

Isaiah 9: 2-7

Psalm 96

Titus 2: 11-14

St. Luke 2: 1-14

Christmas Eve/ Day 2023

“For to us a child is born; to us a Son is given.”

Isaiah 9: 6a

Our first reading is a prophecy from Isaiah, who lived about 800 years before the birth of Jesus Christ... Most of the Old Testament prophecies were a word from the Lord, correcting God’s people in their own day... But some of the old prophecies were about a *coming* time, and a coming person. The old prophets would describe this Coming One as a “child who is born,” or the “Prince of Peace,” or the “Suffering Servant,” and so on. There is this strong, building sense of anticipation, of the coming arrival of a special person, chosen by God himself, who will bring about radical new relationship between God and his covenant people...

Christians have understood these ancient prophecies to have been fulfilled in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ; the Son of God...

So, God has been at work among his people for thousands of years... You and I are privileged to be on the “other side” of the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ. We know about Jesus’ amazing birth in Bethlehem. We know about his teachings, about his death and resurrection. By God’s grace, we look forward to that wonderful future Day, when we will meet our Lord face to face, to live perfectly in his love for ever...

Let’s look a little more carefully about Isaiah’s prophecy. What was God revealing to his people, and to us, about this very special birth?...

We note that this Coming One will be a descendant of King David – as Jesus was. The reason Mary and Joseph went to Bethlehem for the population census was because Joseph was a descendant of King David, and David grew up in Bethlehem...

Part of Isaiah’s prophecy would have been confusing to his listeners, because the Jewish believers knew very well that there is only One True God... Yet Isaiah prophesies that this *Son to be born* will be called “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God.” That is, God himself would be wonderfully present in the human personality of Jesus Christ...

Christians believe that we cannot earn our way to the perfect place of heaven. We aren’t good enough, or smart enough!... But God in his unfailing love and mercy took the initiative. We can’t earn our way to God. Instead, God came to us in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, to set us free, and to bring us to our true Home... God is uniquely present in the person of Jesus Christ... Christian teachers call the Christmas story the “Incarnation” of God...

What else can we learn from this ancient prophesy of Isaiah?...

There is a sense of a new community; a new spiritual government... Isaiah calls it a “kingdom,” a “government of peace,” and prophesies “the government will be on his shoulder...” Sometimes, people these days talk about the relationship between themselves and God, but they don’t mention other people. This would have made no sense to the Jewish nation, nor to the early Christians. We all have our own walk with God, but – we all need to belong actively to the spiritual government we call the Church... Our new relationships are to be with God (vertical, as it were), but also with each other (horizontal, as it were)... Despite our foibles as well as God’s glory, we help each other change as we belong together...

Lastly, we notice that Isaiah prophesies about “rejoicing,” of “peace,” and “justice...”

You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy.
They rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest...
Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end.
Upon the throne of David, and over his kingdom,
To establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness...

So the qualities of this spiritual kingdom are a kind of spiritual renewal, when we carry peace and joy, and know God’s justice. (This period of peace is not on the outside – after all, in Isaiah’s lifetime, the Samaritans were attacking the northern kingdom of Israel. Sadly, the fighting between Israel and Israel’s neighbours continues even today... But for those of us who belong to this new relationship between God and his people, we can carry God’s peace and joy and justice in our hearts, even during the most troubling of times...)

A long time has passed since Isaiah prophesied about this coming Child, who would change the world for ever... *We know* this prophesy to be fulfilled in Jesus Christ, beginning with his birth which we celebrate now... God’s purposes were unfolding before the birth of Jesus. They continue now, after Christ’s death and resurrection.

May we stay close to the Lord Jesus by his Spirit, not only just for a day or two at Christmas, but each day; each hour; now and for ever.

Amen.