

"Proclaim the Royal Birth"

Text: Isaiah 52:7-10

My heart for very joy doth leap, my lips no more can silence keep;
I too must sing with joyful tongue that sweetest ancient cradle song:

Glory to God in highest heaven, Who unto us His Son hath given!
While angels sing with pious mirth a glad new year to all the earth. (TLH #85)

Fellow Recipients of the gift of the Christ Child:

Manufactured excitement is always tacky. I'm sure you've all seen it – maybe at a concert, party, or presentation. Folks naturally want whatever they are in charge of, whatever they are presenting or hosting, to be special, memorable, exciting. The problem is that the event or the occasion itself has to provide the excitement and energy. That sort of thing can't be staged, faked, or manufactured. If, for example, the band is bad, the party is dull, or the event is inconsequential, no amount of artificial excitement will be able to change that. In fact it just seems to make things worse. Human beings have a hard-wired ability to recognize both that which is truly exciting and important, and that which is truly lame.

So it is on this morning that human beings need try to infuse no special excitement into this occasion. We need but be reminded of the event itself and what it is that we are celebrating. The gift of our Savior King and the rescue and salvation that he represents will certainly carry the day all by itself.

So it is that we turn then to an Old Testament foretelling of this event to gain a sense of what life was like prior to this event, and what we will find is that nothing artificial or superficial need be added. The text that will form the basis for our Christmas Day meditation is found in the Book of Isaiah, the 52nd Chapter:

Isaiah 52:7-10 ***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." 8 The voice of your watchmen--they lift up their voice; together they sing for joy; for eye to eye they see the return of the LORD to Zion. 9 Break forth together into singing, you waste places of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people; he has redeemed Jerusalem. 10 The LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.***

So far the words of our text. Far from simple human words, what we have just heard or read reveals to us the mystery of the ages – the gospel of our God and Savior. We can and do trust these words - with our very souls. That God would bless us on this Christmas morning through the study of His Word, so we pray, ***"Sanctify us through your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."*** Amen.

Scripture itself teaches us that there is a time for quiet introspection and preparation, and there is a time for pure celebration. This is indeed the time for the latter – the time to allow the horses of our enthusiasm and joy free reign to celebrate the birth of our Savior, and to revel in the good news that quite literally changed the world. Christ the Savior is born! Hallelujah!

Our text for this Christmas morning makes clear to us that ours is not to be a silent, brooding, introspective religion. There is a time for such things, but the news that we have been given to know and believe is just too good to keep to ourselves, just too good to celebrate in silence. In fact our text is certainly advocating or promoting anything but silence when it says, ***"The voice***

of your watchmen--they lift up their voice; together they sing for joy; for eye to eye they see the return of the LORD to Zion. Break forth together into singing, you waste places of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people."

This morning then we examine what it is that God has done to us and for us. Just what is it that could cause God himself to advocate such an energetic and joyful celebration by his people?

To begin to understand just what this event means to you, ask yourself just what sort of news on this or any other day would naturally cause you to get excited? I mean *really* excited to the point that you would immediately want to share the news with family and friends?

Winning the lottery came to mind for not a few of you, didn't it? Or somehow coming into a substantial amount of money from an unexpected source? That would certainly do it for most folks, wouldn't it? If you suddenly got a phone call or registered letter that informed you that you were suddenly a multi-millionaire, that would certainly hike the old blood pressure and start the old cell phone finger a-dialing.

What if the news was even better than that? We're not even talking heaven here; we're talking spectacular news here on earth. Money comes and goes. Money can ruin lives. So what if the news was something even more personal and substantial – like maybe a genealogy search has revealed that you are royalty – the last living heir not just to a couple million dollars but to the vast wealth and power of an entire country? (We're fantasizing here, so just go with it.)

The problem with this scenario, of course, is that we are Americans, and Americans don't tend to think much of royalty. In our system the sky's the limit for every citizen as far as advancement goes, but that is a relatively new concept when held up to the light of history. Until rather recently a man or a woman could never rise above the station into which he or she was born. Born to a poor, deprived family you would forever remain poor and deprived. That would determine, from birth, what jobs you could hold, whom you could marry, where you could live and in what kind of house, and so on. Denied to you and your offspring would be the vast majority of all this world has to offer.

I know, I know. Most, if not all of you, couldn't care less about discovering that you were royalty. That just doesn't do it for you – in fact that's probably the *last* thing you would want to hear, that you were heir to a throne and had just been drafted to run an entire country somewhere.

Yet this is where the landscape begins to shift from the secular to the spiritual, from fantasy to stark reality, and that shift changes everything. What if your only options are royalty or utter poverty and deprivation, followed by death? You and I had exactly zero options before Jesus Christ came into our lives. We were nothing in God's eyes. We were expendable and utterly forgettable. Worse than that we were damned, which means we had absolutely nothing to look forward to not only in this life but for all eternity.

And then something truly remarkable happened. God himself dramatically altered our reality by sending his Son into our world. The result was that God himself has made the incredible announcement that you and I are now ***"a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and His own special people."*** I suspect that all of you have heard those words before, yet I wonder how many of us really *heard* them; that is, did you not only recognize the words but actually apply them to yourself and your own existence? Did you, in other words, acknowledge both the reality and the implications of these words in your own standing and relationship to your God? We take a few minutes to do just that this morning.

Princess Diana aside, the world's fanaticism regarding royalty has faded dramatically in the last hundred years or so. The American Experiment – the idea that all men are created equal – has gradually established a new mindset in the world. History has helped in the process, for history

has taught us that blood lines are no guarantee of virtue or ability. Royal blood in no way guarantees intelligence, sound judgment, or morality. In fact history is full of royals who were both dense and wicked.

God's sense of royalty is different. *Divine* royalty is based not on bloodlines but on adoption, and God the Father only adopts those who are virtuous and worthy.

Do you feel virtuous and worthy? Do you feel that your conduct has made you worthy of God's adoption and the label of celestial royalty? Neither do I. Yet that is the declaration made by God himself in his inspired Word. In understanding exactly *how* this declaration applies to *and is appropriate for the likes of you and me* represents the very heart of the gospel, and of the event we celebrate on this day.

The Word of God emphasizes over and over again that our virtue, our goodness, our righteousness is *imputed*. That means that God *declares it to be so*; he credits it to our account, even though we haven't earned the right by our own actions. On what basis then does God confer this sort of divine royalty upon the likes of us? How or why would a holy, just, righteous God do something like that to miserable, unworthy sinners like you and me?

The key here is to acknowledge that the source lies outside of ourselves. In fact it all goes back to that royal birth that we celebrate on this day – the Birth of our Savior/substitute, Jesus Christ. When Jesus entered our world – when he took human nature into his divinity – he came as the King of all kings and the Lord of all lords. Yet he did so in utter humility – giving up all of the benefits and trappings of royalty in the humble service of mankind. God the Father then – wonder of wonders – transferred all of the sin and corruption of mankind onto his own dear suffering Son, punishing him for all that you and I had done wrong. The Bible describes it this way: ***"God made Him, Who knew no sin, to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."***

The result of God's transfer of our sins onto his Son is that you and I have not only been cleansed of all of our filth and declared righteous by our God, the royalty of God's Son has been assigned also now to us.

To all of this, the unbelieving world in which we live replies simply, *"Nonsense."* In fact they hear such statements from Christians as utterly pathetic. Yet just as Jesus was rejected as the royal Son of God and Savior of the world during his time on earth, so we should expect no less.

The message then for God's children is that the gospel of Jesus Christ is both liberating and exalting. In sending his Son to be our Savior, God extended the hand of peace to every single human being. This was the message of the angels to the shepherds, the declaration that because God sent a Substitute who would bear the penalty for all sin, a state of peace now exists between God and man. God's disposition toward us is now one of mercy and good will, rather than enmity and wrath. In Jesus Christ, you and I have obtained mercy.

And more than that. In Jesus Christ you and I been made coheirs of heaven and are now known as the royal children of God. In fact God would have every single human being share in this great blessing, which is why he now calls upon every single one of us to share this gospel proclamation.

The time for quiet introspection has given way to the time for celebration and sharing. God give each of us the love and courage to give voice to this greatest of all good news. The King of kings has been born, and he has invited us all into his royal family. Amen.