

JJ¹

A little boy tears at wrapping paper. Still quite new to his little mind, he's starting to understand that opening gifts is fun. And this time he realizes just how fun it can be. The paper comes off and he sees an image of what's inside the box. He explodes with joy and excitement because he knows what he's just received and what he'll now be able to do with this gift.

With snow on the ground, it makes it easier to believe that Christmas is just two weeks away and scenes like this will be repeated millions and millions of times. Christmas is often a joyous time. Even our culture looks at it in a happy light, although almost always for the wrong reasons. One of the greatest sources of joy at Christmas is gifts.

Today as we continue **WAITING WITH THE OLD TESTAMENT CHURCH**, our attention is drawn to the only source of real joy at Christmas, or any time of the year. Our attention is drawn to The Gift, the reason for Christmas and why Christmas is called Christmas. Our attention is drawn both to The Gift and all the gifts he gives to us as we wait for Christmas and for Christ to come again on the Last Day. Today we are assured that we **WAIT WITH JOY**.

Our text begins with the pre-incarnate Christ speaking to us. How do we know? We know 1) because what is said could only be said by God, and 2) because Jesus himself told us these words were about him when he preached his first and last sermon in his hometown synagogue in Nazareth (Lk.4:16ff.).

"The Spirit of the LORD God is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the afflicted." With his first statement, the Son of God summarizes his entire mission. He comes to preach the good news. Everything else falls under that one thing.

God could not give you a greater gift than that because there is nothing you need more. Every single human needs to hear the good news about Jesus. Human lives from north, south, east and west are lives often filled with misery and trouble. We can watch the news and see the trouble and misery in other people's lives. This can cause us to be thankful that we live in a place that hurricanes can't touch, the earth doesn't split or shake, and wildfires aren't destroying entire communities. We can be thankful that we don't face the violent and even deadly persecution Christians face in different parts of the world. But our prayers also ascend to our heavenly Father on behalf of all these people.

¹ JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for "Jesus Help". It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

Yet, while you may not face those things, you still endure misery and trouble in this world. Sometimes you might feel like your life is more defeat and failure than victory. Disappointment keeps rearing it's ugly head in your life. You see loved ones in pain because of sickness. You yourself suffer pain, trauma and anxiety because of your own weakness or illness. You watch loved ones die and it leaves you feeling empty inside. Loved ones even cause you pain with their sin, leaving your heart cracked, even broken.

Then there is the misery you create in your own life with your own sin. Maybe you feel captive to the sin that has such a hold on your heart you don't know if you'll survive it. Maybe you feel like you can't escape the consequences of your own sin because others refuse to forgive you...or even because you refuse to forgive yourself and let Christ's peace rest on your own heart. Maybe good days seem so few and far between because as you rest your head on your pillow at night, your failures flood your mind so you can't sleep. At the end of it all, death glares at you with a stare that can't be broken because it's undeniably inescapable.

Our Lord describes our condition well: afflicted—brokenhearted—captive—bound—mournful—ashen—faint.

And because of this condition, you might doubt that you'll ever really see God's favor. You may think that the pain and trouble you have faced and are facing is God's vengeance burning against you already and that you therefore have no reason to have any joy.

Yet, friends, this is the very reason why our Savior says he was sent into this world. Our God does not want any person lost to this attitude or end—including you! Our heavenly Father sent

his anointed Son into this world so that you would have release from all these things and have his real joy in your hearts and lives. Jesus came to preach good news to you, and here is that good news:

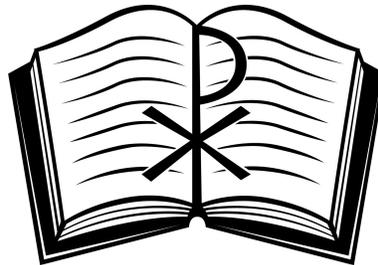
“He sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release for

those who are bound, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance for our God, to comfort all who mourn, to provide for those who mourn in Zion, to give them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, a cloak of praise instead of a faint spirit, so that they will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD to display his beauty.”



Luther describes our condition saying: “Christians are such as rejoice in the spirit but are mournful in the flesh.”² In other words, the things in the world around us and in our own lives cause us to mourn. But even as we mourn, our souls are filled with joy because of the good news announced to us. On the one hand we have mourning, grieving, ashes and despair. On the other hand we have comfort, a crown of beauty, the oil of joy and a garment of praise.

You see, friends, your Lord knows and sees when tears stream down your face because of loss and heartache. Your Lord knows when your life feels as faint and colorless as a black and white photo as sin presses you down. And so he provides you with the solution—joy. His joy.



The Anointed One—The Messiah—doesn’t come to bring this world’s joy that is so often here one minute and gone the next. It’s a joy that endures all things and outlasts every pain and sorrow. It’s more than just the elation of a child’s genuine joy when opening a gift (though sometimes that is the case). Our joy runs deeper because it comes from our Savior proclaiming the Good News to us and therefore has real meaning and conviction.

This is the truth because verse 10 is the response of every believer to hearing what our Savior has done for us. It is joy bubbling over! “I will rejoice greatly in the LORD. My soul will celebrate because of my God, for he has clothed me in garments of salvation. With a robe of righteousness he covered me, like a bridegroom who wears a beautiful headdress like a priest, and like a bride who adorns herself with her jewelry.”

Friends, you can indeed be filled with joy because your loving Lord has covered over your entire sinful life with the robe of Christ’s righteousness. And just consider how precious a thing that it! Every thread in the new robe of righteousness Jesus gives to you is made from every moment of his perfect life. And he took that perfect life and he wove it together on the loom of the cross. And finally, he bleached it pure white with his own holy blood. This, friends, is the robe Christ wrapped around you at your baptism. And don’t worry that it might not fit. It is long enough and wide enough to cover over every twisted thought, wicked word and destructive deed you’ve ever committed and ever will.³ All this God gives to you as his gracious gift.

Christmas is just around the corner. Like a little boy opening a gift of ear protection so he can ride on the

² *Luther’s Works*, AE, 17:334

³ Paraphrase of: Braun, *People’s Bible: Isaiah 2*, p. 335

lawnmower with his daddy fills him with joy, may you too be filled with joy both now, at Christmas, and every day of the year. Yes, be joyful because of the gifts of love given to you again this year, but please don't let that be your only or ultimate source of joy. Toys will break or soon there will be something cooler. Jewelry and tools will tarnish or be lost. Not one of those things given will last into eternity.

Instead, hold on to the joy that is yours through faith in Christ. He is your gift and the one who gives you many other gifts which overcome and outlast every pain and sorrow. This joy is a joy you carry with you all the way to heaven where you will at last and forever experience joy unlike anything you've ever experienced here. As you wait for Christ, wait with joy. Amen.

SDG⁴

⁴ SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for "To God Alone Be The Glory". This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn't about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.

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