

Christmas 1, December 28, 2014

Christmas Every Day

Isaiah 61:10–62:3

¹⁰ 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,
as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

¹¹ For as the earth brings forth its sprouts,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to sprout up,
so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise
to sprout up before all the nations.

62 For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
and for Jerusalem's sake I will not be quiet,
until her righteousness goes forth as brightness,
and her salvation as a burning torch.

² The nations shall see your righteousness,
and all the kings your glory,
and you shall be called by a new name
that the mouth of the LORD will give.

³ You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD,
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.



The hustle and bustle of this hectic holiday season, the hurry and scurry, the racing and chasing to the mall, waiting in the long lines at the checkout counter, buying that perfect gift for that special person, decorations to put up, trees and lights on the tree, preparing for family get-togethers, the squeals of delight, “Oh, it’s perfect!” . . . and now it’s over! The glitz and glamour of this happy holiday—gone for another year. Soon, the lovely Christmas tree will be bare. No more lights. It will blow in the wind as it twists and turns on the curb, waiting to be tossed into the back of the trash truck. It’s over for another year—or is it?

The great prophet Isaiah, the evangelist of the Old Testament, peers into the future. He brings the Good News of the soul-saving Gospel, and with it he brings us the word: rather than a letdown after the festivities, Christ’s arrival lets us celebrate Christmas every day.

Does the first part of our text sound familiar? Listen to it again. Is 61:10–11: “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, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to sprout up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up before all the nations.”

Recognize it? You might, because this was also a portion of our Old Testament Reading just two weeks ago. The difference is that then we were looking forward to Christmas. Now we’re looking past. Now we may be feeling the letdown.

Isaiah says, “I will greatly rejoice.” “I shall exult.” In our text, the bridegroom is just getting himself decked out for the big day; the bride is just putting on her jewels. The wedding is coming up. Even the earth itself, the garden, is sprouting with anticipation. Everyone can hardly wait. That’s the way we felt when we heard these words back on the Third Sunday in Advent.

But sometimes after the wedding’s over, there’s a letdown. Certainly for the parents of the couple as they slump over in their chairs, exhausted and wistful about their babies being all grown up and gone forever from their bedrooms upstairs. Perhaps a letdown for the guests as they wake up, not nearly so ready for another day of gala. Maybe even for the bride and groom as they discover it’s not all a party; there’s a lot to learn. That was Advent. This is post-Christmas. Letdown.

Troubles never take a holiday. Debt, particularly during January when the Christmas credit-card bills appear in the mailbox. Depression. For some, the celebrations are over. The relatives have gone home. It’s back to work, back to the routine. The kids are back in school and college. Letdown.

These may be times we’re weary and worn out, nerves frayed. We snap at loved ones; our tongues are so sharp they can cut through steel. And all the peace on earth, goodwill toward fellowman is packed up again in the attic. Gossip from malicious tongues, profanity soiling our lips, backbiting and bickering even within Christian churches.

The pains we could anesthetize with brightly colored packages and dreams that this year having the family together would solve everything are back. And they hurt as much as they did in October: old grudges, a spouse who cheated on you, a friend who sued you. Letdown.

On Christmas Day, we sang “Joy to the world.” But has anything about the world really changed? Or is it all back to being the sinful, depressing, disappointing way it was before—letdown?

Well, hear once more the inspired words of Isaiah: “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.” Hear that? This isn’t just an Advent, Christmas-coming-up text. This is a Sunday-after-Christmas text too. Now that Christ has come, God has done something—clothed us with garments of salvation, covered us with the robe of Jesus’ righteousness. And because that has happened, now we will rejoice, exult. The party is just starting! No letdown. Christ’s arrival lets us celebrate! It’s Christmas today!—and every day!

The celebration really couldn’t start until now, until Christ came. It’s as Paul wrote in today’s Epistle: “When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Gal 4:4–5). When the fullness of time came, then Jesus took our burden upon himself, kept the Law perfectly in our place, took the punishment of our Lawbreaking upon himself on the cross.

We celebrated Christmas in our homes with family and friends; we celebrated with our extended families in our churches; but the celebration doesn’t end. With Christ’s coming, the wedding doesn’t end with throwing rose petals; the wedding continues for the whole, endless marriage. For the turban the groom wore in Isaiah’s day, for the jewels brides wear then as now, the Head of the Church, Christ, has adorned his Bride, you and me, with the one jewel of great price, the Good News of the Christmas Gospel. We wear the royal robes of righteousness—forgiveness of all our sins—spun for us by Jesus on that cross. We are decked in the garment of salvation—eternal life in heaven—placed on us in our Baptism. No letdown. This lets us celebrate every day.

The news media told a story about a family of treasure hunters from Sanford, Florida . Finally, they struck gold after more than a decade of searching. Their discovery off the Florida coastline was worth \$350,000. The gold came from a three-hundred-year-old Spanish shipwreck.

We strike gold every day when the jewels of Christ, the rich garments of Christ's forgiveness, are delivered to us in his Word and Sacrament. When we fess up to our mess ups—those harsh words, that gossiping, that bickering, betraying our loved ones, carrying grudges—we are again, every day, washed clean in the bloody cross of the Babe of Bethlehem. When we feel the letdown of family gone, of debts that don't go away, of work and routine and life that we wish would just change some way, we are again reminded that Immanuel came to be God with us every day. "You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord," our text says, "and a royal diadem in the hand of your God" (62:3). No letdown. Christ being born to be among us lets us celebrate forever.

Dear old Simeon had waited all his life for Christmas. And then today in our Gospel, Mary and Joseph finally bring the baby into the temple. It's the moment Simeon has been anticipating for years. He takes the Christ Child in his arms, and there's no letdown. "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace" (Lk 2:29). His eyes had seen the salvation he'd been waiting for and all the world needed. No disappointment. No letdown. Let the celebration begin! Christmas every day!