

Merry Christmas! When we announce and herald and celebrate the birth of our Savior we are bringing good news of *happiness* to the world. The event that we remember today causes Christians everywhere to sing for joy. "Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; break forth into joyous songs and sing praises!" God anointed Jesus with the oil of *gladness*. Happiness, good cheer, laughter, and singing: *this* is how God's people remember the birth of the Son of God.

We can't help ourselves. God hasn't *told* us to be merry; He has *made* us merry by sending His Son to be with us, and the more we hear about Jesus, the merrier we become. And the reason why this is so important for us is that making merry is how *faith* responds to Christ's birth. If the birth of Jesus *doesn't* make you merry, then something is terribly wrong in your heart. And I can't tell you how many songs and articles and sermons I've run across that seem intended to put a damper on Christmas merriment by reminding Christians of all that is wrong with the world. "Remember the grieving at Christmas." "Christmas is a lonely time for many people." "Weep with those who weep at Christmas."

The sentiment is good and right; the timing is terribly wrong. And the right thing at the wrong time is the wrong thing. Focusing on grief and suffering and loneliness at Christmastime is like reading divorce stats as your toast at a wedding; like giving a coffin as a gift at a baby shower; like knocking on your neighbor's door to wish them good morning at 3am.

Now, God is not asking you to pretend for a minute that grief and pain and suffering aren't real. What Christmas means is that something *bigger* and *better* and *more real* has come. We consider the sufferings of this present time not worth comparing to the coming glory, and that coming glory was secured for us by this little baby born in Bethlehem. We aren't merry because nothing is wrong. We are merry because Christ Jesus came to put everything right!

Frequently, though, this means correcting our feelings. We don't feel merry. Our particular circumstances are difficult, and our hearts struggle to see how singing a few songs and giving away presents changes anything. Our loved one will still be dead on December 26th. We'll still be divorced, still have cancer, still be broke. And so it's much easier to sing "Blue Christmas" than to say "Merry Christmas!"

But our feelings are a terrible Santa Claus. Our circumstances are pretty lousy at giving gifts. So why look to them? When you misplace your focus at Christmas, you miss out on the merriment that Jesus brings. So instead of asking your feelings or your circumstances how Christmas should feel, ask God instead. God, how do you want me to feel at Christmas? What should be going on in my heart? And our texts today give God's answer: As you hear this good news of happiness, as God anoints Jesus with the oil of gladness, you should rejoice and sing! You should be *merry*. Why? The short answer is Jesus, of course, but sometimes the short answer doesn't cut it in the face of a long list of reasons not to be merry.

But this is the good news of Christmas: the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory. The glory of the Word made flesh is what makes Christians so merry!

And so in order to fill you with joy and gladness this morning, we're going to look back through our readings for today to find twelve words that make our hearts merry, one for each day of Christmas.

First, look at Isaiah 52:7: how beautiful on the mountains are the feet of him who brings **good news**. Be merry, because Christmas brings good news! Not *bad news*, not *information*; good news! Christian, why are you so merry at Christmastime? Because Christmas brings good news.

Second, later on in that same verse: Christmas publishes **peace**. This is not Geico-just-saved 15% good news, this is peace on earth, goodwill to men good news. Rejoice and be merry, because God has published a peace treaty with the world by sending Jesus.

Third, still in verse 7: **salvation**. The good news of Christmas is that God saves, which is why the angel told Joseph to name his adopted son *Jesus*, which means *Jehovah saves*. The salvation that Jesus brings is a reality that runs deeper than all your feelings and all your circumstances. No matter what you are going through, no matter what happens to you, Jesus saves you, so be merry!

Fourth, Christmas declares "**Your God reigns.**" (v.7) God rules. God is in charge. Not sin, not sickness, not suffering, not death. God's heavenly reign has come to earth through the birth of King Jesus. So Merry Christmas!

Fifth, look to verse 9: the waste places break forth into singing because God **comforts** His people. Maybe your life *is* one of those waste places. If so, rejoice, because Christmas is God coming down to comfort you.

Six: **redemption**. God redeems Jerusalem through this babe in a manger. To redeem something is to buy it back, and with His own blood, Jesus buys back God's people from their slavery to sin and Satan. And where did the eternal Son of God get blood from? He got it by being conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary. On Christmas night, your Redeemer was born. Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth!

Seven: **revelation**. Isaiah 52:10: "the Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see." Psalm 98:2 – "the Lord has made known his salvation; he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations." Before Christmas, we'd *heard* about God's salvation; we'd *hoped* for it. Salvation was *promised, predicted, prophesied*. But when God took on flesh, that salvation became visible. In the birth of Christ, salvation was revealed, and we *rejoice* in this revelation!

The eighth gift God gave at Christmas was that He **remembered** His steadfast love and faithfulness. That's Psalm 98:3 – God *remembered* us, and so we sing and shout and make merry. You have not been overlooked; you are not forgotten. So go round up the ends of the earth, the rivers, the sea, the hills; gather them all together and sing for joy!

On the ninth day of Christmas, rejoice along with Psalm 98:9: Christmas brings **righteous judgment** to the world. In Jesus' righteous judgment, Satan is exposed as a pretender, his evil reign is ended, and the reign of righteousness begins. Isn't it comforting to know that injustice will be overturned? Doesn't it make you *glad* to know that the wicked will not get away with anything? Righteousness came at Christmas, so rejoice!

Ten: **incarnation**. Christmas is when God entered the world in human flesh, which is even better, Hebrews 1:6 tells us, than God sending an angel to help you. At Christmas, God became a man to be with us. That's John 1:14. Adam had gotten us kicked out of God's presence, but God came down to be with us again in Jesus. And you should be merry about that!

Number 11: Christmas is the first step towards Christ's **enthronement**. Again, the last time a man was on the throne of the world was back in Eden. Now, a man will be back on the throne, and this one loves righteousness and hates wickedness. And *that's why*, according to Hebrews 1:8-9, *that's why* God anoints Jesus with the oil of gladness. Jesus was born into the world so that we could have a righteous king on the throne, and that makes us glad!

Twelfth and finally, we should be merry because **none of these things will ever change**. Heaven and earth will wear out, but all of these reasons for being merry will remain true forever, because your throne, O God, is forever and ever (Heb. 1:8). Christmas means not just *joy* to the world, but *eternal joy*, because Jesus' years will have no end (Heb. 1:12)! Christmas means that everyone who believes in Jesus will have every reason to be merry forever.

Christmas brings good news of happiness. Christmas overflows with the oil of gladness. So rejoice and sing, feast and shout, and have a Merry Christmas!

- *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Let us pray:

"O God, you make us glad in the yearly festival of the birth of your only Son, Jesus Christ: Grant that we, who joyfully receive Him as our Redeemer, may with sure confidence behold Him when He comes to be our righteous Judge, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**"¹

¹ Adapted from *The Worship Sourcebook*, 2nd edition, E.9.1.6, pg. 497.