



CHRISTMAS DAY - THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD

Merry Christmas!

Isaiah 52:7-10 (NIV)

⁷ 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!" ⁸ 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. ⁹ Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. ¹⁰ 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.

What would it take to ruin Christmas? Burning Christmas dinner? The house catching on fire? All the presents stolen? A terse argument that resulted in a family member walking out and not returning? A snowstorm that kept other family and friends from not being able to come over? A broken promise?

Sadly, and maybe surprisingly, Christmas might get ruined by a simple, "Merry Christmas!" or at least put a damper on the joy of Christmas. There can be that awkward moment when you say, "Merry Christmas!" and someone tells you that you shouldn't say that. You shouldn't say that because not everyone is Christian. Respect other faiths, they tell you. Say "Happy Holidays" since some people celebrate Hanukkah or Kwanza or Yule Tide. This might rub you the wrong way hearing: "No, you can't say, "Merry Christmas"? But Christ is the reason for the season. How dare you take "Christ" out of Christmas. It feels like a personal attack on your faith. Heated arguments ensue. Youtube videos are created. Mean tweets are sent. It seems like everyone gets riled up about "Merry Christmas". Makes you feel a bit "Bah-humbug" about it all.

Well, I don't think we should ever stop saying, "Merry Christmas!" but on Christmas Day it's worth talking about why we say it and what we mean when we do. Let's breakdown the phrase.

We don't often use the word "merry" in our everyday vernacular anymore. For something to be "merry," we mean that it's pleasing, delightful, sweet, something that would lift up our spirits and cause rejoicing. The celebration of Christmas is meant to make people merry. Some, especially those in Great Britain, say, "Happy Christmas!" It's certainly not wrong, but some contend that we should shy away "happy" since it comes from the word "hap," meaning luck. Christmas isn't a lucky event, as if it was up to chance or just a random outcome based on circumstances. It was a planned, prophesied event that God did not leave up to chance at all. It's a joyous event, meant to make us sing praises to God like "Joy to the World!" So, yes, it is very fitting to call Christmas "merry."

"Christmas" is really the combination of two words – Christ and mass. We hear Christ a lot. We know it's a name for Jesus. Even more than that, it's a title. In Hebrew, this is the word for "Messiah," meaning "Anointed One." In the Bible, people were anointed with olive oil to mark them for a specific role, duty, or job. The Christ, the Anointed One, the Messiah, was the one that God chose to be the Savior of the world, that he is the one God promised would come and destroy the work of the devil, to be the perfection that God requires, the perfection that Adam, the very first man, failed to be. The Christ is the Word who was with God and who was God who also took on human flesh and made his dwelling among us to bring light and life to all humankind. This is who that baby boy born to Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem was and is. The Christ is God. The Christ is our Savior from all our sin because he took on human flesh to be our substitute. This is the reason he came into the world in this miraculous way.

The word "mass" is more commonly a term used by Roman Catholics. From its Latin origins, "mass" is derived from the word meaning "dismissal" or "sending away." It was when the priest would dismiss people at the end of the worship service. Through time the word "mass" ended up encompassing the entire worship service, and sometimes more specifically focusing in on the Eucharist, Holy Communion.

The Christ-mass. What a powerful picture to recall on Christmas Day that God now made flesh is remembered by the worship service offering his body and his blood in, with, and under the bread and the wine so that we would have union, fellowship with him, that God is truly with us. Jesus' Supper gives us himself in flesh and blood for the forgiveness of our sins, to renew us before God all over again. God is communing with us here on Christmas Day. He is human, like us, but perfect and without sin – the Savior God Man we need.

So, when we wish someone a “Merry Christmas!”, we are expressing our joy and delight in the fact that God took on human flesh to forgive our sins and bring us to him. But don’t just stop with the phrase, “Merry Christmas,” but tell people why we are merry, what the Christ-mass is. When we do this, we may save someone’s ruined Christmas Day, like how Isaiah did with his prophecy.

Isaiah first prophesied these words from our first Bible reading at an interesting time. The nation of Israel was divided – the 10 northern tribes kept the name Israel with its capital in Samaria and the 2 southern tribes were known as Judah with Jerusalem as its capital. Although it hadn’t happened yet, the LORD prophesied through Isaiah that the 10 northern tribes would be wiped out by the Assyrians, which happened in 722 B.C. But the LORD did not just prophesy the near future; he also prophesied farther in time. He foretold that Judah and Jerusalem would be destroyed as well. God would judge them for their unfaithfulness and their constant disobedience. They would be left in ruins.

Do you at all feel ruined today? I ask knowing that many of you joyfully greeted me with a “Merry Christmas!” this morning, having on your hearts the celebration that Christ Child has already come. I don’t expect you to be ruined, but I know that there are plenty of people on this day who are not merry. Something maybe happened over night or this morning to put a damper, if not ruin, Christmas. Maybe it was an argument with family. Maybe it was the disappointment that family is not coming to see you anymore, that you couldn’t get everyone under one roof. Maybe it’s the ruin of not having a loved one here with you because this is your first Christmas since God took them to heaven. Maybe it’s your wallet that feels ruined because you overspent for Christmas.

Whenever we get thinking about what we did wrong, what we failed to do, how we let people down, how we did not show love and kindness to others, this gets us seeing our ruined spiritual state. The truth is, without the Christ-mass, we would all remain ruined. Without the Christ Child, I am abandoned by God. God is not with us; we have not Immanuel.

This is why we gather to celebrate the Christ-mass because we need the message that God gives us today. “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!’” (verse 7) He rules the world with truth and grace! By coming as God made flesh, by fulfilling all of his promises about his coming, even using Caesar Augustus so that he would be born in Bethlehem, “the LORD [has laid] bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth [have seen] the salvation of our God.” (verse 10) The Christ Child has come. He has redeemed us, purchased and won us from all sin, death, and the power of the devil. This is our comfort. This is our good news. This is what rebuilds our ruined lives. This is the meaning of Christmas, and this is why it is a Merry Christmas!

Yeah, family might not be able to make it today. Christmas dinner may get burnt. Something worse can yet happen, but we came this morning because it is and always is a Merry Christmas! We came to lift up our voices and proudly and loudly sing, “Joy to the World”! The LORD has not abandoned us; he has returned and has come to be with us always to the very end of the age. The LORD has not left us in ruins but saved us from the certain destruction that our sins would have brought upon ourselves.

And so we bring good tiding upon the earth as we proclaim the salvation that has come from the Christ-mass, from the giving of his body and his blood for the forgiveness of our sins, remembering that the Immanuel, the Word made flesh, is truly with us. Today, we joyfully sing that our God rules the world. We greet one another with a Merry Christmas knowing that Christ is the reason for our joy and reason for joy to the whole world! It is this joy that we share today. Merry Christmas! Amen.