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Christmas in the Capitol (Isaiah 9:1-7)

Christmas Light

For many, a favorite part of the Christmas season are the lights. Folks line up to drive through the displays at Coonskin or St. Albans Parks. Others drive for miles to view the wonderful displays at Oblebay in Wheeling. Unfortunately, most miss the message of what those lights represent – the Light of the World, Jesus Christ.

We are now in the beginning of what some church traditions call the Advent season. They celebrate this in the four weeks leading up to Christmas by lighting candles that represent the blessings we have received because of the coming of Christ. The lighting of these candles point us to the Light of the World and the blessings we find in Him: Hope, peace, love, and joy.

One of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the advent, or coming of Christ, will help us anticipate and celebrate His coming into the world is found in Isaiah 9. This passage may be particularly encouraging and meaningful for those who serve in government. Over the next three weeks let this passage help us celebrate the promises of Christ's coming.

It certainly seems we are living in dark days. Economic and budget problems. The moral condition of our nation. The spiritual condition of many of our churches and denominations. Wars and terrorist attacks. All this can easily lead us to become discouraged and cynical about the future.

We may also live in dark days in our own lives. We face personal, professional, and family challenges. We deal with health problems among family or friends. We deal with sin issues in our own lives. So it may be difficult to truly rejoice as we approach the Christmas holiday.

But if we take time to carefully consider the meaning of what took place as Christ came to Bethlehem, and promises of what will take place at His next coming, we can find the hope, peace, love, and joy God means for us to experience this Christmas season.

Isaiah is called by many “the evangelical prophet” because he writes, 700 years before the events, so much of Christ and His life and work. He writes of His birth (7:14, 9:6). He writes of His suffering and death, providing forgiveness for our sin (53). He writes of His rule and reign over all things (9:3-7).

In Isaiah’s time the people of Israel and Judah were living in dark days. He had harsh words for their moral and spiritual condition, and the judgement of God which would come as a result. In the midst of the warnings God makes promises as to what He would do to provide forgiveness for their sin. As we come to Isaiah 7-9, we find the northern Kingdom of Israel is to

be destroyed by the nation of Assyria. However, with these words of judgement and destruction, we find words of hope, words that predict, 700 years before it takes place, the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ:

¹But there will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make it glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles.

²The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them.

³You shall multiply the nation, you shall increase their gladness; they will be glad in Your presence As with the gladness of harvest, As men rejoice when they divide the spoil.

⁴For You shall break the yoke of their burden and the staff on their shoulders, The rod of their oppressor, as at the battle of Midian.

⁵For every boot of the booted warrior in the battle tumult, and cloak rolled in blood, will be for burning, fuel for the fire.

⁶For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his

kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this. **Isaiah 9:1-7**

Isaiah's words refer to two separate events. Christ's first advent (coming) at Bethlehem ("a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us"). Isaiah then speaks of Christ's second coming ("there will be no end to the increase of His government").

For today's study, let us focus briefly on verse 2:

The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them.

Isaiah is specifically referring to the people in the land of Zebulun and Naphtali. These two areas in the northern kingdom were the hardest hit when Israel was conquered by Assyria. They suffered immensely. However, in the midst of those dark days, Isaiah promises they will see a great light. This promise is fulfilled in Matthew 4 when Jesus began His ministry:

¹³...leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali.

¹⁴This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet:

¹⁵ "THE LAND OF ZEBULUN AND THE LAND OF NAPHTALI, BY THE WAY OF THE SEA, BEYOND THE JORDAN, GALILEE OF THE GENTILES—¹⁶ "THE PEOPLE WHO WERE SITTING IN DARKNESS SAW A GREAT LIGHT, AND THOSE WHO WERE SITTING IN THE LAND AND SHADOW OF DEATH, UPON THEM A LIGHT DAWNED."

¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Matthew 4:13-17

The people who lived in Zebulun and Naphtali had experienced great darkness. Their nation had rejected God and as a result experience much suffering in God's judgment. Yet they were the first to "see the light" as Christ began His ministry.

Isaiah goes on to prophesy of when Christ will come again to rule over all things in peace and justice.

This "Light" of which Isaiah writes is spoken of much in the New Testament. John called Jesus "**the Light that shines in the darkness...**" (Jn. 1:5). He called Him "**the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man...**" (1:9). Jesus, speaking of Himself said, "**I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life**" (Jn. 8:12) and, again "**I have come as Light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness**" (Jn. 12:46).

We may well find ourselves living in dark days. We live in a country which seems to reject God and His ways

more each passing day. Paul describes the moral descent of people and cultures who reject God (Romans 1). He predicts that difficult times will come and believers will certainly face persecution (2 Timothy 3). He goes on to describe how even those who profess faith in Christ will reject biblical instruction and pursue false teachers (2 Timothy 4).

So what can we learn from Isaiah's words written to Israel and Judah so long ago? What encouragement can we take from his message as we enter the Advent season?

While we may be living in dark times, and dark situations and circumstances may come into our lives, we can find hope, peace, love, and joy in the Light of the World, Jesus Christ.

The Christmas season, perhaps helped with a more focused observance of Advent, should cause us focus on Christ's birth as He came to live a perfect life and endure a suffering death to provide us forgiveness of sin. However, it also points us to His second coming when He will rule over all things in perfect righteousness and justice.

Christmas lights are certainly attractive. Folks go out of their way to see their display. If we understand all that Christ has done for us – and will do for us – and live accordingly, then we become "the light of the world" in his place:

¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; ¹⁵ nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. ¹⁶ Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

Those who find the hope, peace, love and joy that only come through Christ certainly stand out as lights in a dark world. As we consider the promises God gave through Isaiah, let us consider how these truths apply to us and how we might live them out this Christmas season.

BIBLE STUDIES

Thursdays, 12:00 Noon

MCMANUS (House) CONFERENCE ROOM

(252-M Located by minority offices near House chamber)