

Pastor Daniel Waldschmidt – December 24<sup>th</sup>, 2018 – Christmas Eve – Isaiah 9:2-7 – “A Light in the Darkness”

The theme for our Service tonight is “A Light in the Darkness.”<sup>1</sup> In our reading Isaiah says that we live in “deep darkness.” Isaiah looked at the world of his day and he saw darkness all around him. He saw social injustice. He saw the widows and the orphans not being cared for (Isaiah 1:17). He saw people abusing alcohol. Some people were getting drunk day and night (Isaiah 5:11, 22). He saw people who had seemingly endless material possessions but had no fear of the Lord (Isaiah 2:7; 3:18-23). We certainly see all of those things in our world today. There’s darkness around us.

But we might think, “Well, maybe we can fix that or at least avoid that.” But the problem is there is also darkness inside of us. In our reading from John earlier in the service we heard Jesus say, “People loved darkness instead of light” (John 3:19). There’s a part of us that loves darkness instead of light. When someone wrongs us, there’s a part of us that loves getting even. So there’s darkness around us and inside of us.

There’s also darkness over top of us. Isaiah talks about “**those living in the land of deep darkness**” (Isaiah 9:2). The Hebrew word for “deep darkness” here could also be translated “shadow of death.” It’s the same word that is used in Psalm 23, “even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death” (Psalm 23:4). Death casts its shadow over everything that we do. When we consider all these things, we have to agree with Isaiah. We live in darkness. There’s darkness around us and in us and over us.

But at the first Christmas, God sent a great light into our dark world. Isaiah says, “**The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned**” (Isaiah 9:2). Isaiah says that we have seen a “great light.” Not just a little light, a great light. The darkness is strong. But the light is stronger. In the Gospel of John it says, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:5). God sent us a great light that overcomes the darkness. The darkness represents sin and death. The light represents forgiveness and life. God sent us forgiveness that overcomes our sin. God sent us life that overcomes death. God sent us a light in the darkness.

But you might ask, “What is this great light?” The light that God sent us is a person. Specifically the great light that God has sent us is a little baby boy. It says, “**For to us a child is born, to us a son is given**” (Isaiah 9:6). The little child that Isaiah is talking about is Jesus Christ, the baby lying in the manger. This little baby is our light in the darkness. Little babies always bring us joy. But even though little babies bring us joy, normally a little baby can’t take away the darkness. What is different about this little baby that makes him able to take away the darkness?

This little baby is different, this little baby is able to take away the darkness, because this little baby is also the Mighty God. Isaiah says: “**And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.**” Christ is the Wonderful Counselor. He knows everything and so he gives us the best advice.

He’s the Mighty God. There are certain problems that we humans have that are too big for us to solve. The problem of death for example is too big and too powerful for us to solve. But Jesus is the Mighty God. He is so mighty he defeated death. Three days after he died on the cross, he rose again and the Bible says that when he rose he “brought life and immortality to light” (2 Timothy 1:10). The Bible says that whoever believes in Jesus has immortality. He is our light in the darkness.

Isaiah goes on. He will be called Everlasting Father. He has a father’s heart toward you and toward me.

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the thoughts for this sermon are taken from the WELS C18 sermon helps.

He is the Prince of Peace. Peace is both the absence of conflict and the presence of blessing. And God promises that believers in Jesus will have everlasting peace. It says, **“Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end” (Isaiah 9:7)**. God promises you everlasting peace in Jesus. This peace is such a gift because our sins had created conflict between us and God. But by his death on the cross Christ established peace between us and God. That’s why the angels said on that first Christmas Eve, **“Peace on earth to those on whom his favor rests” (Luke 2:14)**. Christ is our Light in the Darkness. A light that gives us peace.

How did Jesus rescue us from the darkness? Jesus rescued us from the darkness by taking our darkness onto himself. When Christ grew up, he died on a cross. And when Jesus was on the cross, even though it was the middle of the day it became very dark. The gospel of Matthew says, **“From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land” (Matthew 27:45)**. It became dark when Jesus was on the cross because on the cross Jesus was bearing the punishment for all of your sins and mine and the sins of the whole world. Jesus rescued us from the darkness by taking the darkness onto himself.

There’s a hymn called “In Christ Alone” and one stanza in that hymn says, “Light of the world by darkness slain, then bursting forth in glorious day, up from the grave he rose again, and as he stands in victory, sin’s curse has lost its grip on me.” (“In Christ Alone” Verse 2, by Keith Getty and Stewart Townend). It’s like Isaiah said, **“You, God, have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor” (Isaiah 9:4)**. Through Jesus’ death and resurrection, the shackles of sin and death have fallen off of you. Through faith in Jesus, your sins are forgiven. Jesus is your Light in the Darkness.

But you might think, “Is this light really for me?” Yes it is. Look what Isaiah says. He says, **“To us a child is born, to us a son is given.”** That’s an interesting way of speaking. If I heard of a child being born, I would say, “I’m happy for the parents.” But I would never say, “That child is born to me.” Christ was born of Mary, but Isaiah says, **“To us a child is born.”** He says **“to us a child is born”** because he was born for us to be our Savior. It’s like the angel said that first Christmas Eve, **“Today in the city of David a Savior has been born to you” (Luke 2:11)**. This light is for you. Jesus is your light in the darkness.

Because this light is ours, we have great joy. Studies have shown that when it’s dark outside a lot it tends to make us sad. But when it’s bright outside in the spring time that tends to brighten our mood. Light brings us joy. Isaiah talks about the joy that this light brings us. **“You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; They rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder” (Isaiah 9:3)**. There are many ways in which this light brings us joy. We have joy that our sins are forgiven. We have joy that we have life everlasting through faith in Jesus. Allow me to give you two more ways in which this light gives us joy.

First, this light gives us the joy of community. Isaiah says that this light is going to build people into a new nation. **“You have enlarged the nation” (9:3)**. This nation is not a political nation. It is the nation of believers in Jesus. By calling us believers a nation, Isaiah is telling us that we are not meant to walk in the light alone.

Part of the problem with darkness is that it is lonely. In the light we can see one another and give joy to one another. Earlier in the service we read from 1 John, **“If we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another” (1 John 1:7)**. Part of the joy of the light is the joy of community. Part of walking in the light is worshiping regularly and enjoying fellowship regularly with a community of believers. Believers need the encouragement of fellow believers as we roam through this world still covered in darkness. This light gives us the joy of community.

Second, this light also gives us the joy of a future. Isaiah says, **“Every warrior’s boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire” (Isaiah 9:5)**. The picture that

Isaiah uses here is that all wars have ceased and the soldiers are saying, "Well, I'm not going to need my war boots anymore. I can throw them away. I'm not going to need my war clothes anymore. I can throw them away. I can throw them in the fire."

Is there anything that you have right now that if you didn't need it, you would gladly throw it away? Maybe your walker? Maybe your medication? Would you gladly throw those things away if you didn't need them? When Jesus returns, he is going to heal us. The Bible says that he is going to transform our lowly bodies to be like his glorious resurrection body (Phil 3:21). When Jesus returns, you're going to look at your walker and say, "I don't need this anymore!" When Jesus returns we won't need our crutches or our insulin or our medication. When Jesus comes back our bodies are going to be transformed in immortality and we'll have the ultimate joy.

On the first Christmas God sent us a great light that chases away all of our darkness. So this Christmas, in your heart, hold this baby in your arms and know that you are holding your Salvation. Believe in Jesus. Hold this child in your heart by faith, and know that you are holding your Light in the darkness. Amen.

