

The Greatest Christmas Gift
Isaiah 9:2-7

I don't suppose anyone doubts that Christmas is a time for joy, a joy very similar to the one that Isaiah has described for us. Children have opened gifts this morning, and the empty boxes and the piles of wrapping paper do indeed look a lot like warriors dividing the spoil of their labors.

For us older folks, the joy is more like the joy of the harvest, as we revel in the friends and family around us, as we count the blessings God has showered on us this year. Yes, we all have many reasons to come together and rejoice before God on this Christmas morning, with songs and prayers of praise and thanksgiving.

But Isaiah reminds us that the source of all our joys is God – it is God Who has multiplied the nation and increased our joy. And Isaiah reminds us of the principal focus and reason for our joy – unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given. And why is that good news? Not because Jesus was a cute little baby laid in a manger, but because of Who He would grow up to be – the King of Kings sitting upon the throne of David and ruling over his kingdom.

Now, we Americans are often suspicious where it comes to earthly rulers, many times with good reason. But that's why the birth of Jesus is such good news. For He is a Wonderful Counselor, ruling with unerring wisdom. No scandal will rock His administration. No bribe could possibly entice Him to corruption. He will order and establish His Kingdom with judgment and justice, reigning in perfect purity.

And in this time of warfare abroad and riots at home, what good news it is that this King is a Prince of Peace. He brings peace to all the world because His reign is acknowledged by believers in every land. Because He is the Prince of Peace, none who bow the knee to Him need to go on quarrelling, living in conflict.

But the Prince of Peace also brings peace between man and God, satisfying with His own blood the just sentence of death due to us all. Because of His death and resurrection, all His people can come boldly before the throne of grace, with no more fear of God's wrath or curse.

And how can this little baby bring all this about? How can His throne be ordered and established forever, bringing Peace between man and man and between man and God? It is because the baby in the manger is the Mighty God, of one being and substance with the Everlasting Father. Because He is God His sacrifice of Himself is of sufficient value to satisfy the sin debts of all His people. Because He is God, His death shows so clearly the lengths to which God will go to restore a people unto Himself.

And because Jesus is God, He can live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit forever and ever. We will never have need for another king because the reign of our King will never come to an end.

All this is true, and all this is wonderful. But at the same time, we can't deny that Christmas can be a very difficult time for many people. We all have our battles to fight, and they don't magically disappear just because it happens to be Christmas day. Physical ailments in ourselves and in our loved ones, pangs of grief and sorrow, the shattering reality of families that are divided – all these things threaten to intrude on our holiday cheer at any moment. What good does the birth of the baby really do for us here and now? What good does having a king in Heaven do for us here on earth?

Listen carefully to the good news from Isaiah. For it is good news not just for some time in the far future when Jesus comes again. No, the good news that Isaiah speaks is for today. For the Kingdom of God that Isaiah predicted came crashing into reality 2000 years ago when the Virgin Mary gave birth to a son and laid Him in a manger.

Look, as we gather to worship today, all the gifts have been unwrapped, all the mysteries of Christmas have been revealed. The same thing is true of our greatest Christmas gift. The good news for us today is not something we look forward to when Jesus comes again. No, the Kingdom of God in the Person of Jesus Christ has already been revealed to the eyes of a wondering world. The good news is that Christ rules and reigns today and forevermore.

No, as we go forth from this place, all our problems won't just magically disappear. But if we will bow the knee to our Lord and King, submitting every part of our lives to Him, we can go forth with the Light of Christ, shining into the darkness of our broken lives, shining into our broken world. For if we are trusting Jesus Christ to be our Lord and our Savior, we can go forth with the assurance that the God Who loved us enough to be with us as a babe in the manger, the God Who loved us enough to die as a sacrifice on the cross, that this God will reign over us and over all the circumstances of our lives. This God will be with us in the midst of whatever challenges come our way. And as we submit more and more of our lives to the Prince of Peace, His peace and His love will fill us up to overflowing.

Yes, the zeal of the Lord of Hosts has brought to pass the prophecy of Isaiah. And it is the same zeal of the same Lord of Hosts that continues to pursue all His people with amazing, unconditional, unfailing love this Christmas Day, and every day of the year.