

THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD

Isaiah 52:7-10

Beautiful Feet—Open Ears—Blessed Eyes

Americans love reality shows, especially ones dealing with appearance. The plots are simple and monotonous. Find someone insecure about their appearance and offer them plastic surgery, professional trainers, or anything else that will get them to act the fool for the camera. We are obsessed with appearance, sucking fat from one place and putting it in another, pulling hair from one place and plugging it in another, enlarging one part and reducing the other. Last year's fashion quickly becomes this year's faux pas. The mullet, once the emblem of cool, becomes the pinnacle of uncool. Isaiah too is concerned with appearances, and so, as we chew on his prophetic words, we will consider beautiful feet that bring good news, open ears that hear it, and blessed eyes that see the salvation of our God.

When most of us think of beautiful feet, we think about size, proportion, grooming and painting. Isaiah could care less about any of that. The feet in our text are beautiful because of what they bring: "*How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.*" St. Paul cites these words in Romans (10:13-15): "*'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'* How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, '*How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!*'"

Beautiful feet are feet that bring this good news of Jesus Christ. This good news is something spoken, reported, proclaimed. It moves from mouth to ear, creating, strengthening, and preserving faith. What is the good news? Isaiah uses words like *peace, good tidings, and salvation* to describe it. He writes, "*the LORD has comforted His people, He has redeemed Jerusalem.*" This good news is the gospel; in fact, good news is precisely what the word gospel means.

But do we deserve good news, having done what sinners do? Today we joined with the angels in their great Christmas hymn of praise to their King, who traded heaven for hay and their company for the company of sinful men and women. *Glory to God on high!* But what does our world know about glory? What do we fallen creatures glory in besides sin? We are surrounded by beauty, by the wonders of nature, by the blessings of family and God-pleasing relationships, by an abundance of daily bread, most importantly, by His gracious presence in the divine service, yet how often don't we thoughtlessly trample these things underfoot as an ox or consume them like a ravenous dog. We've corrupted the blessings He has given us by using them in ways He never intended. Like pigs with pearls, we've treated His Word and Sacrament like rubbish, maybe not despising His grace, but definitely not continuously thirsting for it either. We've turned His glory into our shame. *Glory to God in the highest?* Maybe in the highest, but all too often, not here. The last thing we have deserved this year is good news; yet, beautiful feet bring good news to open ears, and that good news has nothing to do with what we deserve.

Isaiah says, “*Listen!*” Open your ears for those beautiful feet. They proclaim *peace*. The peace proclaimed here is the forgiveness of sins. Sin is what prevented our peace with God and the removal of sin is what restored it. They bring *good tidings*. This is not the wailing and moaning of guilt that the law brings, but the excitement and joy of grace. They proclaim *salvation*. The Hebrew for salvation here is ת[;Wvy>. That is the name of the Child in the manger: Jesus, that is, as the angel declared last week, He who saves, who takes away the sins of His people. And St. Peter asserts, “*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved*” (Acts 4:12).

These beautiful feet declare, “*The LORD has comforted His people.*” It is interesting that in Hebrew the word for comfort also means repent when used in a different form. The LORD comforts the “*broken and contrite heart*” (Psalm 51:17). He comforts the repentant, that is, those who have turned their minds. To turn our mind means that our attention turns from the offense that once controlled us to the grace that now consoles us. We are comforted, assured of God’s forgiveness for Christ’s sake, and promised help in the struggle against the temptations that still plague us.

These beautiful feet declare that God “*has redeemed Jerusalem.*” Redeem means to buy back. We redeem a coupon by turning it in to the merchant who sent it to us. Christ came to buy His people back. Once sons and daughters of the devil, as all who reject Christ are, He bought us back to be God’s own sons and daughters. He bought us with His holy and precious blood, poured out on Calvary and offered in the Holy Supper we celebrate today. Open your ears and hear this good news, because open ears make blessed eyes.

“*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,*” the prophet prophesies. The LORD has laid bare His arm today. Do you see His strength and might? It is asleep in a manger, weak and helpless. But how can God’s strong arm be revealed in a helpless child? Because God’s arm is doing what only He can do: making sinners into saints. Try as we might, we can never redeem ourselves. A coupon cannot return itself to the store, and neither can we repair the relationship we have wrecked with our heavenly Father. Only God can fix that. He has been born an Infant in a cattle shed to restore what we have broken. This is grace—undeserved love. See your salvation today. See Him born that you might be born again. See Him live that you might live forever. See Him helpless now to be your only help.

Forgiveness was born today, and forgiveness is offered. Here is your God. Will you, unimpressed, leave Him in the manger, or will you prepare Him a place in your heart? He may not be beautiful to our American, reality-TV conditioned eyes, but He is beauty in its truest sense, removing the ugliness of sin and replacing it with His radiant grace. Cast off last year’s fashion, whatever shade of sin it was, and start fresh in this new year, donning Christ’s timeless grace, which never goes out of style. Beautiful feet-open ears-blessed eyes. Do you have them? Look to the manger, and yes, you do. Amen.