



# CHRISTMAS EVE

## Light of the Valley Lutheran Church

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### To Us a Child is Born

#### Isaiah 9:2-7 (NIV84)

<sup>2</sup> The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. <sup>3</sup> You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when dividing the plunder. <sup>4</sup> For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. <sup>5</sup> Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. <sup>6</sup> For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. <sup>7</sup> Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

"Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." (Luke 2:10-12) Those are the words we expect to hear on Christmas Eve. They're the reason we came. You had those words running through your head as you set up your manger scene at home, as you saw the manger scene as you drove here and even as you came into church. We are here tonight to celebrate the birth of that baby.

That is such a momentous occasion, isn't it – the birth of a baby? Welcoming that new bundle of joy is such a unique experience, and there's really not a whole lot else like it. It totally changes your life.

If you are a parent, you know that welcoming home your firstborn is pretty much life altering. For the next several months (if not longer), you will learn what sleep deprivation does to people, and you will wish that you napped more as a child since that is what you will live for on those long days with broken sleep. This goes with the territory because you are committing yourself to take care of another human being's life. For every cry, you are going to have to get up and check on the little one. Every time that they need to eat, you are going to have to feed them. Every time that they soil themselves, you are going to have to change the diaper. You are going to give countless hours to this child to provide everything that they need. In a way, you are going to have to do everything for this child born to you.

For those around the newborn who are not the parents, you know that this new life is a game changer for you as well. If you were the firstborn, well, this new one is going to take a lot of time away from you and you have to somehow deal with that. Maybe even you will be called on to entertain the little guy or feed him or change him. Extended family of the newborn, you will most likely be recruited to help care for this little baby: babysit, maybe feed him, change him. And for those of you who are single or don't have kids yet and you watch your friends start to have kids, you will begin to see that their free time changes drastically. From your perspective, it looks like they have gotten really boring because they stay home and don't do anything, but truth be told, the couple is exhausted just trying to take care of their new baby and get enough sleep to function day to day let alone go out and about. Even if the newborn isn't your kid, things are going to change around you because so many people are now taking care of this child.

Letting facts be facts, babies are a lot of work. I say that in no way implying that there is also not immense joy in holding that newborn in your arms. If you have had that experience, you know that as you stare at this new life in your arms that you have been entrusted with something incredibly precious, someone who you will love no matter how much sleep you lose or how many times you have to try to figure out what it is that the baby wants while they are screaming for you to fix the situation. They are precious to you, even though they are helpless and they need you.

Knowing that all that work needs to be done in bringing home a newborn and caring for a baby, think about when Isaiah first proclaimed the words that we heard today. The Jews that Isaiah was preaching to were looking for solutions to their worldly problems right in front of them. There are warlords, kings, ready to destroy them, standing at the gates of their city with their armies at the ready. They needed to be saved. And God's great message to them is "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given," (verse 6) "We're saved! Wait a minute...you are giving us a child? How is he going to help? Even if he is destined to be a great warrior, that's like 20 years in the future before we can use him. We need immediate help, and you are giving us another mouth to feed, a helpless baby who is going to need our care and protection when we can't protect ourselves? This is your gift to us? Thanks, but no thanks."

But this is not just any child that God promised to be born to them. This is a child unlike any other. He is the dawning of something totally new for the people of the whole world, including the Jews and including us. He is a child. He is a son. But already the government will be on his shoulders. Not in the sense of when he comes to age and can handle the responsibility they will be on his shoulders, but right away this seemingly helpless baby will carry governments on his shoulders, giving them power and authority to rule. He is going to be dishing out authority in greater quantities than the strongest ruler you have ever known.

Like a great ruler, this child will end war. "For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor." (verse 4) Midian was one of the Jew's enemies who tormented them for seven years completely ravaging their land, their crops. The Jews were so afraid, so beaten that they abandoned their homes and lived in caves in the mountains. Their relief came when God raised up a man named Gideon and 300 men with him. All they took into battle against an innumerable Midianite army were trumpets and empty jars with torches inside. With nothing but the trumpets, torches, and a shout, God caused the Midianites to turn on another and they completely decimated their own army.

This child, this helpless baby, is going to accomplish a victory as great as this, for the Jews and for us. In fact, his victory will be that much greater because all the remnants of war will be destroyed, no longer needed, with his coming. "Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire." (verse 5) "Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end." (verse 7) This child born to us brings peace.

But this peace is bigger than the end of physical battles between armies. This child born to us will "reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever." (verse 7) Unlike all other kings that have come before and will come after, this child will be a king to reign forever, both over the Jews and over us. His kingdom is not established by peace treaties or battles. It is established and upheld with justice and righteousness forever. This doesn't mean that he's only going to enforce laws that make people do the right things. No, God's justice demands that all wrongdoings be paid for, all mistakes corrected, all imperfection wiped out. When this is done, then there is righteousness – being right before God. Until that point, though, we are in conflict with God. Every sin I commit puts up a dividing wall of hostility between me and God, pushing me further and further away from him. My sinful nature continues warring against him, and I am not enough to make peace with God and satisfy his justice.

The satisfaction for God's justice begins and ends with this child who was born to us. As Isaiah later prophesies about this child "he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed." (Isaiah 53:5) This child born to us will bring a personal peace to all people in the world, to the people walking in the darkness of sin, of their mistakes, their imperfection, their wrongdoings. He is the great light of righteousness, of perfection, who gives his light to all. This is the personal, spiritual peace that we all have because of this child whose birth we have come together to celebrate tonight.

How will this child be able to do all of this? His name says it all. "And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." (verse 6) This child born to us, he is God. Not just a superior being or a god among other gods, but the one and only true God, the only God that exists, the one who has no beginning and no end, the one who brought all things into being, who can create things simply by speaking the words, who is a wonder, a miracle to be both the everlasting and immortal God who has taken on mortal human flesh capable of truly dying, who needs no other counsel or advisors or helpers because he created and ordered everything in our world and in the universe, who is the only one who can bring lasting and irremovable spiritual peace.

This is the child that has been born to us. He is Jesus Christ. Yes, when he first came into the world that day in Bethlehem some 2000 years ago, Mary still had to nurse him. Mary and Joseph still had to wrap him in clothing to keep him warm. They still had to listen to his cries and coos to figure out what they should do for him, being that they are now first-time parents. Jesus came into this world and looked like every other newborn baby – helpless and needing everything provided for them.

Yet this child born to us was and is still completely different. He came into this world as our Wonderful Counselor, our Mighty God, our Everlasting Father, our Prince of Peace. He is the reason why God looks at us tonight and says, "On earth peace, good will toward men." (Luke 2:14 KJV) My Son has brought you peace with me. You are right before me because of him. Your conflict with wrongdoings and imperfection with God has been decided. This child born to you has established peace for you.

That newborn baby Jesus that we picture tonight, he is your King who rules your life with peace. He is God's gift to us. "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end." (verses 6-7) Amen.