

## Christmas

In a parish where I used to work we had one elderly lady who came to mass faithfully every Sunday. Just as faithfully each week as soon as she showed up, she walked through the door and marched straight up to me. I knew what was coming next: She had a complaint. She complained more than any other person I know. It wasn't the same complaint every week; she had quite a variety of them. Sometimes they were about the building or someone on our staff. It might be something from mass the previous week, or her health, or how someone was mistreating her. It was always bad news. After a while, when she walked through the door and came up to me, I started the conversation with a smile and this question: "What would you like to complain about today?" One year on the Sunday after Ash Wednesday she got out of her and entered the building as usual. She located where I was standing and directed her steps toward me. I put my hand out to stop her. "I can't talk to you," I said. She looked concerned. "Why?" I said, "For Lent this year I've given up listening to your complaints." She honored this; she gave me six weeks of a complaint-free Lent.

To be honest, though, I shouldn't pick on her. We all focus on things that don't go right. When someone hurts us, we spend weeks and months thinking about it. When we are sick, we aren't happy. Often when we feel bad, we don't want anyone else to feel good. We may tell a lot of people how much we hurt just to spread the bad news around. We make bad news the heart of our day.

To celebrate Christmas Day, we hear a prophecy from the Book of Isaiah. It concerns a people who have had nothing but bad news. They have been at war. They were losers. Other nations were stronger than theirs. But now something has changed. Some messenger has appeared up on the mountain, and the messenger has different news to give: glad tidings, peace, good news, and salvation. Israel has a covenant with God, but other nations had not believed in the same God. Now comes this news to Israel: "Your God is King!" No one else's god is the ruler, Israel, "Your God is King!"

The news is so good, that Isaiah says even the feet of the messenger are beautiful. Imagine that, the person carrying the glad tidings has a profound message of joy. You would expect the face to be radiant. But this news is so good that even the messenger's feet look beautiful: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings glad tidings."

For us Christians, the good news is that Christ is born to save. We need to get this into our heads and into our hearts and all the way into our feet. The weather may be bad. Your health may be failing. You may not like your in-laws or the food they brought over this week. But this you have to like: Jesus Christ is born. If this news does not make you happy, then you are letting something else get in the way of Christmas. Don't let that happen. Rejoice! Be glad! Thank God for this good news: the birth of Christ overcomes complaints. Christ was born to save!