

The Nativity of Our Lord • December 25, 2010

St. John's Lutheran Church, Alexandria, VA

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Isaiah 52:7-10

“Special Delivery”

The best gift this year won't be found in a box wrapped in shiny paper under a tree, it's not a sparkling ring stuffed in a stocking with care, it's not a brand new car out in the driveway under a huge bow... and it's not even a baby, bundled in blankets. Even so, the best gift this Christmas is still a special delivery.

I've always been glad to see delivery people. Maybe you feel the same way. When you open the door and the UPS man, the FedEx lady, or your regular postal carrier is there, package in hand, you can feel special, knowing that someone sent something to *you*. Decades ago, back in the days before Amazon.com – before *any* companies were on the Internet – I remember ordering items through the mail or over the phone, then waiting for those packages to arrive. Most of the time, those deliveries would take “three to six weeks,” the catalogs said. In that time, I'd see the UPS truck drive up our street, only to pass right by the house. The mailman would drop off the mail each day, yet no package appeared in the mailbox. But then, one day, there it'd be: sitting on the front porch when I'd get home from school, or nestled in the mailbox alongside the letters. The joy! Now, we **do** have Amazon.com and express shipping. It's December 22nd and you still haven't gone out to get your wife that deluxe bread-making machine for Christmas? No problem! A special delivery will arrive to head off the potential embarrassment of running out to the store at the last minute to pick up whatever you can find. (Of course, it won't help you when you learn that your wife never really ever *wanted* a breadmaker...) But no matter how many deliveries you receive, can any of them every really fill your need? Gifts that were joyfully unwrapped last night or this morning might be broken or forgotten six months from now. They might make you feel happy, for a time, but that feeling fades. You end up looking for the next delivery, then the next after that. Can any delivery break the cycle and bring you and me what we really need?

Our Christmas Day reading from Isaiah 52 speaks of a different kind of delivery. Imagine people living in a city that's surrounded by enemy forces, forces that want to destroy every man, woman, and child. It's really only a matter of time before the enemy comes and does just that. But the people have heard that a king who has been fighting against the enemy is near. One day, a watchman on the city wall looks out and sees something – *someone* – coming over the hills in the distance. Is it an enemy scout? No, it's one of the king's messengers. The people in the city hear the shouts as the news travels from watchman to watchman. Listen! What is it that they're yelling? “The king has won! The enemy is defeated! We have peace!” The messenger has brought the news of the king's victory, waving a palm branch in the air as he draws near. The citizens have been saved from the forces that would otherwise have destroyed them. And now, the king is coming to this town, to these people who for such a long time had lived in need, cut off from the rest of the kingdom. No more. No more will the people be alone. No more will the people fear the enemy. They have been delivered.

This Christmas morning, we are the people whose city is surrounded. After the shine has worn off, after all the family feasts have been eaten, everything that's been delivered just ends up needing to be replaced. Meaninglessness, hopelessness, and isolation are the forces that the enemy is sending against us to break us down and wipe us out. Maybe you've been feeling those in a particular way in this last month of the year. How, then, does God's message through Isaiah relate to you, today? Where's the Christmas gift that you most need? When your life is under siege, the best gift is the same one that the people of the city received: the message of deliverance, of the king's victory. That is the gift that you and I all really need, and God provides it.

God's people celebrate Christmas because it reminds us of God's special delivery. I'm not talking about the special delivery of a baby, born of a virgin – though that is indeed a pretty special delivery. The best gift of Christmas, even more than the news that God Himself came to live as a human being, is the good news that God is doing all that **for you**. The gift that God gives in Jesus isn't just a child who is fully human and also fully divine; this special delivery is a Savior, one who is coming into the world to defeat the enemy that's surrounding you. Jesus was born to break the power of meaninglessness, hopelessness, and isolation. He was born to live and die in order to reconnect you with your Creator, to deliver *you*. This best gift of Christmas is the announcement that God has stretched out His holy arm, his might and power and strength, to bring victory: victory to you and for you. You no longer need to be alone and cut off, because God is coming for you.

Today, we come together around the altar to join in the Christmas feast at the Lord's table in Holy Communion. This special delivery from God is a proclamation of our Savior Jesus and – in the truest sense of the words – delivers Jesus to us. Like the people who heard the watchmen shout out in joy, we learn that the king is coming to us, and soon. He is bringing victory with him, so we can sing, "Joy to the world!"

I give thanks to God that I have been given the message of His victory over the enemy, that I have been sent to deliver it to you. But once this great gift of Christmas has been delivered, what happens next? We've been the people who lived in fear for themselves, for their city, battling meaninglessness, hopelessness, and isolation. But now that the news of God's victory in Jesus has come to us, like the people in the city, the word changes us. No longer only the receivers of the message, you and I become messengers, too.

The gift of Christmas gives your life meaning, calls you to hope, and moves you into community. As a person who has heard and believes the good news of God's love for you in Jesus, God is now sending you out to carry the word of the enemy's defeat. Your feet are now "beautiful feet," because they are carrying the special delivery of the gospel to other people who are still living in fear of the enemy, still in need of this gift that only God can give. And give it He will, through you.

Think about someone in your life that needs the gift of Christmas – not the kind that's under a tree or in a stocking or on the driveway – the real gift of God's good news for them. In the days ahead, look for a way to share the joy that comes through Jesus, to bring the message of victory. When the opportunity comes, God will speak through you, His messenger, to make that special delivery. *How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."* In Jesus, God gives the peace, happiness, and salvation that no other can, for you.

This Christmas morning, then, we go to share the gift that we've been given: Go, tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ is born!

Amen.