

Joy

Sermon for Christmas Day

Sermon Text: Isaiah 52:7-10



⁷ 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.

Messengers of joy that proclaim peace. Well that is just some great news for the present day! Who doesn't want to have joy? Joy that doesn't just last for a day but for a little longer... Today Jebran is happy! Because today, he got a brand-new train! A red train, just like he wanted for Christmas! I want people like Jebran and the many children—and adults—who are excited about their Christmas gifts to allow themselves to be happy. To have a little joy in this dark world is something very special! Yes, we have an excess of fear, worry, discouragement, and depression. Even the "search for happiness" often brings more disappointment than true happiness. That's why when someone can be really happy it is so wonderful! But our joy always seems to have an expiration date. Even if we win the lottery and go out into the world with millions in our bank account, the happiness doesn't last! If it were purely about the feeling of happiness, we could all lay in a hospital bed and insert happiness hormones through an IV drip so that we feel happy. Something like this—so I was told—is medically possible. But why are people not satisfied with this option? The prophet from the book of Isaiah speaks today of profound good news that was not just for one day or one hour, but that had significance for all of history and would be a foundation for the future. How does he explain such a deep joy? And how do we come to something that can be described as joy? Shaped by materialism as we are, we want to attach our joy to our wealth, to certain advancement, to success. Perhaps that is even the reason for our deep depression and sadness. Because we can never be happy like this, at least not with the joy that remains steadfast through the fluctuations of time. Materialism is just another form of the artificial happiness we could have like the IV hormone drip in the hospital. It is more important to recognize the living God who acts on our behalf behind the scenes in everything that happens to us in life. True joy comes from the fact that God is here. Because, as Isaiah proclaims it: God is King! God has not forgotten you. We can be with Him again. We His people and He our God. Isaiah calls out these words in the middle of the rubble. He

has no proof at all but only this cry: God is here! Naturally, Isaiah speaks from his many life experiences. Time and again the Israelites had to experience their livelihood being swept out from under their feet. And this happened because they had forsaken God. If God is gone, there is joy in life, no hope, and no future. That is something terrible! Indeed the worst sorrow that we could ever experience is this: that God has forsaken us and no longer answers our prayers! In such a time, Isaiah exclaims: God dwells on the mountain of Zion! He is here again. He governs our life and gives us new courage! Martin Luther had this experience of the hidden and returning God again and again: When God is hidden, Luther said, it is a time of sadness and depression. In such times, Luther felt himself surrounded by darkness. But when God revealed Himself to him in Jesus, joy returned. We all repeatedly experience this hidden God. We are familiar with the dark clouds that hover over our disposition so that we no longer understand what God intends to do with us, or what the purpose of life even is. It is in those times, that we are inclined to reach for things that we can take comfort in for a little while. We reach for the remote control, for the laptop, or for the bottle... We reach for the colorful shops... All these things can distract us for a short time, but ultimately, they aren't much better than attaching yourself to an IV drip and pumping yourself full of happiness hormones! Isaiah takes a different approach: He calls to faith! "Break forth together into singing, you waste places of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted His people; He has redeemed Jerusalem." Isaiah makes no attempt to cover up the rubble and ashes in Jerusalem. He calls out into the sadness! The misery will not be ignored but included in God's program of joy! Jesus shows us most clearly how this works. He doesn't call to us from above that we poor people may be happy! No, He places Himself not only with the wretched, but He stands among us and, in the middle of misery, speaks about hope and the nearness of God! He takes the cross upon Himself and dies our death. This Lord Christ describes to us how we can not only have our Christmas joy but also keep it. He expresses this with the following image: We are like a branch on a grapevine. Firmly connected to Jesus, God brings living lifeblood into us. This allows us to breathe more freely. We can live. These are not happiness hormones! This is not a substitute for joy or a temporary comfort! It is God Himself who comes to us. God who dwells among us! There is the location of our joy. We must repeatedly be reminded of this. Paul, who himself often experienced bitter suffering, does this and positively exclaims: Rejoice! Rejoice always! This is the reason we celebrate Christmas. Behold, the Light of God is among us through Christ! Behold, God comes to us and breaks the dark facades that separate us from Him! He makes it so that everything will be bright and light in our hearts. Today is Christmas! And Jesus is there! Rejoice! Amen.