

Christ Has Come

Series: The Lights of Christmas: Finding Hope, Peace, Joy, Love, and Christ
Isaiah 9:2-7; Luke 2:1-7
December 24, 2017

It has finally come, and it couldn't have come any sooner. Our sons who work in retail have been planning, stocking, displaying and working long hours up to this day. I walked through the Dayton Best Buy the other day; you couldn't go 10 feet without seeing a television box; Matt said that's the way every Best Buy store is. Marty works at Meijers in Hamilton; this weekend has been crazy in his Grocery department, as people buy more than their usual grocery list. For our guys, Christmas couldn't come any sooner.

But it has finally come. The mailman, the UPS and FedEx deliverers have been very busy, as more and more people shop at Amazon.com or order from online sources. They've worked long hours to try to get everything to you in time. For deliverers, Christmas couldn't come any sooner.

But it has finally come. Children have been waiting for weeks with wish lists in their heads, hoping that special toy or doll or game will show up tomorrow morning. I remember that excitement. Christmas couldn't come sooner.

But it has finally come. The Christian radio stations have been increasing their Christmas programming; even Sirius XM has several different Christmas music channels. It has been wonderful to listen to the inspiring music. This service was designed to sing the carols once again. If you come next Sunday morning at 10 AM, we will do Christmas carols one more time, but that will be it. In a few days, they will be gone until next year, and for some, it could come any sooner.

But it has finally come; the Messiah, the One foretold by the ancient prophet Isaiah. I invite you to turn in your bulletin to page 5. Let me read Isaiah 9:2,6-7 for you:

The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine... For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His government and its peace will never end. He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David for all eternity. The passionate commitment of the LORD of Heaven's Armies will make this happen!

During this season of Advent, we've lit candle, each with their own focus. We lit the candle of Hope because we have a Mighty God. We lit the candle of Peace because we have a Prince of Peace. We lit the candle of Joy because we have a Wonderful Counselor. We lit the candle of Love because we have an Everlasting Father.

Tonight for the first time, we lit the white candle that is the center of all these other candles. It is the hub by which all these other things – hope, peace, joy, love – are connected into our lives in the circle of the wreath. The center is Christ. Christ has come. And this is the world He came into. Look again on page 5.

At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to

*Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. He took with him Mary, his fiancée, who was now obviously pregnant. And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. She gave birth to her first child, a son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.*¹

The Christ child came into this world.

First, it was a world dominated by government.

Though founded as a republic in the 6th century BC, it was with Julius Caesar in the middle of the 1st century BC that Rome came to have an ever going dominance in the area around the Mediterranean Sea, eventually ruling 20% of the world population, with its series of corrupt, power hungry Caesar's. At first, the Romans granted the Jewish people some authority over their internal affairs; however, frequent rebellions by the Jews led the Romans to stamp out that autonomy. Around 40 BC, the Roman Senate proclaimed Herod the Great as "King of the Jews," and he was appointed the governor of Judea. However, it was clear who was ultimately in charge: the Romans.

So, it was a Roman emperor Augustus, who decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. The purpose of this census was twofold: first was to count the number of people, including the number of eligible fighting men. However, Jews were not allowed to be part of the army; they were far too troublesome to trust in the military. So the first reason for the census was irrelevant for them. Therefore, a census could only mean one thing: a new system of taxation, and for the Jews, the tax burden was already heavy. This explains why the question of paying tribute to Caesar, which Jesus addressed in the last week of His life, was so burning an issue.

When a government is corrupt, immoral, and levies high taxes, the people feel oppressed. In our day, there are many who believe the government is too controlling, spends too much money, has borrowed too much against our and our children's and our grandchildren's future. As of September, for the first time, the total US government debt exceeded \$20 trillion; that's \$63,121 per person, or \$170,436 per tax payer (and it went up \$2 per person since I checked yesterday).

The question is not how does Washington work; the question is, how can we stop it?

Yet Isaiah promises a Messiah would come:

*For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His government and its peace will never end. He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David for all eternity.*²

The Christ child has come this night to give us a government of peace, fairness and justice.

Second, the Christ child came into this world, a world dominated by hardship.

Every once in a while, I get the opportunity to go to one of the happiest places in the world. No, not Disneyworld. And it's not to a child's home as they see the Christmas tree with presents. Not even the airport to go flying. The happiest place in the world... is the maternity floor at a hospital. And I'm amazed at how wonderful the rooms have

¹ Luke 2:1-7 (NLT)

² Isaiah 9:6-7 (NLT)

become. They are so soft and pretty. Everything is there for the mother and the baby. There is seating for whomever wants to be there, but if I was a woman, I'd be telling any man to get out! Maybe even the husband. ("You did this to me! It's all your fault!") When I go there, I get to see a brand new life, a mother overwhelmed with the joy of this arrival, and a father with his machismo broken down to the place he says, "Goo goo, gaa, gaa."

Everything has been put into place for this moment. The announcement (which have become quite elaborate these days), the baby showers, the setting up of the nursery, and the anticipation has now come to fruition. Here, in this place, in this beautiful room, is a new life.

But that's not the world Mary found herself in when she was pregnant with Jesus. A highly suspicious pregnancy? Then all her plans were thrown out the window when the decree arrived. "Go to Bethlehem? Now? We can't, not with the baby due." But go they did, probably waiting until the last possible moment. That's why there were so many in Bethlehem when they arrived. It's like going to the Mall on Christmas Eve.

Can you imagine worse circumstances, to travel the some 90 miles, 2-3 weeks on the back of a donkey, ready to give birth? We have sanitized and simplified the journey Mary and Joseph had to take, but now after seeing the terrain from Nazareth to Bethlehem, I realize it was a difficult, dangerous, and arduous journey. It couldn't have been any harder.

Yet Isaiah makes a promise when the Messiah comes:

*The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine.*³

When you feel as if circumstances have closed in on you, that the world couldn't get any darker, remember that God promised to send a light Who will shine, the One who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, He came into the world that night in Bethlehem.⁴

Finally, the Christ child came into this world, a world dominated by rejection.

We know the story, don't we? Mary and Joseph arrive in Bethlehem only to find no place to stay. Not even the sympathy of the sight of a woman going into labor could open a single door to a house. All that was left to them was a cave where the innkeeper kept his animals (goats, sheep, chickens, a donkey), and the animals his guests had brought (maybe throw in a camel or two.) It was a cave: dark, cold, hard, smelly.

This is the kind of world that Christ came into: a world of rejection. It seems like most of us never measure up. You watch "American Idol" or "American's Got Talent" or any of what seems a hundred different talent contests on TV, and you can easily forget that they are shows of rejection. Hundreds, even thousands of people, who believe they have talent, are told, "No, you don't." Only one out of all those people wins; all the rest are rejected.

Same way in sports. A relatively small group of athletes make the teams, while 4-5 times their number are cut, and then, only one team wins, and only one player on that team gets the Most Valuable Player award. Sports is about rejection.

³ Isaiah 9:2 (NLT)

⁴ See John 1:9

So is a lot of life. Your spouse, who once said, “‘til death do us depart’ now says, “Just depart.” Your boss, “We don’t need you anymore.” Your friends decide you are no longer cool or hip enough to be in their group. There is a story of rejection for every single person in this room tonight because we’ve all been rejected. This is a world of throw aways.

Yet Isaiah promises:

*For a child is born **to us**, a son is given **to us**.*⁵

You are not a throw away. You are worth everything to God, so that He sent His Son to this world to that little town of Bethlehem on that holy night to break the worldly dominances and bring us peace, fairness, and justice.

VIDEO: O HOLY NIGHT

CAIPHUS HOUSE. THROW AWAY

That baby, born in a manger, so that your sins and my sins, the sins we cannot forget, that haunt us in the dark of night, could be removed and the God that knows everything forgets them all, because, if you turn your life over to Christ, God doesn’t see you and your sins when He looks at you; He sees His only begotten Son.

Christ has indeed come. Hallelujah.

In 1818, a roving band of actors was performing in towns throughout the Austrian Alps. On December 23, they arrived at Oberndorf, a village near Salzburg, where they were to re-enact the story of Christ’s birth in the small Church of St. Nicholas. Unfortunately, the St. Nicholas’ church organ wasn’t working and would not be repaired before Christmas. So with the organ out of commission, the actors presented their Christmas drama in a private home. The presentation from the first chapters of Matthew and Luke put assistant pastor Josef Mohr in a meditative mood. Instead of walking straight to his house that night, Mohr took a longer way home. The longer path took him up over a hill overlooking the village. From that hilltop, Mohr looked down on the peaceful snow-covered village. Reveling in majestic silence of the wintry night, Mohr gazed down at the glowing Christmas-card like scene. His thoughts about the Christmas play he had just seen reminded him of a poem he had written a couple of years before. That poem was about the night when angels announced the birth of the long-awaited Messiah to shepherds on a hillside. Mohr decided those words might make a good carol for his congregation the following evening at their Christmas Eve service. The one problem was that he didn’t have any music to which that poem could be sung. So, the next day Mohr went to see the church organist and asked him to come up with a melody which could be sung with a guitar. And that Christmas Eve, the congregation of St. Nicholas became the first to sing our next hymn, “Silent Night.”

⁵ Isaiah 9:6 (NLT)