

# Advent: Hope of the World

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Isaiah 9:1-7

November 29, 2015

## Introduction:

After what I trust has been a delightful Thanksgiving weekend, we now turn our focus to the coming Christmas season and one way God's people have historically anticipated the celebration of Christ's birth is through the season of Advent. Considering how we're a church that doesn't normally follow the traditional western Church calendar of seasons and holy days I thought I'd briefly explain to you what the season of Advent is all about.

The term "Advent" comes from Latin meaning "coming." It's a season of the Church year that focuses on the anticipation of the coming of Christ at Christmas. During these four weeks of Advent, we take time to reflect on the coming of Christ both in terms of his first coming 2000 years ago as a baby born in Bethlehem as well as anticipate his second coming when Christ returns to gather his people to reign with him eternally.

As you might have noticed, there are some candles up front in the sanctuary. We light a candle each Sunday during Advent: the first candle is the Candle of Hope, focusing on the prophecies concerning Christ's coming. The second candle is the Candle of Light, as Jesus is the Light for a world lost in darkness. The third candle is the Candle of Joy, reminding us that Jesus' arrival brings joy to those who await his coming. The fourth candle is the Candle of Peace, for it is through Christ that men can now have peace with God. The final large candle in the middle is called the Christ Candle and is lit on Christmas in celebration of Christ's birth as our Lord and Savior.

So over the next four weeks of Advent the sermons will cover each of those four themes: hope, light, joy, and peace. My hope is that this can be a time of joyful anticipation for us as we set aside all the cultural baggage of shopping malls and flying reindeers and focus our hearts and minds on the true meaning of Christmas - the gift of God's Son, Jesus Christ, born in a manger, sent to save the world from sin.

Let's begin this morning then by considering the first theme of the Advent season: hope. To do that, please open your Bibles with me Isaiah 9. If you don't have a Bible with you, I'd invite you to grab one of the Bibles in the pew in front of you and open it to page 573. Please follow along as I read verses 1-7 in Isaiah 9.

**"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 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 has light shined.**

**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.  
For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder,  
the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.  
For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult  
and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire.  
For to us a child is born, 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.  
Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end,  
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,  
to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness  
from this time forth and forevermore.  
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.”

As we consider this familiar passage this morning, let me sum up the main idea of what God would have us understand from these verses like this:

**Main idea: Jesus Christ is the hope for a world caught in the darkness of sin.**

We'll break this passage down into three parts. First, we'll talk about **the darkness**, followed by **the deliverance**, and finally we'll focus on **the deliverer**. So let's jump right in and consider what v. 1-2 have to say about...

### **1. The darkness (v. 1-2)**

The historical context of this passage concerns the nation of Israel during the time of oppression by the Assyrians around 722 BC. The Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom during this period and if you know anything about the Assyrians you should know they weren't exactly gentle to those nations they subjugated. As a result, Isaiah describes the situation in v. 1 with words like **“gloom”** and **“anguish”** and describes the particular lands in the northern parts of Israel as having been **“brought into contempt.”** Furthermore he twice describes the situation of God's people during this time as **“walking in darkness... [dwelling] in a land of deep darkness.”** Things are not going well for Israel; they're being oppressed by a foreign power and suffering under Assyria's cruel and merciless hand.

It's difficult to imagine what it must have been like to live under the oppression of an occupying nation, especially one particularly brutal like the Assyrians. It's the kind of situation where one looks for some sign of hope, for deliverance from the forces that have subjugated you. As the glory days of King David dimmed from their collective memories and the nation of Israel began to decline in power and fall under the domination of foreign nations, the Jews longed for a Savior who would release them from the dark bondage of oppression.

Yet the darkness of the political oppression they were under was indicative of a deeper kind of oppression they were experiencing. The root of the problem wasn't that they were being oppressed by the Assyrians but rather was to be found in the reason why Assyrian oppression happened to begin with. The real problem wasn't the Assyrians; it was the Israelites. They had sinned and followed after other gods. They had abandoned trust in God to protect them and instead placed their trust in the nations around them for their security. The Assyrians were only tools used by God to punish Israel for their sin. Their **darkness**, their **gloom**, their **anguish** was ultimately not because of the Assyrians; it was because of their sin, their rebellion, and their faithlessness.

So while they longed for a political Messiah that would deliver them from political oppression, such a hope wouldn't save them from their core issue. What they really needed was a Messiah who could save them from their sins. They needed a Savior who could deliver them from the power of sin, death, and the devil. And what they needed back then is what we still need now.

Scripture tells us that every man, woman, and child is living under the oppressive dominion of sin. We're in bondage to desires that are in rebellion to God. We don't need to be taught to sin; we naturally gravitate to it. Anybody who is a parent of young children can tell you the truthfulness of that! We all have compelling desires to pursue the wickedness of our hearts; things like anger, bitterness, envy, lust, selfishness, hatred, pride, and arrogance all rise up like an ugly weed from the sinful soil of our hearts and minds. We on the one hand know that these things are not right; we see the destruction and pain wrought by such things in our lives and in the lives of others. Yet on the other hand we find ourselves unable to stop ourselves from indulging our sinful attitudes and actions. We're enslaved to our sin and the darkness that those sinful choices bring into our lives.

So there is a need for hope. Like the apostle Paul we cry out, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:24). In the darkness of our sin we long for the light of hope, hoping in a deliverer that will save me from that which I'm unable to save myself. So although there has been darkness and oppression, Isaiah promises his readers a ray of hope in v. 2. Look back in your Bibles at what he says there. **"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined."** A light is coming for those in darkness. Deliverance from God is on its way.

Let's see what Isaiah says about that deliverance by looking at your Bibles at v. 3-5 which concerns the second point of our message this morning...

## 2. The deliverance (v. 3-5)

Follow along as I read v. 3-5. **"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. For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of**

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

In these verses Isaiah is describing a future time of deliverance as if it has already happened. First he says **“You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy.”** Instead of God’s people dwindling in numbers due to death and exile, God is multiplying his people. Instead of the gloom and darkness of captivity, God has increased their joy by liberating them from their oppressors. Then in the second half of v. 3 it says, **“They rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil.”** They rejoice because instead of their fields being plundered, there is an abundance of food at the harvest. Rather than being robbed of material goods as the spoils of war, they’re glad with an abundance of material goods they can divide up and enjoy. Isaiah is painting a picture of a time when God’s people enjoy a time of material, physical blessing instead of the poverty and hardship of being a conquered people.

He goes on in v. 4 to describe the defeat of the oppressor. The three words used there - **“yoke, staff, and rod”** – all describes the power of the oppressor over God’s people. Yet Isaiah says that all of those have been **“broken as on the day of Midian.”** Isaiah is referring back to Judges 6-7 where Israel was being oppressed by Midian yet God’s raised up Gideon and used him to lead a group of only 300 men to liberate Israel from Midian’s control.

But not only are God’s people free of the current oppressor, but Isaiah describes a time where the need for war is no longer. In v. 6 he writes, **“For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire.** Clothing, especially shoes, were valuable commodities in the ancient world. Normally, these would be taken from the bodies of defeated soldiers and kept for future use. But instead, Isaiah says they’ll be **“burned as fuel for the fire.”** He’s describing a time where God’s people will no need to prepare for any future oppressor. As a result, the boots of warriors and bloodied garments are now worthless except as fuel for a fire.

So the picture of deliverance Isaiah presents here is one of total deliverance. The people of God are free from the enslavement of their oppressor, there is the security of knowing nobody else will rise up against them again, and they can again find joy in God’s rich blessing in their lives. But then we must ask, how was this prophecy fulfilled? As we know, the Assyrians weren’t the last nation to oppress the Jews. So what does this prophecy point ahead to?

First, it points ahead to Christ and his first coming. Christ was born so that he could grow up, live the perfect life of obedience we should have lived, and then suffer the wrath of God on the cross in order to die the death we should have died. Through the power of the Holy Spirit causing us to be born again, we believe in Christ and as a result we’re liberated from the oppression of sin. Whereas we were once slaves to sin, in Christ we are freed from the controlling power of our sin nature and given a

new heart that can chose to love and serve God. As a result, we experience joy and peace with God that comes through knowing our sins are forgiven and that death and hell no longer have any power over us.

But second, it points us even further ahead to our heavenly home. Our salvation in Christ that we experience in our lives is just a down-payment for the fullness of our salvation that is yet to come. In heaven, in our glorified resurrected bodies, we will at last be fully free of Satan's power and the temptations of our sinful flesh. It is there where our joy will be made complete as we enjoy our rich inheritance, where sin's power is completely broken, never to trouble or tempt us again. That's the deliverance Isaiah is ultimately pointing us to in this passage.

So while we may be born into the darkness of sin and enslaved to the devil and wicked desires, God promises deliverance to his people. One day, the weight of sin will be removed and we will experience the joy of the Lord unhindered by the power of the flesh. That is the promise of God to his people and it should be the hope that we cling to as we seek to follow God in our lives.

But how will this all be accomplished? If we're to be delivered from the darkness of sin, who is the one who shall be our deliverer? The answer to that question brings us to the final point of our message this morning...

### 3. The deliverer (v. 6-7)

Now we come to what is without question the most well-known part of this passage. Look back in your Bibles at v. 6-7. **“For to us a child is born, 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. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.”**

It's hard to read this passage and not think of a grand choir singing this passage as they perform Handel's *Messiah*. This is God's great promise to send a deliverer, but not just a deliverer for the Jewish people but for Jews and Gentles alike. Christmas is the celebration of the birth Christ, the long-awaited deliverer of God's people. But as you can see by the names he's given, this is no ordinary baby. This deliverer is more than simply a political leader or strong-armed warrior. We're given three hints concerning who this child really is in the opening phrases of v. 6, an observation that I am indebted to John MacArthur for pointing out.<sup>1</sup>

First, he's the *Son of Man*. When Isaiah writes, **“For unto us a child is born...”** he is speaking of Jesus' humanity. Jesus became a flesh and blood human being who experienced everything we experience. He spent nine months in his mother's womb; he was born; he needed to have his diaper changed; he cried when he was hungry; he had to learn how to walk and talk; he scraped his knee when he fell down, caught

colds, got the flu, had to do chores around the house and eventually learn a trade as a carpenter. Jesus went through the same things we all go through as humans. He was fully man in every sense of the word.

Second, he's the *Son of God*. Isaiah says in v. 6, **"...to us a son is given."** This speaks to the fact of the preexistent deity of Christ. Before the world was made, the Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, existed. The apostle John wrote in the beginning of gospel that *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."* Then John says a few chapters later in another famous passage of Scripture that, *"God so love the world that he **gave** his only-begotten Son..."* God the Father gave us His Son, who existed with him as God before time began.

Third, he's the *King of Kings*. When Isaiah predicts that **"the government shall be upon his shoulder"** he is looking forward to a time when Christ will reign not just as a king over Israel, but as the King of King and Lord of Lord when he rules over all the nations. People from every tribe, tongue, and nation will stand before him in worship and he will be their God and they will be his people, forever enjoying the eternal kingdom of heaven.

So Isaiah is not talking about some ordinary baby. He's foretelling of a coming Messiah who is both fully human and fully divine and who will rule over the whole earth in righteousness. He's speaking of Jesus Christ, God incarnate who reigns over the hearts of those love him and to whom one day every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord over all.

But if that wasn't enough to convince you that this promised deliverer was to be exceedingly great, consider the names given to him at the end of v. 6. Isaiah says **"...his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."** These aren't names you would apply to any normal human ruler; these names speak to the divine and exalted nature of Christ. He is a **"Wonderful Counselor"** who is infinitely wise and will lead those who follow him in the ways of life and soul-satisfying joy. He is **"Mighty God,"** all powerful to deliver his people from the oppression of sin, death, and the devil. He is the **Everlasting Father"** who will always exist to love and care for the sons and daughters of God that he came to redeem. Finally, he is the **"Prince of Peace."** By his shed blood on the cross, we now have peace with God and the dividing wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles has eliminated.

Isaiah then expands on this idea of Christ being our Prince of Peace in v. 7. Look back in your Bibles there with me. **"Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this."**

Isaiah concludes this prophecy about the coming Christ by connecting it God's promise to establish the throne of David forever. The promised deliverer will be a

king like David, but his throne will last forever. This King will not grow old and die and need to be replaced; instead he will establish his throne with justice and with righteousness and under his reign there will be eternal peace. Obviously, no mere mortal human king can fulfill this. Only the God-man, Jesus Christ, can accomplish what Isaiah is predicting here.

## **Conclusion**

So then let me wrap this all up by saying that we who now stand over 2700 years after these words were spoken can see with much clearer eyes what it was that Isaiah was prophesying about. While those who were living in the darkness of those days of Assyrian oppression could find hope in this message, they were still left uncertain of how and when exactly these words would be fulfilled. Yet we can see the wonderful plan of God far more clearly now that this long-awaited child has been born to us. That child, born 2000 years ago to the Virgin Mary, grew up and started to put into motion all that needed to take place to bring these words into fulfillment. The Son of God became flesh, suffered and died on the cross to atone for the sins of the world, and was raised again from the dead after three days and is now seated in glory at the right hand of God the Father. He has delivered his people from the darkness of sin, given us peace with God, and rules in our hearts as Lord. What was only hope for those of Isaiah's day has become a living reality for those of us who know and love Christ Jesus.

But even though much has been fulfilled, there is still room for hope in this prophecy for us today. We still await the final culmination of this age, when the Lord Jesus will return in glory with all the heavenly host and begin to reign as the unquestioned sovereign King of King over all nations. Like those in Isaiah's day, we do not know precisely when that day will come, so we wait with hopeful expectation for the establishment of total peace and righteousness under the wise and loving rule of the Lord Jesus at his second coming. May we rejoice in the knowledge of his first advent this holiday season, but may we also eagerly hope for his second advent when all of these words of prophecy are completely fulfilled under Christ's majestic reign over all the earth. Let's pray.

## **Endnotes**

1. MacArthur, John. God With Us. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989.

**This sermon was addressed originally to the people at Grace Fellowship of Waterloo, IA by Pastor Rob Borkowitz. Copyright 2015.**

