

It's hard to believe that it's been over twenty years since the first movie in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy has debuted. This adaptation of J.R.R. Tolkien's book of the same name has become a classic of its own. With the trilogy having an over nine hour run time, a watch from beginning to end demands dedication.

My wife and I have slowly been making our way through the extended edition of the Lord of the Rings this winter. On this Christmas morning, I cannot help but think of a scene in the second movie, *The Two Towers* as I read our Old Testament text: **“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.””**

*The Two Towers* reaches a climax at the Battle of Helm's Deep. The forces of the Kingdom of Rohan must fight off the forces of evil that have outnumbered them. Rohan takes refuge in Helm's Deep, their last stronghold. The walls are breached, and yet a small remnant remains in the inner sanctum behind the last door.

The only hope our heroes have is a promise: that their ally Gandalf will return with reinforcements at dawn. With that promise the handful of fighters ride out to make one last charge. Of course, Gandalf arrives just as they charge out with innumerable cavalry to save the day. The enemy army is routed, and the day is saved.

As we consider Christmas, perhaps medieval warfare is the last thing on our minds. Instead, we have visions of sugarplums, reindeer, and elves. We imagine manger scenes, shepherds, and the infant Jesus in a manger. But I want us to picture that scene from the Lord of the Rings and find that what's going on at Christmas really isn't all that dissimilar. **REJOICE! ON CHRISTMAS GOD ROLLED UP HIS SLEEVES TO DELIVER YOU SALVATION.**

First, I. On Christmas, God rolled up His sleeves to save. We read in our text: **“The LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.”** You heard it first from me. The Bible talks about the right to bare arms. Allow me a little levity on Christmas Day, I'm not talking about bear arms as in b-e-a-r, but bare as in b-a-r-e. Isaiah tells us that the Lord our God has bared His arm before everyone. That's when God rolls up His sleeves and flexes His muscles. Whenever He saves His people, He bares His arm.

What's the need for the elbow grease? The situation might not have been so obviously dire as the Kingdom of Rohan surrounded by an army of evil orcs. However, the world of Isaiah was not unlike the world that you and I experience today—it too was filled with sin, death, and the reign of the devil.

It was filled with people who sinned: acting selfishly and harming others. It was filled with death: people both young and old dying before their time. It was

filled with the reign of the devil: natural disasters, corrupt rulers who served their own egos rather than God.

Christmas tells us that God was not content to leave us to our own devices. He didn't want His creation to God to hell in a handbasket. He had to roll up His sleeves. He had to get to work. He had to bare his holy arm.

We have a hands-on God who can't leave His people alone. He has bared His arm whenever He saved His people. He gave Adam and Eve the promise of a Savior even in the Garden of Eden. He covered their nakedness with the skins of animals. He guided Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their families even despite their foibles and sins. He saved the people of Israel time and time again.

But today the way He bares His holy arm is not by sending in the cavalry like Gandalf did in *Lord of the Rings*, but by sending His Son Jesus Christ into the flesh so He could be brought to Calvary. He bares His holy arm by being born naked, with not only bare arms, but not an article of clothing as Jesus burst from the womb of the Virgin Mary.

And II. On Christmas, God has come to bring salvation. In *The Two Towers* as Gandalf arrives with the reinforcements, it's almost as though the entire battle stops to stare at him. The enemies must realign their battle formation to prepare for this new threat. The orcs align their pikes to prepare for the rush of horsemen down the valley slope, but it is to no avail as they are even blinded by the bright light of dawn shining in from the East.

In our cosmic battle of good versus evil, we see a similar scene: **“The voice of your watchmen—they lift up their voice; together they sing for joy; for eye to eye they see the return of the LORD to Zion.”** When our heroes saw Gandalf coming, they knew the victory was near. They knew that the death and destruction of warfare was not in vain.

On this Christmas day, it may not seem like much: a mother worn out from labor, a father holding his newborn son, and shepherds greeting this baby boy. But Christmas marks the start of a cosmic invasion—of the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth taking back what is His.

The return of the Lord to Zion is the restoration of the way things should be. It is a return to life in the Garden of Eden when the Lord walked alongside Adam and Eve. The birth of Jesus Christ, who is the Lord made flesh, is the fulfillment of this promise from Isaiah's prophecy.

Your God reigns, that's the promise of our text, and we see this as Jesus preaches as message of the Kingdom of God being near all throughout the Gospels. The sick are healed, the blind have their sight restored, demons are cast out, and sins are forgiven. God has come to this Earth to bear your burdens, and it started in a manger two thousand years ago.

This cosmic invasion culminated in God saving us by dying for our sins. It found its fulfillment not only in God becoming man, but God dying in the person of Jesus Christ for our failures and brokenness. Salvation is found in this God-man bursting from the tomb on the dawn of that morning of the Resurrection of our Lord.

Now that we have beheld Jesus in the flesh. We have heard His voice in Holy Scripture and experienced Him truly present in His body and blood of the Lord's Supper, we too can rejoice because even today, God is with us and has saved us!

Perhaps it's just that you're kind of worn out by the end of a three hour movie, but many of the scenes from *The Lord of the Rings* are emotional for me even as a grown man. I found myself tearing up at watching this clip from the Battle of Helm's Deep on Youtube as I prepared this sermon.

Of course, there's no such place as Helm's Deep. Middle Earth is a made-up place, and *Lord of the Rings* is a work of fiction, but perhaps there's something about these stories that stirs up something deep inside us. This knowledge of good and evil, and the desire for good to triumph over evil.

The story of *The Lord of the Rings* is fake, but the stories of the Bible are real. III. On Christmas, rejoice because God has saved you! On Christmas we have real joy, real hope, and real peace at the good news of the dwelling place of God being with men. We can rejoice at John's testimony: "**And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.**"

Today, lift up your voices, sing for joy. "**Break forth together into singing, you waste places of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people; he has redeemed Jerusalem.**" The forces of evil are routed as the light of the world has come into our midst.

Celebrate, with more than just the happiness that comes from the Packers beating the Rams, or your favorite gift under the tree, or old times with your family. Rejoice and sing for joy because God has seen fit to redeem His creation by sending Himself to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

More than just the victory in a battle, this good news will last forever as Christ saves us not only from our sins, but from eternal death. He saves us so that we can live eternally under Him in His Kingdom. And go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere. Tell your neighbors, your family, your friends down in a lonely manger the humble Christ was born; and God sent us salvation, that blessed Christmas morn! Amen!