

Christmas Eve Reflections

Isaiah 9:2-7

Rev. Jeff Chapman ~ December 24, 2025 ~ Faith Presbyterian Church

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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 exultation;
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 Great will be his authority,
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. (Isaiah
9:2-7, NRSV)

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A friend of mine and I were imagining the other day what it would be like for somebody dropped into the middle of our culture this time of year without ever before having even heard of Christmas. Imagine such a person wandering the streets of our neighborhoods in December taking in all the bright, colorful decorations and trying to work out the reason for the season. If you knew nothing about any of this, what would you make of it all?

You would definitely come away with a sense of festivity. Right? Whatever it is people are honoring with all these decorations, it must be something that is cause for great celebration. In fact, I dare you to try to find a single downcast-looking Christmas decoration. Even though difficult circumstances in life have left many of us feeling less than merry this time of year, that's not the image we want to put forward.

But beyond the jolly tone of the season, you'd still wonder, what is the source of all this merry-making? It could be winter. That's a clear theme here. Maybe the people of this strange land really, really love cold, wet weather. That could explain things, a celebration of snow.

The one clear connection you might discover between all these images could be imagination. Right? Baby Yoda in very peculiar headwear. Penguins in top hats and matching gloves. Smiling families of snow people. Reindeer with glowing noses keeping company with giant albino yetis. Portly, strangely-outfitted old men sneaking into homes through chimney ducts. What do all these things have in common? Really just one thing. Imagination. In fact, any reasonable person would be hard-pressed to construct any sensible narrative which included such an assorted and peculiar cast of characters without a great deal of imagination.

How hard would it be then to just toss that other odd decoration into the same bucket? A virgin giving birth to a baby and laying the newborn child in a feeding trough meant for animals. More than that, a baby who was human and God all at the same time. Now, that's a stretch of the imagination! And yet, as the name should tell you every time you say it, that is what Christmas, Christ-Mass, is actually all about. And for a few minutes this evening, allow me to help us remember that this is the case.

Isaiah is as good a place as any to turn as we do. This prophet, who lived a good 700 years before the events in question, was used by God to give the people of his day the true meaning of Christmas before Christmas even came to be. The part of his prophesy we just read is especially illustrative. It begins this way: **"The people walked in darkness..."** I think we have it easier than our brothers and sisters down under in the Southern Hemisphere this time of year who are trying to celebrate Christmas at the beginning of summer when the days are as long as they will ever be. Our Christmas days are short. This is the darkest time of year in our part of the world, and that helps remind us that our world, in many ways, is a dark place. Imagine the people who first read these words, who not only lived at a time when there was no such thing as artificial light to illuminate the night, but when life was, in many ways, much more brutal than it is now. Still, even today in our well-lit world we understand. There is still so much more pain, and suffering, and violence, and greed, and deception in our world than any of us would like to imagine? Anybody

here disagree? The people of our world still walk in darkness.

And yet, as Isaiah foretold, into the great darkness of this world a great light has shined. But before he tells us the source of the light he tells us the reaction to its coming. Verses 3-5 name the darkness which the light dispels. Scarcity, so many people in the world living without even the most basic things we need to survive. Oppression, so many people in the world burdened down by others who only want to use them and then discard them. Violence, so much bloodshed. And yet, as the light comes, scarcity is transformed into unimaginable abundance, oppression is broken and becomes freedom, and every source of violence is extinguished. Can you imagine a world in which all this will some day be true? It's no wonder that light is the one dominate theme among our decorations this time of year. We seem to at least know this much, that the reason for the season has something to do with light breaking into darkness.

And the source? Isaiah, 700 years before it happened, made it clear: **"A child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders."** This will be a child unlike any other. On one hand, he will be born. Don't miss that blunt detail. He's not going to ride down from heaven on a thunderbolt or cloud, or appear out of nowhere on top of a mountain one day. He will begin in a womb, just like the rest of us. He will have flesh and bone, just like the rest of us. He will know hunger and thirst, and sweat, and work, just like the rest of us. And he will weep, and laugh, and bleed, just like the rest of us. He will experience every aspect of human life, just like the rest of us. And yet, all authority in heaven and earth will be his; nothing will be beneath him. So in one aspect he is just like us, and in another aspect he is nothing like us.

Clearly, this extraordinary child who brings light into the darkness is so beyond anything we have ever known it must take many names to describe him. In fact it does.

He shall be called *Wonderful Counselor*. That word "wonderful" is so overused in our day we forget what it means. The root of "wonderful" is "wonder." I'm sure we have all received good counsel in our lives. I hope you have been fortunate enough to have good counselors around you. But this one who comes to bring light, he gives counsel that inspires wonder. Perfect wisdom. All knowledge. Flawlessly trustworthy. There is no obstacle in life he does not know how to overcome. There is no question so confounding it will perplex him. There are no crossroads along the way he does not know how to navigate.

He shall be called *Mighty God*. Every single time this word translated "mighty" is used in the Old Testament scriptures it is used in reference to the Lord. Every single time. The Lord creates everything that exists simply by speaking it into existence. Nothing can overwhelm him,

not even death. And this is the name given to the child who was to be born. If ever it appears that the darkness of this world has overcome him, it is only because he has allowed it to overcome him so that the darkness might be overcome in him and by him.

He shall be called *Everlasting Father*. How can a son be called a father? Only if the Father and the Son are one in the same. Such is the nature of this child, fully human but also fully divine. But what father is everlasting? No other father I have ever known. I have twice lost an earthly father. Some day my kids will lose their father. Think of all the limitations which time puts on fathers. Not only do they die, but even when they are living there is never enough time. Not this Father. He is never late, never early, never rushed, never busy, never regretting, never anxious. Look at Jesus the Son if you want to know what your Heavenly Father is like. This is the sort of Father in Heaven you will always have.

And finally, he shall be called *Prince of Peace*. The Hebrew word translated here as "peace" is the word *shalom*. It means so much more than the absence of noise or conflict. Shalom is about wholeness and completeness, flourishing and restoration, that place in life where everything is set right again. Almost every single Old Testament usage of this word occurs in a description of right relationships. It makes sense. You know, if somebody could come and just fix all the broken relationships in this world, between us and God, between us one to another, between us and the natural world around us, we would have shalom. This is the one, this child, this prince, who has come to do so. And not just for a time but, as Isaiah foretells, he comes to bring **"endless shalom...from this time forward and forevermore."**

Wonderful Counselor. Mighty God. Everlasting Father. Prince of Peace. All these names help us better understand what is behind the name the angel told his mother, Mary, to give him, Jesus, which means "The Lord Saves." The Lord has done all this and, in time, will do all this. Does believing all this require some level of imagination? I suppose it does. But not because it's imaginary. I, for one, believe this is the one part of our Christmas decorations which reflects the actual events of history, and points us forward to things the Lord will actually do in the fulfillment of time. Sadly, you don't have to be a foreigner parachuted in from another place with no prior knowledge of Christmas to miss this. Plenty of people who have celebrated Christmas for years miss it as well every single year. Let's not be among them.

Amen.