# Christmas

***But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah,***

***from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel,***

***whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.***

***(Micah 5:2 ESV)***

***And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold,***

***I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.***

***(Luke 2:10 ESV)***

# Unto Us A Child Is Born

**December 19, 2021**

**Isaiah 9:1-7**

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**Introduction:**

Good morning. I want to invite you to open your Bibles with me to Isaiah 9:1-7. That’s on page X in the pew bible in front of you. Most often, the Gospels like Matthew or Luke are where people search to find the story of Christmas. Many have it a tradition in their home to read these stories every year.

But today we will look back to the Old Testament. That’s because the Christmas we understand and see in the New Testament needs to fit the shape of the Old Testament prophesies. The Old Testament deals in shadows whereas the New Testament deals in substance. It isn’t that the Old Testament is false, it is that the Old Testament is incomplete. It’s like the children’s toy ball or cube with different cut-out shapes on its surface. The goal is for the child to get that shape and place it into the right-shaped hole. But we’ve all seen the one that frustratingly tries to force a shape in the wrong hole. In the same way, the goal is for us to take Jesus and understand him through the outline granted to us by the prophets. If we don’t do this, we may have made him into a different shape and meaning than God intended.

Rightly understood, we will find that the text this morning shows us that Christmas is important because it is the dawning of a true deliverance and everlasting hope through coming of a king.

Hear now the Word of the Lord beginning at verse 1.

1 But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

2The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.

3 You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil.

4 For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.

5 For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire.

6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

7 Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. (Isaiah 9:1–7 ESV)

The audience to this passage would have seen it is a ray of hope in the midst of great distress, fear, and judgment. The prophet Isaiah was commissioned by God to speak against the infidelity of Israel and warn of their impending judgment. But sprinkled amidst these, God provided opportunities of repentance, hope, and promise if they would trust in him.  
The kingdom of Israel at this point was divided. In both northern Israel (called Ephraim) and southern Israel (called Judah) there arose numerous evil kings. In the north, King Pekah of Israel/Ephraim made a coalition with King Rezin of Aram/Syria to besiege Jerusalem in the land of Judah to push him into fighting with them against the mighty nation of Assyria. This made King Ahaz of Judah scared. Isaiah says, “the heart of Ahaz and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind”.

But God tells him through Isaiah in chapter 7,

“And say to him, ‘Be careful, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint because of these two smoldering stumps of firebrands, at the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria and the son of Remaliah.” (vs. 4)

“thus says the Lord God: ‘It shall not stand, and it shall not come to pass.” (vs. 7)  
“If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all.’” (vs. 9b)  
We even find in this chapter another prophesy of Jesus through the virgin birth as a sign for Ahaz. But King Ahaz refuses the help of God and bribes Assyria to fight against the northern coalition.   
Because of this, and little did he know, but Assyria would not only brutally destroy and deport Northern Israel but they would keep on coming south to Judah and Jerusalem.

So, Isaiah 8 tells of the utter destruction and gloom of Israel. Northern Israel – Zebulin, Naphtali, and Gallili – which is mentioned in the first verse of our text of chapter 9 would be the first to be cut down to a burned stump.

But thankfully, that is not all that Isaiah was told to proclaim. God also showed him that this purifying judgment would not thwart God’s intention to fulfil his promise to Abraham and David. Isaiah saw a hopeful glimmer of light in the distance.

In verse 2 he says:

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. (v. 2. ESV)

Isaiah saw the one who would come to powerfully deliver and righteously reign a people lost in darkness. He saw Jesus…he saw Christmas.

And Christmas was going to change everything!

Verse 3 says, “You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil.” (Isaiah 9:3). He says that Christmas is going to cause God’s people to multiply. It will fill people with joy and hearts of rejoicing.

And Isaiah tells us why. In the text, verses 4, 5, and 6 all start with the word “For”. This indicates a causal statement. Each of these little sentences tells us why Christmas is a really big deal.

**What is the significance of Christmas?**

The first one says that Christmas is a big deal because:

**1. God has liberated his people**

You see that one in verse 4:

**For** the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. (Isaiah 9:4 ESV)

When it says, “on the day of Midian”, it is a reference to the time of Gideon. God called Gideon as a judge of Israel to deliver his people from the Midianites who were oppressing them.

But Gideon said:

“Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house.” (Judges 6:15 ESV)

He didn’t have the military necessary to defeat the Midianites. He didn’t have a lot of money or resources. He was not the man for the job.

But God said:

“But I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man.” (Judges 6:16 ESV)

God didn’t choose Gideon because he was the most equipped. God chose Gideon in order to display to everyone that the presence of God determines the outcome of the battle. Ultimately, God, rather than chariots, armies, or weapons conquers the enemy.

Now the prophet Isaiah says that God would deliver his people in the same way. God is going to break the yoke of slavery from his people, free them from the whip of abuse, and deliver them from the tyranny of their cruel master. And he is not going to do so by conquering with a force of power or great wealth. It would be through a baby called Immanuel – “God with us”.

This would be in direct contrast to the current King Ahaz who sought the comfort of an alliance with the mighty Assyria. While it brought brief relief from the northern coalition, it ultimately enslaved them. His hopes were foolishly in finding a bigger bully to beat up their bully and trust that the bigger bully wouldn’t turn on them too. But again, we see him following the same cycle Israel always found themselves in - Midianites, Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, and Romans

God would provide a deliverance that would be better than simply trying to amass a more troops or have more diplomatic agreements. Because their problem will never be solved by those things. Because the root of their problem is not their northern neighbours, their size, or their resources. They forget so easily that even when they have all of those things – when Solomon, the wisest, richest, most victorious was on the throne – it was the sin and idolatry that resided within that emptied the throne.

Until we see what they didn’t, we’ll never truly appreciate Christmas. If the real problem is really the surrounding enemies then a baby in a manger is a foolish solution. I’ll trade you for tanks and missiles. But that’s the thing. The real problem isn’t OUT THERE – the real problem is IN HERE.

The issue is INSIDE and it comes OUT and spoils the things around us. That’s what the Bible says. We read,

The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks. (Luke 6:45 ESV)

The human heart is broken and beyond cure! We cannot fix our own broken heart because what flows from it is deceptive and wicked. It will take someone outside of us to fix our heart – it will take an act of grace and a radical intervention from our holy God. The prophets spoke this way as God began to reveal his redemptive plan. God spoke through Ezekiel in his climactic prophecy saying:

I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. (Ezekiel 36:26 ESV)

This is what we truly need. A salvation secured without armies or alliances. It’s about God using a single servant, unimpressive to the world, who fully submits and obeys the Lord’s will. It’s about God dealing with our heart problem by this righteous man to take the poison in our hearts upon himself so that we can be made whole.

The Apostle Paul tells says it this way:

“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:21)

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure – and yet, because of the intervention of God, by his wounds we are healed. That is how we get a new heart and a new spirit – this is how God’s people are liberated from the bondage and oppression of our enemy. It will be by God’s hand and his unsuspecting servant – just like in the day of Midian.

Secondly, Isaiah tells us that Christmas is significant because:

**2. Our enemy has been defeated**

Look at verse 5:

**For** every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. (Isaiah 9:5 ESV)

Isaiah says that the enemy will be utterly defeated. There will be a huge bonfire for all the battle clothes because there is victory. Swords can be beaten into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks because war will be no more.

But who could possibly bring this about? The Apostle Paul indicates that Jesus has done that:

He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. (Colossians 2:15 ESV)

You may wonder, if Jesus has done this then why is there no peace in the Middle East. That’s because these rulers and authorities that he has disarmed, defeated, and shamed are not what you think. Thomas Aquinas helpfully says that we only have three enemies, fighting on three fronts – the world, the flesh, and the devil.

While we often, like Ahaz, solely focus on the worldly issues, the Bible says:

“we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:12 ESV)

Our battle is against the devil and his demonic spiritual forces. But because of Jesus, he is a defeated foe.

But the devil is only an agitator and an accuser – that is all. He has no true power. He simply seeks to stir up the remnants of your spoiled heart. He whispers to your lusts and fans them into flame. He proposes, and he cajoles and he asks deceiving, doubt-prompting questions like:

“Did God actually say” …(Genesis 3:1 ESV)

Jesus has rendered him powerless to do anything else. And the author of Hebrews tells us how Jesus has won. He says,

“Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.” (Hebrews 2:14-15)

We see here that Satan has the power of death. That means he has the power to restrain men in bondage through fear of death – to keep men in sin so that death comes as a dreadful thing. However, it is through death that Jesus strips him of power and destroys him.

How does he do this? He takes all of our sins upon himself and gives us his righteousness. And without sin to strike, this breastplate of righteousness, deflects any lie, accusation, and whisper that the devil shoots at us. And without this sin, Paul tells us in Romans there is no condemnation so death for a Christian is not something to be feared. In fact, we embrace the death of Jesus, we take up our cross in dying to ourselves and holding fast to him, because in death we find rescue, life, and peace.

That’s why the Apostle Paul sings that little song in 1 Corinthians 15:

55 “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”

56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:55–57 ESV)

Our enemy is a defeated foe! The Cross of Christ has run him through and his end will surely follow. Death is no longer something to be feared!

Take a second to grasp that. The greatest threat to us, to our joy, and to our freedom has been dealt with by Christ. We are free to take any risk, face any challenge, and encounter any foe because Christ has already won. Praise be to God!

Thirdly, the prophet says that Christmas is significant because:

**3. The good king was born**

This may not initially seem evident but Isaiah provides extra content that loads this simple truth with enormous freight of significance.

Verse 6 says:

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

7 Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. (Isaiah 9:6–7 ESV)

Here we find the climax! The first two points were really leading us towards this one. Isaiah proclaims that this child will be the greater David – the true, promised king – who will shoulder the burden of rule with righteousness and grace. But this description is not just what he will do but rather resultant of who he is. Christmas is important because of the nature of Jesus.

Alec Motyer says it well when he says,

“The emphasis falls not on what the child will do when grown up but on the mere fact of his birth. In his coming all that results from his coming is at once secured.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

All that we have discussed has assurance in the coming restoration and rule of Jesus. Like the shepherds in the field, the baby in swaddling clothes is also our sign.

But this is only good news if Jesus is truly better than the other kings. Israel and Judah were continually casting their hopes on the success of the next king only to have their hopes crushed. After being taken into captivity they built their hopes up and even when they were delivered, they were only brought into the hands of another more brutal empire. I can imagine the remnant of Israel saying, “before I put my bet in, how can I trust him?” And you may be thinking the same thing this morning.

Thankfully, Isaiah tells us all about how this Jesus is different. He is:

1. **Wonderful Counsellor**

He is not just wonderful in the sense of being delightful. This means he is a supernatural counsellor. He is the wisdom of the Father brought down to be shown and shared with us.

He intimately in tune with both God and man, so there is no problem that he does not have the solution for.

There are many times when we simply do not know what to do. Sometimes life seems so complicated that we don’t feel peace with any decision that we make. Jesus was born to give you hope. He was born to give you purpose and direction, guidance and counsel. We don’t need better strategies or more self-help books. We need Jesus. And that’s what Christmas gave us.

He is also

1. **Mighty God**

Not only does he give us wise counsel, but he secures the ability to heed it. Christmas is not about a tiny, weak baby. Jesus came as a warrior with all the power and resources of Heaven at his disposal. He came to crush the head of the snake and bring us home. And nothing can stand in his way. There is no army, government, oppressor, or sin that can even come close to being a match for him. He has overcome the world!

I think this is one area where we have conceded to the humanistic worldview. We have started to believe that God doesn’t really move mountains, he doesn’t have the power to save a wretched sinner, and he won’t be able to conquer the sin that we face. But that is a lie straight from the Devil. Jesus has already disarmed the enemy and he stands as a mighty warrior king that can do far more than we can imagine. What would happen if we started to live like we believed that? How different would our marriages and families look? How would that change how we walked into work on Monday? It’s worth asking and meditating upon.

Thirdly, Isaiah says that he is:

1. **Everlasting Father**

Jesus, of course, is not God the Father. This metaphorically speaks of Jesus as the loving, paternal, tender, provider, and protector. In our culture many of us struggle with understanding what a positive father image looks like because fathers who are abusive, aloof, or absent. But God has graciously shown us the perfect image of a father in Christ. And more than this, we can be comforted that what we see in Jesus is FOR US! When we see his compassion and kindness, that compassion is for us. When we see his mercy and forebearance, that is for us. When we see his intimacy and gentle love, that is for us.

Fourthly and lastly, Isaiah says that he is the:

1. **Prince of Peace**

Jesus is the embodiment of peace because he both makes us right with God and with each other.

Paul says, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 5:1). The wrath of our holy God toward us because of our sin has been removed. We have been given the righteousness of Christ. And we are brought close to God as his beloved children. The hostility was replaced by peace. Then, freed from sin, we are enabled to have peace with one another. No longer does sin have to plague our relationships. Jesus has established indescribable peace the instantaneous moment that we put our trust in him.

This is the reason that we have for celebrating Christmas. This is why it is of utmost significance. It changes everything. When we were at our very worst and when the depth of darkness around us was overwhelming– the light of God shone! God invaded history to bring us salvation! God defeated our enemy, broke every chain, paid every debt in his own body, and will one day bring us to experience fellowship with him forever.

The final line in verse 7 says, “The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.” The zeal of God – that zeal that rises his deep love for his people – has caused him to fulfil his promises in Jesus. With confidence, joy, and hope we can wake up to the truths of the coming of Christ every day of the year until Christmas returns.

That is why Jesus has come. That is the essence of the Gospel. That is the good news and great joy of Christmas for all people.

Thanks be to God. Let’s pray together.

1. J. A. Motyer, The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)