

King of Glory Lutheran Church
December 24, 2020
Year B: Christmas Eve: Luke 2:1-14
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Isaiah 9:2-7

² *The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
on them light has shined.*

³ *You have multiplied the nation,
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.*

⁴ *For the yoke of their burden,
and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.*

⁵ *For all the boots of the tramping warriors
and all the garments rolled in blood
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.*

⁶ *For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

⁷ *His authority shall grow continually,
and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.*

*He will establish and uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time onward and forevermore.*

The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Luke 2:1-20

² *In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴ Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵ He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.*

⁸ In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹ to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶ So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Merry Christmas to you wherever you are worshipping with us from! At home, at work, in the car, in Colorado or somewhere in the United States or another part of the world. Merry Christmas!

There has never been a Christmas like this one... We have all been thinking, hearing and saying this to each other this year.

I've been thinking a lot about this Christmas. This is a Christmas like no other because of this pandemic and all that has happened this past year. This is a Christmas like no other for those who have been sick and for those who have lost loved ones and for all those who have been caring for the sick. This is a Christmas like no other because we are not able to gather for worship in this physical space. This is a Christmas like no other because we are not able to gather with friends and family and hug each other and sing carols together.

And yet I wonder if you have known a Christmas before this one where you might have said the same thing. There has never been a Christmas like this one...

Maybe it was the year you moved when you were a child and found yourself living in a new unfamiliar place where nothing about Christmas was the same as it had been. Or maybe it was a year when you were a young adult and you had to work on Christmas Eve and Christmas didn't feel like Christmas. Or maybe it was a year when you lost someone you loved because of a broken relationship or death. And you thought, there has never been a Christmas like this one.

There are times in our lives, and most certainly this year, when we come to Christmas feeling tired, lonely and lost. We find ourselves in a deep darkness of grief and anxiety, division and despair. And we wonder if the darkness will consume us. We wonder how we will find the light again.

The prophet Isaiah spoke to his people who found themselves in a deep darkness of grief and anxiety, division and despair. And he shared a message from God, “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined.”

Isaiah brought a message from God that there would be light in the darkness. There would be new life, a child, who would bring hope and peace, justice and righteousness.

On this Christmas Eve we heard these powerful words from the prophet Isaiah, words from God that speak to us.

And then we heard the Christmas story from the gospel of Luke where we find Mary and Joseph on their way to Bethlehem. And while in Bethlehem the only place they can find to stay is with the animals. And Mary has her baby there and lays him in the manger.

On that night there were shepherds nearby. We can only imagine the darkness of that field, the darkness of that time. Those shepherds, and Mary and Joseph, lived in a time of deep darkness of grief and anxiety, division and despair. They lived in a time of war and occupation, corruption and greed, poverty and injustice. Perhaps on this first Christmas the shepherds were talking together in that field, wondering if there would ever be light in their darkness.

That first Christmas, as those shepherds were taking care of their sheep and watching out for them through the night, light suddenly blinded them. There was an angel with them, all around them, speaking to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.”

This light and this message were almost too brilliant and incredible to behold. Almost. But even in their fear and amazement the shepherds go running toward this new child, this new experience, this new light. They are terrified and amazed and excited all at once. God broke into their darkness and they were transformed. They told everyone about Jesus and praised God.

They must have talked about this night for a long time. Thinking and saying amongst themselves, there has never been a night like this one!

The angels’ message, the baby lying in a manger, the shepherds shouting the good news of God born into the world bringing peace, bringing hope, bringing light. It’s true, there has never been a night like this one.

On this Christmas Eve we too hear the angels announce the birth of Jesus. We feel the excitement of the shepherds running to find him. We imagine the exhaustion and wonder of Mary and Joseph. And we see the baby Jesus, born for us, a gift of new life. His birth is humble and ordinary. And yet his birth is miraculous and extraordinary.

God brings new life given through this baby. This tiny child born in humble surroundings to ordinary people is the one we call Jesus. He will grow up and become a teacher, healer, brother, friend and savior. He is and will be the light shining in a world of deep darkness.

We know this light. We feel it when we hear God's love and grace and peace proclaimed for all people. We hear it in our favorite Christmas carols and the words of scripture. We see it in the kindness of neighbors, the forgiveness of friends, the joy of children, the generosity of strangers. We know this light and we share this light, shining brightly in the darkness.

And once we have seen even a glimmer of the light of Christ we are transformed because we are no longer people of the dark, we are people of the light.

When I was a child I would go every year with my aunt to the midnight Christmas Eve service at our church. I went because it was her favorite service and I loved being with her. But it always seemed so dark and cold going to church so late, past my bedtime. I would question why I hadn't stayed home in my pjs eating Christmas cookies. Then the service would begin and the story would be told and at the end of the service we would all light our candles one by one until all we could see was light. And I understood why we gathered to see the dark turn into light on Christmas.

Jesus is the light, bringing hope and peace and love into the darkness, into our darkness.

So on this Christmas Eve I hope you light a candle with a flame or battery or on your phone. Light many candles. Remember these words, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness-on them light has shined."

And keep this light burning bright by sharing it. Lift the spirits of the lonely with your voice. Feed the hungry. Encourage those who despair. Share what you have been given. Love your enemies. Practice small acts of kindness. We are ordinary people living in the extraordinary light of Jesus. And that light cannot, will not, be contained or put out.

And I hope we say with those who experienced the first Christmas, there has never been a Christmas like this one. Because when we find ourselves in the dark, in deep deep darkness, Jesus will always find us. Jesus will always come to us. Jesus is the light in our darkness. Merry Christmas!