

The First Sunday of Christmas

Luke 2:33-40

It's the most wonderful time of the year; well, not so much because of the kids jingle belling and everyone telling you to be of good cheer. Actually, I am pretty sure the time of the year of which Andy Williams sang as the most wonderful one is over and done with. What the song describes seems more like the weeks *before* Christmas. Nevertheless, it is the most wonderful time of the year. Of course, other songs will tell us that spring is the most wonderful time of the year, although, perhaps, in other words, and others yet will tell us that summer is, or any other time of the year, I suppose, except, perhaps, April 15, not so much because it is the day after my wife's birthday, but more so because it is the day our tax returns are due. Be that as it may.

There are some problems involved, though, in declaring one particular season *the* most wonderful time of the year, is there not? Most seasons have their own particular wonderfulness, regardless of whether *wonderfulness* is really a word or not. And that which really makes Christmas the most wonderful time of the year, which is not the kids jingle belling and everyone telling you to be of good cheer, *that* remains true all through the year, and wonderful. Joy to the world: the Lord has come. The Lamb who was slain has begun His reign; His name shall stand forever, and that name to us is love.

This is indeed one of many wonderful times of the year. It is a time of celebration for the good tidings of great joy, which should be for all people, although, clearly, some do not care much for the good tidings, like those heathens who have enough in kids jingle belling and everyone telling you to be of good cheer - says the grumpy old Lutheran, who always has an open eye for all that is bad about things, and if nothing is really bad, then he is always creative to come up with something that could be *construed* as being bad.

It is one of many wonderful times of the year. And as we rejoice at the good tidings of great joy, which is to be for all people, why should we not *also* enjoy that kids are jingle belling, when they are that, and everyone telling you to be of good cheer? Well, that last bit can get to be a bit much for some of us; still, there is nothing wrong with people being kind, I suppose.

What we hear of Holy Scripture today has a joyous tone to it, also. *His father and His mother marvelled at what was said about Him*, as we hear it at first.

Of course there is a story behind. The mother of our Lord Jesus and the human father He had adopted for Himself had brought Him to the Temple, *to present Him to the Lord and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, as Holy Scripture says it.* And this was a joyful thing, although it also had a certain sting to it. To present Him to the Lord involved bringing a sacrifice on His behalf. He was the firstborn son of His mother, and according to the Law of God the firstfruits of all things belong to Him, the first and the best. And therefore a sacrifice had to be made to *ransom the firstborn child to allow the parents to keep him or her, a lamb a year old for a burnt offering, as the Law says it, and a pigeon or a turtle-dove for a sin offering and if she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtle-doves or two pigeons, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering.* So there it is; even at the celebration of the birth of a child there has to be this reminder of the reality of sin. Holy Scripture *is very Lutheran, is it not?* Well, actually Holy Scripture is *all Lutheran*; although that is beside the point.

At any rate, although the firstborn Child of Mary is Himself the Lord, the Firstborn Son of God, and God Himself from eternity, still they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord, in accordance with the Law.

Although He had been born into the world without sin to be Himself the sacrifice and ransom for all sinners, they came to bring the sacrifices for Him, according to the Law, to ransom Him. And since they could not afford a lamb, although He is Himself the Lamb of God who would bear and take away the sin of the world, they offered for Him instead *a pair of turtle-doves, or two young pigeons, as Holy Scripture says it.* For, as the holy Apostle Paul writes it: *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.* He who was always above the Law, the very Author of the Law, He brought Himself under the Law to fulfil it for us.

And still, even this came to be a joyous occasion. *There was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, says Holy Scripture, and it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the Law, he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said: "Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace according to Your Word, for my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared before the face of all people."*

And this is where we come in with what we hear today:

And His father and His mother marvelled at what was said about Him.

And then, of course, the old man had to turn all *Lutheran* on us; well, we do not know for certain that he was really all that old; Holy Scripture never says so, but we tend to surmise that he was, mostly because we get the impression that he was now expecting to die soon. At any rate, as we hear it, he said to Mary: *Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and as a sign to be opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.*

And there it is, again: in the midst of all the wonderfulness, whether that is a word of not, we have to have thrown in our faces once again a reminder of the reality of sin, of ungodliness and unbelief, and of the sufferings that awaited not only our Lord Jesus but also the mother who loved Him: *a sword will pierce through your own soul also.*

We just cannot have our good Christmas atmosphere in peace, can we? Just like a curmudgeonly Lutheran Pastor Holy Scripture has to remind us of the sinister realities of the real world, what the Son of God had to suffer from sinners who would not receive Him and what He came to give. Not even over Christmas can we be allowed to just be joyful, can we?

Well, in a way that is true. And in another way it is not. It is true that Holy Scripture does not allow us to remain in the false peace of believing the lie that the world is not all that bad, that all is well, for all is well that ends well, and all always does in this wonderful world, at least for all *good* people, as long as we stay positive and count our blessing and keep smiling.

On the other hand, Holy Scripture does present us with good tidings of great joy, which should be for all people, and actually is, and when many will not know of it, only they themselves are to blame for that, for God intends the good tidings of great joy for all people, and as we might grieve for those who will not know of it, and *should* grieve for them, so God Himself grieves, whose wish is for all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the Truth, as He has had His holy Apostle Paul write it, and has sent His Son to the world for that very purpose.

With His Word, even as we hear it today, God Himself presents to all people the good tidings of great joy, which He intends for all people.

For it is in fact good tidings of great joy, the Word of what awaited the Son of God in this world, what He had to suffer. It is the Word of our salvation!

And the Word of our salvation cannot but be good tidings of great joy, can it?.

It is the Word from God of rescue from death, of eternal life with Him in glory. It is good tidings of great joy, spoken into the real world as it really is, of deliverance from this world of suffering and sorrow and sin.

The Son of God had to suffer to save us from this world of suffering and sorrow and sin. For we are ourselves part of this world of suffering and sorrow and sin, not only in that some of the sufferings and sorrows of this world are ours, but also in that sin itself is. We are sinners. We sin, and we have sin in us. And sin is evil, and must be judged, and God is good and will and must, in His goodness, judge all sin, and condemn it to eternal destruction.

And the Son of God, who is Himself God from eternity, He loved us so as to take it upon Himself to bear all sin for us, and His own judgement against it, eternal death and damnation, that is: utter and complete death and damnation, the righteous wrath of God, His holy hatred of evil.

The Word of His suffering is the Word of our salvation. In Him our sin is judged and damned, dealt with and done away with, the price and penalty paid, in full and in abundance, so that we are righteous and right with Him, free from all sin and guilt and debt before Him. And so we shall not perish and die in His wrath, rather, we shall live and be with Him forever in the fullness of His goodness and His glory. How can this not be good tidings, of great joy, and that this is for all people, for all sinners, which means that it is for you?

And the Word of what the Son of God suffered for the salvation of sinners is good tidings of great joy, also, because it is the Word of just how good God is, how great His love for us sinners, for all of us, and for each and every one of us, and for you. So good is God that He who is Himself God from eternity would suffer so severely for us sinners. How can this *not* be good tidings of great joy, that this is His love for sinners, for *all* sinners, which means that this is His love for you?

And this Word comes to us from God, into the real world as it really is, because this Word is real, not a myth, a tale told to help us cope with life as it really is by helping us imagine that real life is different than it really is. This Word of reality is spoken into the real world, to real people, real sinners, such as you and myself, as His real promise of real salvation and real eternal life with Him in glory, in real joys we cannot and could never even begin to imagine. How can this *not* be good tidings of great joy?

Glory be to God on High, and on earth peace, good will toward men! *Amen.*