

Sermon: Precious Child

Scripture: Isaiah 61:10-62:3; Galatians 4:4-7

First Sunday of Christmas

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Isaiah 61:10-62:3

Today's Old Testament reading comes from Isaiah 61:10-62:3, where message of hope, redemption and renewal are told to the Israelites who are facing destruction, despair, and uncertainty of what is coming next as they returned from their exile in Babylon. Listen to the Word of the Lord.

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD;
my whole being shall exult in my God,
for the Lord has clothed me with the garments of salvation;
God has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

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

62 For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest,
until her vindication shines out like the dawn
and her salvation like a burning torch.

² The nations shall see your vindication
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 beautiful crown in the hand of the LORD
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

Amen.

Galatians 4:4-7

Our New Testament reading comes from Galatians 4:4-7 shares with us the timeless truth and wisdom of God's plan for our redemption. It shows us how Christ child is the truth, the way, and the life. Hear the Word of the Lord.

⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent God's Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. ⁶ And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of God's Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷ So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir through God.

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

Sermon: Precious Child

Let us pray. Holy and loving God, thank you for your precious son being born to us, to bring us hope, peace, joy, and love to our lives. As we celebrate Christ's birth and worship him, be with us, open our hearts and eyes to see the generous love you have for all of us. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be pleasing to you, our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.

Happy New Year's Eve everyone! On this seventh day of Christmas looking toward Epiphany and as we celebrate the last day of the year 2023, many of you will agree with me when I say, what a fast-paced year it was. It seems like the world is trying to get its bearings after how COVID has altered our lives. And it is very meaningful, that today, we are worshipping on the first and the only Sunday of Christmas, allowing us to refocus and realign our inner compass to match the spiritual compass as we find ourselves standing in-between times of looking back to year 2023 and looking forward to 2024.

To help us achieve that, we look to today's Isaiah's passage. After years of exile, the Israelites have come back home and found themselves rebuilding the old ruins. They had to repair and restore things that had served them for many generations. Yet as they rebuilt the walls, I can surely imagine that there were some changes made from the ways of the old. The work must have been tiresome and what lay ahead of them must have seemed daunting. Yet the message that Isaiah starts today's passage is: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord... for the Lord has covered me with the robe of righteousness."

Although the world may be quick to move on from celebrating Christmas, I, on the other hand, am going to fully celebrate the twelve days of Christmas this year. I will keep on playing the Christmas carols, dwell on the blessings of the Lord a little longer before I get back to hustle and bustling. 2023 was a quick year for a reason – many of us fully lived it out, making up for the lost time from previous two years from COVID. Many of us traveled to see our families and go places where we could not in the recent past. We started to regain the rhythm of life as things started to go back to the way it used to be. Yet this year, each of us had our own battles and demons to overcome, as it was also a year of incredible inflation and changes of post-COVID ways of doing things. One of the biggest adaptations in the post-covid world which we have accepted without knowing is the smaller degree of human interactions in our daily lives. What started out as a temporary necessity during the COVID crisis has paved the way for lasting changes. We rely less on the number of cashiers and bank tellers and find ourselves standing in front of automated machines in the name of convenience. Advances in AI finally broke the silence and made us wonder what the future might hold. As social beings, we are looking for a different way and means to interact with one another, to keep the value of interpersonal interactions in our lives.

This year's Christmas special reminder for all of us is that in the midst of all this, our steadfast God continues to desire to have an intimate relationship with us. God has invested in humanity and gave us the greatest gift of all - a Christ child. This gift is not merely material; it is the embodiment of God's unfathomable love for us – to bring reconciliation and salvation for us all. The question is, are we like Isaiah, greatly rejoicing in the Lord, knowing that we are covered in God's robe of righteousness?

All of us have one thing in common: we are someone's child. Most of us have a child of our own to know that each of them is precious. Blessed, too, are you those who may not have your own children but have inherited the precious ones as spiritual parents and grandparents in the congregation for you seen these children on their best behaviors before you at the church. It is true that sometimes we are driven to wonder if we have cubic zirconia rather than a real diamond in our kids, yet within our hearts, they are far more valuable than any of the earthly precious stones. They are gift from the Lord, and their simple gift of a hug can melt away mountain load of hardships. Truly, each child is priceless.

If we see our children in a such lens, how would our God see us? How precious are we to God as God's adopted sons and daughters that God would risk Godself – risking all the might, power, and authority that God possesses – to save us and rescue us from the dangers that we face in our lives? That God came down, in a humble form as a human child, not as a prince or wealthy noble's child but as a son of a carpenter to prove that all God's people are worthy and precious to be saved? Many of us know the answer to this question: Who are we? We are the children of God who are called by God, to share the amazing grace of our God and the everlasting love of Christ, the Messiah, and we are called to be God's ambassadors. Henri Nouwen, one of the greatest theologians in modern times eloquently said, "We are not what we do, we are not what we have, we are not what others think of us. Coming home is claiming the truth. I am the beloved child of a loving Creator." Sometimes we forget to ask the bigger question. The bigger question we should be asking is have you ever asked yourself *why* do we need to do these things that God has called us to do? It is because God looks to us as heirs to God's Kingdom, very people who will inherit God's might, power, and authority, desiring us to do great things as God's precious child, just like how we wish for our children and our spiritual children to grow with greater potential than us, to have better lives than us, to become better person than us.

God is committed to sharing the incredible love for us. As we look forward to the new year, are we committed in our relationships to replicate the love of God with others? Or any of our new year's resolutions include a way to invest in the common humanity in our communities, to share overflowing love of Christ to others around us? To know and to exemplify what it means to be the hands and feet to share God's gospel to the ends of the earth? Simply put, does your desire for the new year coincide with your beliefs and values?

As we continue to celebrate this season of Christmas, let us carry with us the profound revelation of our identity as God's precious children. Let us embody the love and grace we have received and share it abundantly and willingly with those around us. May we live each day with the assurance that we are cherished, valued, and deeply loved by our Heavenly Father. In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Spirit. Amen.