

Sermon for Christmas Eve (I)
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Holy Nativity, Plano
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Tonight we celebrate the coming of the king. It is an event that happened some two thousand years ago. And yet, it has made such an impact on the world, that we have celebrated it for most of those two thousand years. But it is also an event that was foretold about seven hundred years before it happened by the prophet Isaiah. “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given”. The world has been anticipating or remembering this event for millennia. But its impact is still not completed. The reason we still keep celebrating it is that it is still changing the world. And it is still changing our lives.

Much of the world would rather forget about this. It is wonderful to hear “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light”! But then we think, “But that’s not me.” In order to be saved, you have to be saved *from* something. In order to approach the light, we have to acknowledge that are (or have been) in darkness and “the shadow of death”. That’s hard for many people to do, because, as St. John tells us, we love the darkness. It hides us and everything that’s wrong with us.

But this child that is born to us brings joy that cannot be known without him. The picture given by Isaiah is one of so much rejoicing that he needs several images to convey it. The people on whom the light shines are rejoicing like they do at a great harvest, or like they do when they have won a great battle, or like they do in long periods of prosperity and health.

The child that is the light shining on us tonight will free us from oppression. Just as the Midianites were routed by Gideon and his three hundred men, so the Messiah will destroy all oppressors. There won’t be any more hard labor or beatings. There will be no more war. The rule of sin in the twisted hearts of men will end, and the injustice that sin causes between men will be rooted out.

The Messiah is the Prince of Peace. He will rule, not by force, but with peace, by setting all things in order such that there is no need for conflict. He will give the wonderful counsel of divine wisdom, because he is Almighty God. He is the one who is everlasting and the loving Father of whom all human fatherhood is a pale reflection.

And yet, although he is God, he is also a child. He comes into the world in a fully human way, not merely taking on the appearance of a man, but becoming completely a man, and experiencing the absolute dependency that each of us went through as a baby.

There will be no stopping this man who is God. There will be no end to his rule. And there will be no diminishing his domain. His kingdom will continue to increase. And it will last forever.

It's all there in the prophecy of Isaiah, set down some seven hundred years before Jesus was born. Before the Assyrians wiped out the northern tribes of Israel. Before even the southern kingdom of Judah was conquered and went into exile in Babylon. Some of it has been fulfilled. Jesus was born, and he rules in the hearts of those who come to the light. That's what we're celebrating. Some of it is yet to come. There is still oppression to be overcome. But you can be sure it will be, just as Isaiah was sure it would be. And that's also what we're celebrating.

There is only one question left. We are the ones who walk in darkness and the shadow of death. But the light shines in the darkness. Will you come to the light?