

Joy At His coming

Isaiah 61:1—4, 8—11

Introduction

“Joy to the world, the Lord is come!” (**LSB #387:1**). I thought we weren’t supposed to use Christmas carols during Advent, since we aren’t celebrating Christmas yet. That’s okay. Even though it’s the best-selling Christmas carol of all time and listed with Christmas hymns in our hymnal, ***Joy to the World*** is not a Christmas song—at least, it wasn’t intended to be one. Isaac Watts wrote the poem, based on ***Psalm 98***, which is a psalm of praise, focusing on the kingship of Yahweh. This hymn pictures Christ’s coming at the end of the age as King and Lord. There is no mention of the Nativity in it. It was, however, released as a song in December. So, even though it calls Him Lord, Savior, and King, instead of Jesus or Christ, since it was produced at Christmastime and is all about joy, it must be a Christmas carol. In truth, it’s a very appropriate Advent hymn, especially for Gaudete Sunday. Rejoice! Today, we look at the joy Christ brings—what it is and how we receive it.

Joy and Happiness

The first thing is understanding what joy is. Many times, we get joy confused with happiness. We say that Christmas is a joyous time of the year. Why do we say that? What makes it “joyous?” Well, it’s the music, the parties, the general feeling people get at Christmastime. It’s the decorations, the family, the mistletoe, and the laughter. Oh yeah, it’s also the Baby in the manger. These are all external things. A better phrase would be to say that the season is festive. Joy doesn’t come from externals, what’s happening around or to us. Joy is an inner attitude, not an outward emotion. This is why martyrs could have joy in the face of cruel deaths.

Joy in the Lord

I suppose, on their own, a person could work up an attitude of joy. But the joy we’re talking about is a deep joy, that can’t be manufactured. It permeates and engulfs the person who experiences it. This joy comes from above. It comes from the Lord. It is joy in the Lord. *I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult in my God, for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness (Isaiah 61:10)*. Joy in the Lord consists of salvation and righteousness.

Salvation

What is the story of the entire Bible in one word? Salvation. Coming right on the heels of the story of creation is the story of man’s fall into sin. From ***Genesis 3:15*** onward, the whole Bible tells us how God worked, is working, and will work to redeem His creation. That’s where we see the first promise of the Seed of the woman who will crush the devil’s head, while the devil will bruise His heel. The rest of the Old Testament points forward to the fulfillment of this promise. The Gospels show the promise of a Savior being fulfilled. And the rest of the New Testament shows how God works through His church and will one day bring salvation to completion when His Son returns as King and Judge. That is the source of our joy, being saved from sin, its power, and penalty. There is nothing else that can bring us this type of joy.

Righteousness

(Read **Revelation 7:9—14**). Hand-in-hand with salvation is righteousness. This multitude John sees in white robes is the church triumphant. These are believers from all times and all places, gathered around the throne of God. You and I will be in that multitude. Loved ones who have gone on before are already in it. The white robes they wear are robes of righteousness. But notice that righteousness isn't theirs. *They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:14)*. *Our righteousness is like filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6)*. The righteousness that counts, that gives us joy is the righteousness of Christ. On the cross, He has taken our sins upon Himself and clothed us in His righteousness when we first believed.

The Everlasting Covenant

In **verse 8** of our reading in **Isaiah**, the Lord, talking about His people, says, *"I will make an everlasting covenant with them" (Isaiah 61:8)*. The first covenant God made with His people was temporary and, as such, was sealed with the blood of animals. This new covenant is everlasting because it is sealed with the blood of His Son. No one can break this covenant because the Son is the one who holds it together.

How He Gives Us This Joy

Isaiah says that we are clothed with salvation and righteousness *as a bride adorns herself with jewels (Isaiah 61:10)*. This points to how God gives us this joy. The church is the bride of Christ (read **Ephesians 5:25—27**). Christ died to save us and give us this great joy of salvation and righteousness. And He communicates this salvation, righteousness, and joy to us through the means of grace—Word and Sacrament. May the righteous blessing of the joy of salvation be yours this season and throughout the year.

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
