

## My Christmas Story

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

<sup>2</sup> The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness 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 warriors 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 greatness 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.

I'm going to take a guess that most, if not all, of you here tonight have come because you know the familiar Christmas story. It is the reason for the season, right? You came because you want to hear again that beloved story, how a pregnant virgin named Mary and her betrothed husband Joseph made a journey to a little town called Bethlehem to be registered for a Roman census. There she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. And this wasn't just any son. As the angels announced to the shepherds keeping watch over their flocks at night, "I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord." (Luke 2:10b-11) The angels praised God with their "Glorias." The shepherds rushed off and found Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus just as they were told, and they tell everyone!

That's the Christmas story we came to hear tonight, but what about your Christmas story? If you were writing the story of your life, what would Christmas 2021 look like? Would it be a story about getting the gift you've been fantasizing and pining over for months now, something like Ralphie from *A Christmas Story* earnestly trying to convince his parents that a Red Ryder BB gun is the greatest gift in the world and that if he got it, this would make for the happiest Christmas story? Would your Christmas story be one where there were no masks, no travel restrictions, no flight cancellations, no supply shortages, no pandemic? Would you write a Christmas story where all your family was in one place, that you didn't have to share them with any in-laws, that you would have a lovely dinner where there were no fights, no disagreements, no awkward moments, no politics, no social media drama, just peace on earth and goodwill toward men? Would you write a story where your loved one you lost came back and, of course, the story would end with you two living happily ever after?

If we're in control, if we are writing our Christmas stories, then we're going to write a story that makes us happy. And certainly if you received the things I just mentioned, I bet you would call it a happy Christmas story. Some years you've probably gotten what you wanted for your Christmas story and you were happy, but maybe this year you're not. Things can make you happy. Events can make you happy. People can make you happy. But maintaining that happiness all the time, that's something else.

Solomon, the king who reigned over Israel during the 10<sup>th</sup> century B.C., was given wisdom from God so that he would be the wisest man on the whole earth. He used that wisdom to ponder how a person can maintain happiness in his own story. You know what he found? "I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my labor, and this was the reward for all my toil. Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun." (Ecclesiastes 2:10-11) All his happiness was temporary, fleeting. It never stuck around.

That's the thing about a lot of happiness: it's dependent on outside, external circumstances that are often outside of our control. We've gotten the gifts that we wanted, and most of the time they end up breaking and being thrown away, used but then forgotten, appreciated but now collecting dust. We've had Christmases of good health, but we can't control who gets sick and who doesn't. Sometimes the presence of family has really lifted us up. Other times they left us feeling stressed, frustrated, annoyed, unwanted.

Happiness is not something that we can guarantee by what we do. We cannot write the perfect story that would make for a happy Christmas every single year. God knows this about us. So, he took it upon himself to write a story.

The setting for our words from Isaiah when God wrote this story was a time of despair of depression. If your Christmas is already shaping up to be one where sadness has crept in when you think about the things you won't get and the people you won't be with and the things you won't be able to do, then hear the story that God writes: "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light;

on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.” (verse 2) Things are changing in this story. Light is coming and when light comes it scatters the darkness. Darkness cannot stand up to it; it’s powerless against the light.

Isaiah tells of people on whom the light has dawned that they have increased with joy and rejoicing. “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. Every warrior’s boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire.” (verses 4-5) Enemies have been defeated. The people are victorious. They burn all the weapons and armor for war because another battle will never have to be waged. The darkness is gone for good. We have peace on earth!

What’s done this? What’s this light that has dawned in the dark, depressing world such as ours? It’s something else that was outside of our control. God wrote the story: “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.” (verse 6)

The light that dawned to people walking in darkness is God coming to us, coming as a child born of a virgin. While being a baby, this son also comes as Mighty God, who holds the government on his shoulders in charge of everything and conquers every one of our enemies. This son is the Everlasting Father who always has been and always will be, who transcends time, who is and will be enduring in his work as the Mighty God. He is the Wonderful Counselor, a marvel of God taking on human flesh in order to share with us his story, the story of how he lives perfectly under God’s law, his law, for us in our place and then sacrifices his life to remove all our sins, all our wrongs, every single imperfection. In this way, this son who was born is the Prince of Peace who has made peace between us and God, the battle is over, we are reconciled to God and so brought us into his family.

This is not just any story written for you or a story out there away from you that you read. This is a story about you, the story God wrote with you in it. He is the light that has dawned in the darkness of your story, your life. God wrote himself into your Christmas story so that your story, and you yourself, would have meaning and value beyond the things in life that make you temporarily happy.

Since God wrote himself into our story and gave his life in place of ours, we have value that we would find nowhere else. God has removed all our sins and covered us with his perfection. We may not be able to think highly of ourselves, but with this child, we now have value, value measured in his perfect life and his innocent blood shed for us. Because he wrote himself into our story, God calls us his children and we call him Father. We have full and free access to him in prayer, to ask him for anything on our hearts or minds. Because he has written himself into our story, we have purpose and meaning, to share the Christmas gift of this child to others so that they too can have the same value as us, the same forgiveness, the same perfection of Christ covering them as it does us. Because God has written us into his story, we have a sure and certain hope for our future. Since this child has conquered Satan, paid for all our sin, reconciled us to God, we know that we will get to live with God forever.

The greatest part of God writing himself into our story is that what he did for us cannot be changed or taken from you. “Of the greatness 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.” (verse 7) The happiness we have because the child was born for us does not go away. It’s an accomplished fact that stands forever. Circumstances can’t change it. Loss can’t take away the fact that the son was born to us. It will never be broken or fail to happen. Nothing can be changed of what God wrote. He is a part of your past, your present, and your future. This is our happiness not just for today, but for every single day.

Rejoice with me that God has written himself into our Christmas story. He came into our story as a son. He has taken away your sins. He has covered you with his perfection. He has brought you into his family. You are at peace with God. You will live with him in heaven. Nothing can change this story. Nothing can take away the happiness and joy you have because God has come to us. His Christmas story is your Christmas story, today and every day. Amen.