the Holy Spirit for giving us the gift of faith. We honor God the Father for the gift of his Son. We praise and glorify Jesus for his gift of redemption and salvation. You see, we are not who we once were!

We treasure Luke's gospel because it tells us details about our Savior's birth and Matthew's gospel because it shares the circumstances surrounding his birth. But John's gospel is so necessary because it ties the birth of Christ to us personally! Listen to that part again: **Yet to all who received (Jesus), to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.**

Do you see the other wondrous birth? It is yours! It is mine! God says that by faith in Jesus, we are spiritually reborn! It was not like a physical birth where we are born into a family tree or that someone decided for us like a wife and husband "decide" to have a baby. And it was not because we *wanted* to have faith! It was because we saw Jesus and the Spirit of God moved in our hearts and made us children of God through the gift of faith.

Wonderful...undeserved...incredible. John has hit the nail on the head! Christmas means so much to us because through Jesus we become children of God. It started at the wondrous birth of the eternal Son of God and continued at our wondrous birth as children of God and it will go on in the unending glories of heaven when we join our Savior there!

When that day comes, we will sing like the angels sang at Jesus' birth—we'll even sing *with* the angels who sang at Jesus' birth! May you rejoice on this Christmas Day at the birth of the Savior and rejoice *every day* that you have been born into the family of God by faith in Christ. Amen.