

Christmas Morning, 2019, Isaiah 9:1-7

You noticed perhaps a similar theme between the two portions of Scripture this morning, and that is one of celebration and rejoicing. So let me ask you this question, what do you celebrate at Christmas time? Perhaps you are happy about the time off work? Perhaps you enjoy spending the break with family and friends? Perhaps you are like the neighbour down my street, and use it as an occasion to put lights on every available surface outside your home? Maybe you like the giving of gifts, or if you are a child, you like the receiving gifts? If you are like me, perhaps you enjoying singing the great Christian hymns. Perhaps you enjoy the Christmas spirit of goodwill to one another or the many of the Christmas traditions that we have picked up in the Western world that are associated with Christmas, like snow, and Christmas trees and wreaths and Santa and reindeer. And for the most part, all of these things in and of themselves are not wrong to enjoy as cultural traditions. But I can also assure you, that the day Jesus Christ was born 2000 years ago, there was not a public holiday, there was no feasting or sparkling lights, there was no Santa or 50% off sales. Yet, at the birth of the child Jesus, there was a celebration and anticipation among some that would barely be replicated in even the most pious Christian households throughout the world on Christmas day. And I will be speaking to you today, to exhort you all to join the shepherds and the angels in their celebration and rejoicing over Jesus Christ. To do so this Christmas morning, we will be looking mostly at Isaiah 9, so open your Bibles to Isaiah 9, and I want you to read with me again chapter 9 verses 1 - 3.

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 a way glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light,
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them a light has shone.
You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you as they do as with joy at the harvest,
as they are glad when they divide the spoil.

Keep in mind there is 700 years between when Isaiah wrote this prophecy and when Luke wrote about Jesus. So we need to go back and transport ourselves back in time, to see what kind of situation the prophet Isaiah was writing this down. And at this time, God's chosen people, living in the land of Judah, are surrounded by enemies. The northern kingdom, including the the Galilee region with Zebulun and Naphtali had been overtaken, and the Assyrians were at the gates of Jerusalem. The prophet Isaiah speaks from God in these verses, saying do not worry, there is a time coming where this light will come from these regions, now full of gloom and darkness and Gentiles to the north of Jerusalem, and he will cause us all to celebrate. The two metaphors used here in verse 3 is the celebration the occurs at the end of a bountiful harvest or the excitement of soldiers dividing plunder after a successful battle. There will be feasting, and joy and celebration. It will be a celebration without cares or worries, as the metaphorical barns are full of food for the winter, and the metaphorical enemy has been plundered. And this joy is one that is given by God, and many

from all around the world will come and join in these festivities. The former darkness has passed away because of this light that has come, and people will rejoice! But who is this light, and why all the celebration?! Lets continue into verse 5,

For the yoke of his burden and the staff of his shoulder,
and the rod of his oppressor,
you have broken as in the days of Midian.

The people are celebrating because their oppression has been lifted, that heavy wooden yoke that tied the oxen to its burden, it has been broken and lifted off their backs. The rod of the taskmaster uses to strike his workers has been taken away. Whoever this 'light' is, he is one to take away oppression just like when Gideon destroyed his armies at Midian and freed the 12 tribes from its enemies, so is it that these people are delivered from the oppressors over them. But there is more! There is celebration because a war has ended. The raging battle has been ceased, the weapons previously used for warfare are now used as heating! Read with me again, verse 6

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

Have I introduced enough tension for you? Have I built up enough anticipation to reveal who is this light that removes darkness, who is this reason for joy, who is this righteous one who takes away the oppressor, who is the great and mighty warrior who stops the warfare and causes all to have reason for celebration? Well, those in Isaiah's day never saw this prophesied celebration at its fullest extent. The Assyrian army, although they turned back at Jerusalem, but within several years were shortly to be followed by the Babylonian army who destroyed the city and carried God's chosen people into exile. When the Jews returned, they remained under the oppression of foreign powers, never again to establish the Davidic kingdom. So Isaiah must be speaking prophetically about someone who is still to come. Let us continue reading. Chapter 9, verse 6.

For to us, a child is born, for 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.

This one prophesied here 700 years before his birth is Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, the Messiah, the Saviour of the World! Could anyone else fit these magnificent titles? The first one, Wonderful Counselor, would summarize his surpassing wisdom. Consider Colossians 3, where Jesus is described as one in whom are hidden all the treasures of knowledge and wisdom. Think the life of Jesus himself, never once at a conundrum of where he should go and what he should do. He communed with God the Father in prayer, but he never sat down with his disciples and asked for their advice or recommendations. He always knew what to say, where he was going, what he was doing, and why he was doing it, refusing to lean upon the fallible wisdom of men. Speaking of Jesus in John chapter 7, even his enemies exclaimed 'Never did anyone speak in such a way'.

The second title is Mighty God, *El Gabor* in Hebrew. It is a bold claim by Isaiah of divinity of this coming son. Isaiah, whether he knew the fully the implications of this title or not, sees there is somehow a plurality of persons within what we now call the Trinity. In the very next chapter, Isaiah 10:21, exactly the same Hebrew word is used in direct reference to YHWH, the covenant name given to God in the Old Testament. And consider Jesus' own claims throughout his life to being one with the Father, consider his miraculous acts of creation when he fed the 5,000, his complete control over nature when he calmed the raging sea, his ability to heal the blind, lepers and the sick, to cast out demons at a word, to raise the dead by command, and even Jesus' authority to forgive sins display some of the obvious traits found in someone who claims the title of God himself.

The third title, Everlasting Father – now here is a potentially confusing one. Why is the Messiah described as the 'Everlasting Father?' Well, we know two things, the author is probably not intending this be a class on systematic theology of inter-Trinitarian relationships, and we know that Isaiah is out of every author in the Bible, uses the idea of eternity to most. In Isaiah 63:15, it reads, describing YHWH, 'you O Lord, are our Father, Redeemer from of old (that is, from eternity) is your name', so this title could be another reference to the eternal nature of this son to be born. This fits well of what we know Jesus said of himself in Revelation 22 that he is 'the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End'. But it could also be describing the paternal nature of Jesus as he cares for his people. Jesus says in the book of John that he is the good shepherd, and he will not leave any of his peoples as orphans, so perhaps the title is focusing on the the caring and providing nature that the Messiah will be. Remember also that this promised Child is to bring lasting joy and celebration, removing the oppressor and stopping the warfare, and this adds an extra element to it – it will be a lasting victory, lasting for all eternity.

The last title of Jesus, here is that of Prince of Peace. For Isaiah and the Jewish people holed up in Jerusalem, a ruler who will bring peace is a very comforting thought. And this is no doubt describing the very aim that Christ is looking to accomplish. Verse 4, the oppressor has been removed by this Child, and verse 5, the warfare has been finished. Now there is peace in His government under the rule and reign of Jesus. The same one who is described as one who does not break a bruised reed, nor snuff out a faintly burning wick said to his people blessed are the peace makers. For of this Child Jesus God said in the book of John, "I have not sent Him into the world to judge the world, but that I might be saved through him." So to summarize, this Child needs no counsel apart from himself, he is the Mighty God, and when he establishes his government, it will last forever, and it will never be challenged, for it is ruled by the Prince of Peace.

Well Matt, so what you might be asking? You have described the prophetic birth of Jesus, and the character of Jesus, but its all theology up in the air somewhere, how does it relate to me this Christmas? Well, let me ask a more personal and direct question. Can you celebrate Christ this Christmas? Or is Christmas the time to surround yourself with little trinkets and distractions that you do not have to think about the God-man who was born into the world to seek and save the lost?

Let us look at the passage again in light of what Christ has accomplished. He did not merely arrive on earth to provide a fleeting spark to the Jewish towns of Galilee, he is the light of the entire world. And his light continues to shine brighter and brighter as the world around us is getting darker and darker. He did not light up the literal darkness, but he came to light up the darkness and gloom that settles over the hearts of men, the darkness of ignorance, and misery and distress, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness and unbelief, loving darkness rather than light, not wanting to come into the light because their deeds were evil. If you cannot celebrate Jesus Christ this Christmas, you are still as it says in Isaiah 9 verse 2, you are walking in darkness.

When Jesus came, verse 4, he came not remove the yoke of oppression of the Roman rule over the Jewish people, but instead removed something much greater. The Jews were crying out for a political King who would crush their enemies, hoping that Jesus would deliver them from the hands of the Romans, but Jesus came to remove the oppressor of our own sinfulness. Romans 8 describes this condition as being a slave to sin, our wicked task master commanding us and standing over us, forcing us to obey its sinful commands. If you cannot celebrate Christ this Christmas, you are still under the oppression of your sin.

When Jesus came, verse 5, he did not come to conquer his enemy by merely crushing them in an earthly battle. He came to destroy a much greater enemy, the enmity that exists between sinful man and a holy God. By Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross for the sins of his people, he satisfied God's wrath against our sin on our behalf. At the right time, Christ died not for the righteous, but for the ungodly. If you cannot celebrate Christ this Christmas, you are still at enmity to God, and God is hostile to you. You are still hostile to his rule and commands, and nothing but Christ can ever make peace between you.

And this Child, verse 6, who is to be born as the Messiah, the Son of David, the Son of God is given as a gift. He is given to his people. He does not require a certain level of righteousness to be received, he does not require a certain amount of penance, he does not require any good works to be done to qualify. All the benefits of reconciliation to God and forgiveness of sin, wrought by the life and death of this Child Jesus Christ is only offered free for those humble ones to take it with empty hands of faith contributing nothing to the perfect salvation but their own sin. If you cannot celebrate Christ this Christmas, then Jesus Christ has not been given to you. You cannot say with Isaiah, 'For to us a child is born, to us a son is given', because you reject this child who has come into the world in order to save it.

And this Jesus who is the Wonderful Counselor – do you trust his counsel or your own? This Jesus who is the Mighty God – do you submit and worship him or do you despise the thought that a man could be the creator of the world? This Jesus who is Everlasting Father – do you believe his eternal nature, that before he began he existed in communion with the Father and the Holy Spirit? And this Jesus who is the Prince of Peace – do you bow to his rule, as he has made peace with the hostility that exists between a sinful people and a holy God? Do you want to live in his Kingdom which is guaranteed a peaceful existence for ever, or prefer to attempt to make your own peace before God by slaving away on your own strength? When the sin has been removed, peace can be accomplished, as it says in Romans 5:1, 'Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ'.

Now among us this morning who do celebrate Christ, and not just only at Christmas time when we focus directly on his birth, but every Lord's Day as Christians gather as a church to worship him, you are the continuation of the rejoicing and celebration that Isaiah prophesied in chapter 9 and what the angels proclaimed to the shepherds in Luke 2:10. You who believe are as much a recipient of the angelic proclamation as the shepherds were 2000 years ago. The Angels said:

Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you this day is born, in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

And if you celebrate Christ this Christmas, you know more than these shepherds, you know how the story ends. God-incarnate coming into the world, born of a virgin, to satisfy God's wrath on your behalf, he who is destroying the oppression of sin over your life, and removing the enmity between a holy God and us sinful people.

If you celebrate Christ this Christmas, you can join the heavenly host in Luke 2:14, praising God saying

'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased'.

And when you do, you can think back to Isaiah 9 verses 1-3, celebrating the Son, Jesus Christ who has been given freely to you with all of his benefits, with a joy given by God, with a multitude added to the people celebrating him, rejoicing like that of the end of the harvest, and rejoicing like those diving spoil.

So I hope I have given you the who and why we should celebrate this Christmas, and challenged you to take stock of your Christmas festivities. To those who use this time to think, and ponder and marvel at this Messiah who was prophesied, you join the ranks of millions of people with a history 2000 years old who have had celebrated the arrival of this Child here on earth and are even still even now celebrating eternally under the complete ruled and reign of the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. And to those here who cannot yet celebrate Jesus this Christmas, who would rather the fleeting distractions of feasts and presents and trees and Santa, there is still time while you live, to turn to the Prince of Peace, to seek peace for your soul, and join in the celebration of the only One truly worth celebrating, Jesus Christ.

Let us Pray.