In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

In this world, you redeem yourself. You mess up, you make it right. The husband who forgets his anniversary brings home flowers. The child who disobeyed brings mom breakfast in bed. And even if the action isn’t equivalent to the infraction, love accepts the gesture and things are good again. But if love is not there, it won’t work. The wronged one will demand much more in return. And likely will not forget what happened, in case it is useful in the future.

Redemption is hard. It is humbling. It is admitting that you were wrong and trying to make things right again. Easier - and so the path more taken - is denial, or excuse. *I didn’t do it!* or, *She made me do it!* seems better. For me at least. But not for the wronged one. So Adam blames Eve . . . and God. And Eve blames the serpent . . . and God. And the serpent just smiles at the destruction he has caused: the breakdown of love.

God could have demanded redemption. Adam and Eve messed up - make it right! But they could not possibly do so. Their efforts would be too small, and their sin was too great. Its consequences earth-shattering. Literally. Besides, a world created in love could only be redeemed by love. A love Adam and Eve no longer had. But the God who *is* love, did.

And so God, instead of demanding redemption, promised it. In a stunning turn of event, the wronged one would pay the price for the wrong-doers. The wronged one would make things right again. Because He was the only one who could. And His love would let Him do no less. The alternative was to lose His children forever. Give them over to their sin and death. Something a heavenly Father could not do.

So God promises a Redeemer. At first, the promise was quite vague. But over the years, it became more and more clear. A descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. From the tribe of Judah. A son of David. Born in little town of Bethlehem. And when, finally, the angels sang to the shepherds, they pointed to the child in the manger. There is the love of God. There is the Redeemer - *your* Redeemer - in the manger. You messed up, but He is making it right - making *you* right - with God again.

No wonder the prophet Isaiah gushes as he does in the words we heard tonight. These are
not the calm, measured words of a news reporter - these are the excited words of one who has seen and received a gift greater than he could have ever imagined. **How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings [this] good news!** The watchmen are singing! **Singing for joy!** (Not something watchmen usually do!) Even the **waste places of Jerusalem** he tells to sing. Because the Lord has **bared His holy arm.** He has rolled up His sleeves and did His work. **He has redeemed Jerusalem.** But not just Jerusalem. **All the nations, all the ends of the earth, he says, shall see the salvation of our God.** For all throughout the Old Testament, God was watching over Israel for this reason: for the Redeemer of the world to come from them, as He had promised. And when Isaiah catches a glimpse of it, a prophetic vision 700 years before it happens, he cannot contain himself!

Very much like Simeon and Anna in the Temple in Jerusalem. Simeon had been promised that **he would not see death before seeing the Lord’s Christ** - the promised Redeemer; the one who would set things right with God again. And so when he does, he cannot contain himself. He takes up Jesus in his arms - from His probably-very-startled mother! - and breaks out in praise. Anna, too, **from that very hour begins to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.** And not just Jerusalem, but beginning at Jerusalem and going out into all the world.

To you and me today. That is why for us, for the church, the path taken is not one of denial or excuse for our wrongdoing, for our sin, but confession. **I did it. It is my fault.** For God’s love has changed things. It has changed everything. So we need no longer blame or deny, or think that we have to somehow, some way, redeem ourselves and make ourselves right with God again. **It is finished,** Jesus said. And it is. Because of the Redeemer in the manger, who went to the cross for your sin and shed His blood for you. Which is what Paul told the Ephesians and reminded them of in his letter to them, that **in him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us.** Lavished indeed. Grace upon grace. Gift upon gift. Forgiveness that never ends. The redemption of God for the sin of the world, from the beginning of time to the end of time. For you. **To,** as Paul went on to say, **unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.** To unite. To overcome and restore the division cause by sin and the breakdown of love.

And so like Isaiah, and like Simeon and Anna, and I suspect Paul, too - now it is joy for us! Not denial and blame, but thanks and praise. That what we could not and could never do, the Son of God did for us. From manger to cross, from life to death to life again. A world created in love has been redeemed in love. The love of God. His perfect love. There it is on display for all the world to see.

Or this is how one Lutheran Pastor put it, writing in the early 20th century:

*What an exceptional proof of Your love You have given me by such a gift! For my sake, You caused Your only-begotten Son, the Son of Your love, Your only Child, to become a*
human man, that as a man He might be able to suffer torture, scourging, stripes, and even death, and thereby render satisfaction to You . . . and redeem . . . me. If some great man of this world were to sacrifice his most beautiful ring, his most valuable jewels, his choicest treasure, to save some wretched human being from his misery and make him happy, such an act would be admired and praised everywhere as an instance of the highest degree of man’s love for man. If a king were to deliver one of his sons into captivity to obtain release of some prisoner of lesser rank from his chains and dungeon, people would imagine that they could not sufficiently extol and praise the love of such a monarch for his subjects. And yet, all this is as nothing in comparison with the love that You have shown to the children of men by clothing Your beloved Son in [our] flesh and blood, by sending Him in the fullness of time as a man into this world. . . . Your love has no equal - it passes all understanding! We can do nothing but humbly thank You, praise You, and magnify You.*

Like Isaiah, Simeon, Anna, Paul, and countless Christians across the centuries, upon seeing with the eyes of faith, the promise fulfilled, redemption accomplished, and the waiting done. God is in the manger.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.