



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

December 17, 2023

Pastor Rik Krahn

Manitowoc Lutheran High School Sunday; Advent

First Lesson/Sermon Text: [Isaiah 61: 1-3, 10-11](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 71B

Second Lesson: [1 Thessalonians 5: 16-24](#)

Gospel Lesson: [John 1: 6-8, 19-28](#)

Christmas Joy

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Brothers and sisters in Christ:

During this time of year it is hard to go anywhere without somebody telling you how they think you're supposed to feel. There are obviously all of the wishes of having a Merry Christmas or Happy Holidays. But then there are all the songs. O'er the Fields We Go, Laughing All the Way. Though I've slip off the road in winter before, as I was going o'er those fields, I wasn't laughing all the way. Tis the Season to Be Jolly. I don't know that I've ever been jolly. I don't know what jolly is. I don't know what it looks like. I don't know how I would be jolly, but apparently this is the season to be jolly. Then the old favorite, It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year. For some people, I'm sure this is. If you're one of those people that comes home to the new Lexus with the big, red bow on the top, parked in the driveway, I'm sure for you it is the most wonderful time of the year. You let me know if that happens.

What about the others, though? For some, this just isn't the most wonderful time of the year. Maybe it's because they are just Scrooges, or maybe their hearts are two sizes too small. Or maybe it's for more serious reasons than that.

What about the young couple from our first congregation, whose three-month-old baby girl was killed in a car accident on the way to a Christmas party, when they buried their three-month-old girl on December 28? Do you think for them this is the most wonderful time of the year?

What about the lady that says good-bye to her husband of nearly 50 years, who passes away on December 22? Do you think for her this is the most wonderful time of the year?

What about all of those kids around the country, in our communities, in our schools, that spend the Christmas season bouncing back and forth between two homes or two apartments, trying to deal with two parents who can't stand each other and won't talk to each other and are constantly trying to use their kids to try to get back at the other parent? Do you think it's the most wonderful time of the year for them?

What about all the families that are already financially stretched, almost to the breaking point, and now it's Christmas and they have to spend hundreds of dollars on gifts for their children so their kids don't wonder why they ended up on the naughty list? Or all the families that are already under every other kind of stress and now this month we add the shopping and the wrapping and the baking and the decorating and the parties and the deadlines and the practices, etc.?

For some people, this is the most wonderful time of the year, and it's great. But what if it's not?

The answer to that maybe painful question might actually be found in the pink candle down here. I'm not sure if you know what the pink candle means. None of our churches seem to know. Maybe Pastor Enderle has done a better job than I did of training it, so maybe you know this. Colors in church, they generally mean something. We're used to seeing the green of the long Pentecost season; green symbolizing growth. We'll see the red of Pentecost, symbolizing fire or sometimes the blood of the martyrs. We'll see white on Christmas and on Easter, symbolizing Jesus' perfection and Jesus' holiness. Before each of those two major festival days, Christmas and Easter, historically, going back centuries, the Church has had a period of preparation for those things. Of course, the way that you are going to prepare for the arrival of the Savior or the resurrection of the Savior is with repentance. So both of those festival days were preceded by Easter, 40 days of Lent; Christmas, 6 weeks of Advent (it was eventually shortened to 4 weeks. And for both of those seasons, the color of the season was purple. Purple is the color of repentance. In recent years, many of our churches have switched to blue for Advent; the blue of the sky, the blue of looking forward to the coming of the Savior; and that's perfectly fitting. But let's go back to the purple.

It's difficult to repent, right? Forty days, four weeks, six weeks of repentance; that's a long slog. That's a tough stretch. So historically, in the middle of each of those seasons, we take one week to kind of lighten it up a little bit and to focus a little bit less on repentance and a little bit more on why we repent and what happens when we repent. So the fourth Sunday in the season of Lent and the third Sunday in the season of Advent, we focus a little bit less on repentance and more on joy. What happens when you take purple and you lighten it a little bit? You get pink, or properly rose. You know real high churchy people don't like calling it pink, but it's pink.

That's really what Jesus is talking about in today's First Lesson. I didn't misspeak; Jesus is talking in today's First Lesson. I understand that today you might have been a little bit distracted during the reading of the First Lesson. I apologize for the microphone problems we had, so maybe you want to take a look at it. It's on Page 5 in your Service Folder. Yes, it's the Old Testament. Yes, it's Isaiah. But the beginnings of these verses are on the lips of Jesus Himself. They are spoken 700 years before Jesus was born, but this is Jesus speaking and He is talking about what He was coming to do. It's so easy for us to see ourselves in these verses. He talks about the afflicted, about those who are in poor or rough circumstances. He talks about those who mourn. He talks about those who are broken-hearted. He's not just talking about some feeling of sadness. He is talking about those who have been broken by guilt and their conscience gives them absolutely no rest. He talks about those who are bound and who are held captive. He is using terminology from slavery and captivity, but He is talking about us—we, who are held captive by sin and guilt and shame and death; that doesn't sound much like joy.

But look at what He says it does. He brings good news to the afflicted. He binds up. He heals the broken hearted. He comforts those who mourn. He proclaims freedom for the captives and release for those who are bound, and that last one is especially important because that is what has happened to every one of us. We, who by nature and by our own sin, were bound to that sin and we are held in captivity to sin and all its affects; guilt and death and hell. Jesus has set us free. That's what He came to do.

He came to live, to die, to rise again in our place; to pay for all of those sins; to hand us a perfect life that we would get the credit for so that we are set free. We are set free from our sins. And if we are set free from our sins, we are set free from guilt. We are set free from hell. We are set free from a broken and tortured conscience. We are even set free from death because death can't hold us, and we live forever. God's anger over our sin is gone. All that is left is His love and His promise to use every day of our lives in the way that He knows is best for us.

So, our sins are forgiven. It's like they never even happened. We are right with God and we have the promise of His protection and of His blessing. We are members of His family and we have the promise of a place at His side for all eternity in heaven. All of that is yours. And there is nothing that can ever take that away from you. What could we possibly ever have to complain about? Knowing that is ours, what could ever drag us down? How do we respond to that? That's the rest of this lesson.

If you look at the last part of it, starting at about Verse 10, now it's no longer Jesus speaking. Now it is us. We say "I will rejoice greatly in the Lord. I will celebrate because of my God." That is the joy that is ours as Christians through Christ; the joy that begins when we see His coming on Christmas day.

Isaiah says that we are like a bride. The Bible often calls the Church the "Bride of Christ." A bride never looks better than on her wedding day. Isaiah says that's how we are, except it's not just one special day. It's EVERY DAY. It's ALL THE TIME because we are always rejoicing over what God has done for us. And there is absolutely nothing that can silence that rejoicing.

So yes, we may have bad days. But that sadness is lifted by knowing that even those bad days are being used for our good by God. So really, there is no such thing as a bad day because every day, God is using to bless us, to bring about what He knows is best for us. Yes, we may have to say "Good-bye" to loved ones, but even while we grieve, we rejoice because we know where they are. We know they are with Jesus and we know that we are soon going to see them and we will be with them forever. We may have the stress of deadlines and especially this time of year more to do than time we have to do it in, but Jesus puts it all into perspective for us. He reminds us why we are doing all of it, because it's part of our celebration. It's part of our expression of our **Christmas Joy**.

For a lot of people, this is the most wonderful time of the year, and that's just fine. For others, it's definitely not. But whatever camp you fall into there, let that pink candle remind you of what this season really means. You are loved. You are forgiven. You live under God's blessing now. And you will live with your Savior forever. So through the brightest days and even through the darkest nights, rejoice in the Lord. Celebrate because of what your God has done. Live today and every day because you will live forever in Christmas Joy. Amen.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. [\(Philippians 4:7\)](#) Amen.