

*Sermon on Isaiah 9:1-7 prepared for Grace Church by Jonathan Shradar*

This week I shared some reflections on my own longing for Christmas. Advent is about waiting, about an anticipation for the arrival of the Savior... And I am always glad to celebrate it, preach the weeks ahead of Christmas to get us in the mood... but this year I have found myself yearning for the familiarity, the tradition, the joy and the reminder of Christmas.

The music started earlier this year, I put up no resistance to the decoration of the house. While this has been a good year for my family, addition on our sweet girl and the flourishing on her brother and sister. A sense of settling into a place... For all the good though, it has seemed to be a hard one as well. Friends facing hard diagnoses, sickness, long days, hard decisions - noise and division in our culture. Really things have felt pretty messy, but Christmas is a reminder that the One we call Savior, the One who truly rules the universe came into the mess to redeem his people, to bring light into the darkest of places. And because that light has come, we don't have to live in the dark anymore.

So this morning we open the prophetic Word promising this light, this child; that we might be warmed by the gift we have received in Jesus.

**Because God's promise of a King was kept we can live in Thankful Anticipation of what is to come.**

**Isaiah 9:1-7**

Here we have arguably the most prominent prophet of the Bible - Isaiah declaring the word of the Lord to Judah and really the world, from a failed king to the demise of foreign leaders... it is all here full of imagery, most notably pointing to the anointed One, the Messiah that would save the remnant of faithful Israel.

This is a book which its context is covenant. Between God and a people, called to faithfulness but warned of discipline for turning to idols and self. And the words we are reflecting on today are not just great lyrics to Christmas music but they land right in the thick of it... bringing a Spark to desperate people, giving them Hope and ultimately pointing forward to the Light that we look back on.

**1) Spark**

Can you imagine being a member of the tribe of Judah, clinging to faithfulness... maybe you have a good family that hasn't set up idols to worship on the mantle. Or maybe your family has left worshipping Yahweh behind in order to impress the armies that occupy your home. Whatever the situation, if you were to consider yourself part of the faithful remnant, you put no other gods before the Lord, you kept the dietary guidelines and endeavor to keep the law ever before you; you would hear the words of Isaiah and know that the nation was being disciplined... for their

unfaithfulness. It would be a hard truth to swallow - from the covenantal promise given to Abraham to bless him that he would be a blessing...

For you the blessing seems too far off, or removed for good. As you try to make sense of it all, you live in the unknown, who will rule over this people, how will we be dispersed... how will our faith be ripped away from us. The outlook would not be good...

**8:22** “And they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. And they will be thrust into thick darkness.”

But Isaiah has more to say... And the promise comes as a spark in the darkness. “There will be no gloom for her who was in anguish... the former time was discipline... but the time to come is to be glorious.”

Hoping you would experience the great light that is promised, to see the nation - the remnant of faithful followers grow with abundant joy, and to live under the reign of this great king. It is enough to put wind in your sails as you continue to pursue faithfulness - singing of all that God has done to redeem his people, anticipation of his ongoing steadfast love... It only takes a spark to give you, and all of the remnant, hope.

## **2) Hope**

The promise comes and it is meant to reveal the redemptive care that God still has for his people - and again it has the same indication of expansion that the promise to Abraham did... it has a similar deliverance like the exodus out of slavery and Egypt. Interesting though, in the midst of covenantal language of right response to who God is, being faithful to him, comes this promise of light, of rescue and peace not by any obedience of the people, not after a long season of punishment to purge the evil.

I think I missed this before. We get distracted by the tinsel and presents... and whether directly or not, we have a tendency to view the promises of God as something to be earned. I wonder if Judah, the remnant of faithful people thought that way. As if the prophet was saying “if you are just faithful enough, if you strive and behave just right... then you will be rescued.”

But there is no condition in this promise. It is a gift... a big Christmas present! This my type of present. You might know that I don't like surprises. It drives my family crazy, but I prefer to know everything that is under the tree... so I aggressively indicate what it is I desire. There are no surprises here. In the latter time, light will come... anticipate it.

This light for the remnant is rescue - freedom from occupation, exile and oppression. Those that walked in darkness have seen a great light... those in dwell in the valley of deep darkness - the valley of the shadow of death - on them light will shine. Saved from the darkness, rescued from the misery of idol worship and surrendering to the little gods of invading cultures.

It is a rescue that brings joy. As the nation - as God's people multiply - their joy is increased - as in a bountiful harvest they party when they "divide the spoil," when they realize all they have been given.

It is a rescue that brings freedom. The yoke of burden, the rod of oppression have been broken. This promise is not a mere shift to another king of like ethnicity that in benevolence works the people hard. They might imagine Solomon - a good and wise king but one that burdened the people with labor. Or Fidel Castro. No this promise is of abundance apart from burden.

It is a rescue that brings peace. "Every boot of the trampling warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire." A war torn people will have no need for the instruments of war. Mothers and wives will no longer hear of sons and husbands killed in battle. No going out to war, just being warmed by the fire!

The people hope in the light - the promise of rescue, of joy, freedom and peace. But it is not only what is delivered that would fascinate those first hearing this news - it was also who was to deliver it. It comes through a child. A child that will rescue the people.

Before, in assuring Ahaz that invaders would not prevail, God promises a child, and the same promise goes beyond to speak of this child born - **7:14** "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."

A son is given, God with us is to come and rescue his people. A fully human king that is something more, will free and reign over the nation that is increasing. The government will rest on his shoulder - there will be no other political system - his kingdom alone will stand and of the increase of his reign and of peace there will be no end. This is a once-and-for-all king that will not be deposed or succeeded. He will uphold the kingdom from his throne with justice and righteousness forevermore...

His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor - unmatched wisdom in planning, his way is the way. Mighty God - not merely human but God himself will all of his power, the Everlasting Father, a loving father to his people. For those having prayed all their lives about God being one - was this confounding to them? Prince of Peace... known for the peace that only he brings, the shalom, the peace of rest and confidence in his reign.

If for just a moment the remnant can look beyond their rescue, they see God, this God-man, rescuing them. And not like the exodus where they is a miraculous work and then a wait and see depending on behavior. This is rescue and entrance into a new kingdom of permanence.

All of this accomplished by the zeal of the Lord, by his passion and jealousy for his people. What a promise for the faithful remnant to hear when it was first delivered. The anticipation they must have had for this day, for this child to be born. Generations would pass. Exile would come and

go. The city and temple would fall and be rebuilt. And still this promise was on the lips and in the hearts of the people. This prophecy would be read aloud for hundreds of years...

I wonder how the anticipation waned... I am sure it did. Real life happened, new oppressors, what was silence from the prophetic voice of God. Was the spark able to shine at all in the darkness?

Then came a man, from Galilee, who reads another section of Isaiah telling of the Messiah and he claims he is the One. What was a spark has become the bright light of realized promise.

### **3) Light**

For all our negotiating away meaning and attempting to sanitize religion out of our lives, we can not deny that the baby born unto us that Christmas day radically changed the trajectory of humanity. Our calendar. Our systems of justice and government... what we think of as right and wrong have all been impacted by that birth and the life of this given son.

Now, we are living in the light that has come. God kept his promise to his people and the empire of grace that broke forth with the arrival and work of Jesus is now our home.

**2 Corinthians 4:6** “For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

This is our king. And each Christmas we don't hold out hope that he would come like the remnant, we celebrate that he has come and fulfilled the promise. We live in the wake of his zeal for his people. We live as rescued people - no longer in darkness - no gloom for us. In that rescue we can find joy - at the recounting of the “spoils” all that the grace of Jesus provides we can be glad! We live as free people, no longer under the control of the occupiers, of sin and death, no longer under burden but relieved and at peace with God - nothing separates us from his love, his governance.

This is what Christmas invites us into again. To living a kingdom life trusting the wonderful counselor that in his sovereignty is working things for our good. Trusting in his power and his authority in the increase of his kingdom, the ongoing additions of territory and newly freed people. Living for his justice and in his righteousness.

The promise has been kept. The child not only was born, but lived a perfectly obedient life - he faced temptation and torture and still established his kingdom. This God with Us took on a cross that belonged to us, to those lost in sin. And though it appeared as weakness, he in his might defeated the enemy once-for-all. This is our place of thanksgiving!

But it has been thousands of years... For some of us it feels more recent - awakening to the truth of Jesus and the freedom that has come... but what of the darkness that still seems to wage war for control?

Even for those closer to Jesus... thinking of the disciples right after his resurrection, “where is the kingdom? Where is the military victory?” Like the waiting remnant we can grow numb to the promise.

Christmas also reminds us of the already and not yet of the child that is born. He has already instituted his reign over the world - at this very moment he is in control, as wonderful counselor he is not surprised and somehow everything is unfolding as he has planned it, but it is not yet complete. And while he has brought peace between God and man, there is still not peace between man and man. But one reconciliation at a time it is increasing.

We anticipate his return as we live in his light, as we wait for the full light of Christ’s presence to fully transform our hearts and our world.

**2 Peter 1:19** “And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts,”

The Lord kept his promise - the Messiah has come - Jesus has come. And his rule is heading somewhere, we live protected, settled and free as he establishes and upholds his kingdom from that time to forevermore. From the kept promise of a Savior, at Christmas we can look forward to the completion of that promise and another.

**Revelation 21:1-6** “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” And he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment.”

**Because God’s promise of a King was kept we can live in Thankful Anticipation of what is to come.**

Because the child has been born. Because the servant has suffered on the cross for his people. Because we are headed home to this, dwelling with Immanuel for eternity with no death, pain or

sin. Because Jesus will one day add to his “it is finished,” with “it is done...” We can face everything that comes our way with thankful anticipation.

This is Christmas. A season, a holiday, a marker in the ground of thankful anticipation. Thankful for the promise kept, the child, the Son of God who has begun his reign as king - who has broken the chains of bondage and brings peace. Anticipation of completion, when darkness will be no more, the end of spiritual thirst, the unending glory of his presence forever.

Isaiah 9:1-7 is not just a nice text to dust off during advent, it is a promise we can live from, with joy. Let the words of a child to be born remind you of where you are headed. Let each bell rung remind you of the end of war, the justice and righteousness of Jesus. Let each sip of eggnog and every bite of our feasts remind you of the glory that is to come when we dine with Jesus. Let every giggle of children opening presents remind you of the increase of his kingdom. Let every long line remind you that we are all searching for the king.

As we are reminded... or maybe hear for the first time;

**Get in on the promise.** These were not only words of the remnant of Judah, this was a promise for all people that the light would come. Believe in Jesus, he is the light. He is not just a sentimental figure we think about at Christmas, he is the king of the universe. He is God himself, that by his blood made a way for you to dwell with him forever. To be freed from sin and the things that hold you back. Know him, call him king, call him Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

**Live with Thanksgiving.** This promise has been kept. In Christ it is yours. The joy, the freedom, the peace, the forever reign of our good king. Worship him. Rejoice. Notice all the ways his grace flows to you. Look up to him. Smile! Kill your inner Scrooge!

**Live with Anticipation.** Look forward to his return. Let Christ shift your priorities and perspective on life. Be expectant for what Jesus will do in and through you. Share the promise with your neighbors that his kingdom would increase.

**Because God’s promise of a King was kept we can live in Thankful Anticipation of what is to come.**

From a calm and cool night when this child arrived, from the awe of Shepherds and wise men, from faithful men and women that waited for the Messiah. From the authority with which this man spoke. From the miracles of healing and provision. From the violence and victory of the cross. From his resurrection, and from his promise of return, we now live in his light.

May we enter into this Christmas season with thankful anticipation. May we live in the joy, freedom and peace this king delivers. May we live that others might notice and wonder why. For our good and the glory of Christ.