

## **“THE ZEAL OF THE LORD OF HOSTS.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA**

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**Text for the Sermon: Isaiah 9:1-7**

### **A great darkness and a great light.**

This Advent we are considering the Messianic prophecies in Isaiah. These prophecies were spoken over 700 years before the birth of Jesus which makes the details in them all the more staggering. Who will refuse to believe the God who speaks about the future and it comes to pass?

Last week we were helped to understand the prophecy of a virgin birth by knowing some geography and history. That is true for this prophecy of a great darkness and a great light.

Israel is a country divided, like ours only different. Judah is the southern kingdom made up of two tribes under evil King Ahaz. Israel is the northern kingdom of ten tribes under an equally evil King Pekah.

The northern most part of Israel is the region of Galilee and around the Sea of Galilee are two of the northern tribes, Zebulun and Naphtali. These two tribes being in the far north were the first to take the brunt of any invading army.

**II Kings 15:29** In the days of Pekah king of Israel, Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria came and captured ... Galilee, all the land of Naphtali, and he carried the people captive to Assyria.

The northern kingdom had been faithless, they had broken covenant with God. As a result, God disciplined them by the Assyrians. When we read of the yoke and rod of oppression and being trampled under warriors' boots, that's Assyria.

But God. God refuses to let go of His faithless flock. God has a tenacious memory, He never forgets His own, He never forgets His covenant promises. Even when they are beaten down and destroyed, when they are led away into captivity, even when they have been cast out into a land of deep darkness, God's grace never completely lets go.

Chapter 9 opens suddenly with a brilliant display of a great light. Listen to the incredible fulfillment of this prophecy as Matthew quotes our text.

**Matthew 4:13-17** Leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, 14 so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

15 “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,  
the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—

16 the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light,  
and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.”

17 From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus came to Zebulun and Naphtali, to the Galilee of the Gentiles. These most northern tribes who had been plunged into darkness by the Assyrians and sin, were the first to see a great light from the Sun of righteousness. Jesus who is the light of the world began His ministry in the darkest part of Israel.

## Joy, Joy, Joy, vss. 3-5.

From a great light comes a great joy. Verses 3-5 remind me of a line from a Christmas carol, joy, joy, joy, how great our joy.

**Isaiah 9:3** You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil.

Isaiah uses several images to capture the joy this great light brings. The problem is these images are foreign to most of us, they don't connect with our reality.

We don't really know *darkness*. Light floods our lives. They talk about light pollution and how we can no longer see the Milky Way. We don't need light, we have plenty.

Isaiah describes the nation being *multiplied* as if it is a good thing, but not to us, we don't like people coming across our borders and increasing our nation.

Has anyone ever considered that if a nation refuses to be fruitful and multiply and kills their young, that God might increase that nation through other means?

Then there is the joy of the *harvest*. We are still living close to the soil here, but less so all the time. How many of us know the joy of a fruitful and plentiful harvest?

What about the glad day of dividing *spoils*? That is certainly foreign to us. We have never been in a war where there were great quantities of spoils, treasures, to be divided, after the total plundering of another nation. Maybe the closest we come is lifting the gold ball after a state basketball championship. Or a big bonus check after a profitable year. Those of you who canned a thousand jars of fruits and vegetables will enjoy your spoils all winter.

And what about knowing the joy of being *released from the heavy yoke of tyranny* and the rod of oppression? Like one released from a concentration camp or decades of slavery. Our country has never been overrun by an enemy, we have not known this kind of oppression like Afghanistan under the Taliban or what the Ukraine is fearing from Russia.

But Isaiah makes a historical reference that is helpful when he speaks of the *day of Midian*. He says the joy of this great light is like day of the defeat of Midian. You know the story, it is one of the most famous in the OT. God raised up Gideon as a judge to deliver the Israelite people from seven years of oppression by Midian.

Gideon led an army of 32,000 men, but God said no, they are too many. So God reduced his army to 300. And then he took the swords out of their hands and told them to carry lighted torches. They attacked at night with the light of 300 torches piercing the darkness and scattering the Midianite horde who turned on each other with their swords. The yoke and rod of oppression was broken without a sword and only with light. And it was a resounding, total victory by God given to Gideon.

In the same way Jesus defeated Satan's seemingly unbreakable yoke of slavery to sin and rod of oppression and threat of death. Satan imploded on himself when he killed Jesus and in so doing destroyed his own kingdom and doomed himself to eternal death. Satan and all his minions have been completely routed without a sword, but with the light of the glory of the Gospel. It was resounding, total victory by God given to us.

Vss. 3-5 describe what the reign of the Messiah will be like, like the joy of harvest, like the joy of victory in war, like the joy of release from captivity, the joy of a great light in darkness. Then Isaiah gives the ultimate reason for the increased joy of those who have seen a great light.

### **A child is born, a son is given, vs. 6-7.**

Do you see what we miss when we pull this one verse out of this passage and put it on all our Hallmark Christmas cards?

We have taken one of the most stunning prophecies in history, given to one of the most oppressed people in history and turned it into something nice and sweet sounding. It gives off a warm Christmassy glow, rather than a great light.

The “for” in verse 6 explains everything. It explains the great light, the great joy, the great victory, the great liberation, this great reversal of fortune. This great light, this great surprising conqueror is revealed to be a child, an baby boy. He is the one who has come for us.

What causes fear or terror in your life? What traumatizes you more than anything else? What causes you the most stress and grief? God answers it with a baby. The power of God is so great that He can defeat the greatest power with a mere child.

God answers the mighty power of the Assyrians with the superior power of a little child.

### ***How great is He?***

Isaiah tells us how great He is by describing *two things* about Him, ***His name and His reign.***

#### ***His Name.***

He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

#### ***Wonderful Counselor.***

Wonderful is a Hebrew word that implies things only God can do. Wonderful implies the ability to do supernatural signs, wonders. It signifies deity.

**Psalm 139:6** Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it.

God’s knowledge and wisdom is incomprehensible, utterly beyond us, too high to get ahold of. God perfectly, accurately sees all things, knows all things. He is omniscient.

#### ***Mighty God. Warrior God.***

In addition to perfect wisdom, He has perfect power. Our hope and trust rest on One in whom there is no uncertainty, no insecurity, no lack. He is omnipotent.

#### ***Everlasting Father.***

This is not a reference to the first person in the Trinity, but to the character of Jesus. He is father like, taking on the role of a king who cares for, provides for and protects His children. This is a shepherd-king who tenderly cares for His flock in all circumstances. He is omnipresent.

### ***Prince of Peace.***

This is not just inner peace, psychological peace. This is peace in a traumatic world filled with chaos, turmoil, war, violence. This is the kind of peace that comes after a great battle and victory. This is more than just a peaceful person, this is a person who brings about peace, who makes peace.

What do you think when you hear this name? What is your response, your reaction? Is there any emotion, any stirring in your heart when you hear this name? Is there any pause to reflect, to praise, to worship, to utter a silent word of thanks?

This is the name above all other names, this is the name that at the sound of it every knee will bow and every tongue confess. This child is God, Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

Defend this name, protect this name, stand up for this name. If you hear it used as a curse, with a certain amount of trepidation plead with that person not to use the name of Jesus that way, for the sake of their own eternal soul. Ask them why they use that name rather than John Smith? Are they not acknowledging in some way there is power and authority in that name?

We protect and cherish what is most valuable to us. Make Jesus' name one of those things.

### ***His Reign, His Realm.***

His government will be on His shoulder. He will bear the full weight of it, not a democracy.

He will have total dominion, authority, control over all things.

It will be final, it will have no end. He will be the final king.

It will be covenantal, He will sit on the throne of David and over His kingdom.

It will be just, righteous, a reflection of Jesus character and nature.

It will increase. God is a God of abundance and fruitfulness.

In every age of human history there have been great experiments in human government and in every age the perfect government has been proclaimed only to see it crumble to the effects of human depravity and sin.

Don't expect so much from our government, it is fatally flawed because it is led by sinful, depraved men and women. Isaiah 9 prophecies' a perfect ruler who will reign forever over a perfect realm. His government will be on His shoulders.

**Matthew 28:18** All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

This knowledge should change our prayer life, when we realize His authority, His power. Whatever happens to you, your life, your family, spouse, children, job, future, money, car, house, it is all under His authority.

### **The Zeal of the Lord of Hosts will Accomplish This.**

We have read a great text that makes some incredible promises, holds out some amazing hope. Are we the least bit skeptical?

Put yourself in the shoes of an Israelite in 732 BC. Tiglath-pileser has laid waste to your country. Things look as hopeless as they did in Gideon's day when the Midianites were crushing them.

God did not save Israel from Midian in a manner that seemed humanly conceivable.  
God did not save Israel from Rome in a way that seemed humanly conceivable.

God will not have us trusting ourselves, our means, our resources, our circumstances.  
God will bring us to a place when all is lost, hopeless, and then raise up the most unlikely means.  
God will do it in a way that will cause us to have trouble believing it.  
God will do it in a way that only God can do.

How shall this be? How will such a King and His Kingdom come to be? It will be the zeal, the burning passion of the Lord that accomplishes it. God's zeal for His glory will do it.

It does not matter how hopeless, how bleak, how impossible the future looks. Because of the burning zeal of the Lord of hosts, there will be a great light, a great victory and liberation, a government of the One who sits on the eternal throne of David.

God is moving in human history, and there is nothing casual, complacent or easy going about it. God is driven with a zealous and jealous passion for His glory and the glory of His Son and His Gospel. God is driving toward the final triumph of the Messianic Kingdom of His Son.

### **Conclusion and application.**

Are you attracted to this light? Do you want to see this great light?

When Jesus fulfills this prophecy in Matthew 1:17 it says:  
From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

How do you move from darkness to light? By *repentance*. To repent is to come into the light. Jesus has come to release us from the worst bondage of all, the darkness of sin.  
Captivity is a proud man who refuses to repent. Don't remain in captivity, come to the light.

**John 8:12** Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

**John 3:19-20** "This is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed."

**II Corinthians 4:4** The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

**II 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.

Jesus is the great light. Only Jesus can dispel our darkness with the light of His Gospel. To all who repent, to them Jesus is a great light who saves from eternal darkness. To all who repent there is joy, joy, joy, the plunder of Jesus' great victory.