

Trinity Baptist Church
Sunday 13th December 2020
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Isaiah 8:19 – 9:7 'The promise of a great Light'

So let's take a look at the next Advent promise that God gave through Isaiah about 700 years before Jesus' birth. Isaiah 8:19 – 9:7 (TLB).

[Read Isaiah 8:19 – 9:7 (The Living Bible)]

8:19 Why are you trying to find out the future by consulting witches and mediums? Don't listen to their whisperings and mutterings. Can the living find out the future from the dead? Why not ask your God?

20 "Check these witches' words against the Word of God!" he says. "If their messages are different than mine, it is because I have not sent them; for they have no light or truth in them. 21 My people will be led away captive, stumbling, weary and hungry. And because they are hungry, they will rave and shake their fists at heaven and curse their King and their God. 22 Wherever they look there will be trouble and anguish and dark despair. And they will be thrust out into the darkness."

9:1 Nevertheless, that time of darkness and despair shall not go on forever. Though soon the land of Zebulun and Naphtali will be under God's contempt and judgment, yet in the future these very lands, Galilee and northern Transjordan, where lies the road to the sea, will be filled with glory.

2 The people who walk in darkness shall see a great Light – a Light that will shine on all those who live in the land of the shadow of death. 3 For Israel will again be great, filled with joy like that of reapers when the harvest time has come, and like that of men dividing up the plunder they have won. 4 For God will break the chains that bind his people and the whip that scourges them, just as he did when he destroyed the vast host of the Midianites by Gideon's little band. 5 In that glorious day of peace there will no longer be the issuing of battle gear; no more the bloodstained uniforms of war; all such will be burned.

*6 For to us a child is born;
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder.*

These will be his royal titles:

*"Wonderful Counsellor," "The Mighty God,"
"The Everlasting Father," "The Prince of Peace."*

*7 His ever-expanding, peaceful government
will never end.*

*He will rule
with perfect fairness and justice
from the throne of his father David.*

*He will bring true justice and peace
to all the nations of the world.*

*This is going to happen because the Lord of heaven's armies
has dedicated himself to do it!*

[Pray]

[Drawing with eyes shut]

We're going to start thinking about this promise by doing some drawing. So, I hope you brought some paper and pencils with you, or have got some paper ready if you're at home. Now, we're all going to draw the same thing, but there's a catch. All the time you're drawing, you have to keep your eyes shut – no peaking! And when we're done, you can see who drew the best picture. So shut your eyes.

To start with, I want you to draw a candle, with a wick.

And put a large flame at the top ...

Now draw a saucer at the bottom for the candle to stand on ...

And wax dripping down the side of the candle, like its burning ...

And lastly draw some lines coming away from the flame at the top to show the light radiating out ...

Now open your eyes and see what everyone in your house or family group has drawn!

Raise your hand if you found it difficult with your eyes shut to work out where everything needed to go? Why was it hard?

[Take answers]

It was hard because you couldn't see. And you couldn't see because you had stopped the light getting to your eyes by closing them. If you lived in the dark like that all the time it would make life much harder, wouldn't it?

But, in Isaiah's day, many of God's own people *were* living life in the dark – not physically, but spiritually. Instead of following *God* and the good rules he had given them in the Bible, they were following the other religions of the people around them. And part of that involved doing what lots of people still do today – trying to contact the dead, in the foolish belief that they somehow can predict what will happen in the future. People like mediums or spiritists or fortune-tellers or witches claim to be able to help people make these contacts. But please don't ever try it, even if your friends suggest it, because it is highly dangerous. Satan uses this stuff to damage people's lives.

And because God's people were doing this in Isaiah's day, there was a great spiritual darkness in the land. And God was about to punish his people by bringing against them horrible enemies – the Assyrians – who would make their lives awful. It would be a dreadful time, far worse than anything we've had to suffer this year!

But God also made a promise of incredible hope to his people: "That time of darkness and despair shall not go on forever" (v.2)! And that's true for us too. Because "The people who walk in darkness shall see a great Light!" Actually, this was so firmly decided that in the original language, it's written as though it's already happened! "The people walking in darkness *have seen* a great Light."

Imagine being in a really dark forest at night. You're lost, and you don't know which way to go. And then a helicopter flies over head and shines its light down ahead of you and shows you the way out of that forest. You'd be grateful for that light, wouldn't you? Yet that's nothing compared to the joy that *this* great Light would bring.

And what was the great Light? v.6 tells us: "For to us a *child* is born; to us a *son* is given." Now, when God talked about a Son to be born, the Israelites would immediately have understood that he meant a king in

David's line. Hence, "the government (or rule) shall be upon his shoulder." But this is not just any king. No, this is *the* King, the King of all kings, the great King who would make everything right! In fact, he's greater than they could ever have imagined!

You get a flavour of that in his names: "*Wonderful* counsellor" suggests he brings *God's* own instructions – especially as Isaiah had already told the Israelites to consult God's revealed Word, the Bible. And that is made explicit in the second title for this Son: "*Mighty God.*" So, they will relate to this Son as "Everlasting Father" because he is God. And he will be the "Prince of peace," because he will bring about a society that is characterised by peace and well-being and wholeness. How would you like to live in a world where no-one ever hurt anyone else, where everyone was kind to everyone and worked for the best life for each other? That's what this Son will make happen.

That won't happen straight away. Actually, it would start small, just a few people's hearts being changed. But this Son's rule would be ever expanding. It will just keep growing and growing as more and more people are changed by his Light. And it will never stop growing. Maybe the Israelites might struggle to believe that, so God gave Isaiah a further reassurance (v.7): "This is *going to happen* because the Lord of heaven's armies [that's God] has *dedicated himself* to do it!" It doesn't depend on any human making it happen. Just on God. And on God's Son, Jesus, who is himself God made human! For Jesus is the great Light who Isaiah foresaw!

And he wasn't just for Israel, either. In most translations of this prophecy, Galilee, where Jesus grew up, is actually called Galilee of the Gentiles, or of the nations. Jesus was not just Israel's King, but the King of the whole world.

So, we now have a choice. We can walk around in the darkness, following this teaching and that religious practice, dabbling in what other people tell us will do us good, and ruining our lives as we do. Or we can walk in the light that Jesus gives us. How do we do that, do you think?

[Take answers]

You can actually boil it down to some very simple thoughts. We walk in Jesus' light by reading his word, the Bible, and doing what it says. We walk in Jesus light, by loving God with all that we are and loving other people as we love ourselves. If we try to live that way, God promises that we will live for ever, and increasingly, in Jesus' light! We will know how to live and where we are going! And we need never fear the darkness we see in the world, even in a year like 2020.

But not everyone lives like this now, do they? And if we're honest, we don't always live like this either, do we? So, did Jesus fail in his mission? No. Jesus *finished* his mission. He did *everything* that was needed to make the world right by dying and rising again for our sins. But, God, in his wisdom decided that Jesus' kingdom would grow *gradually*, through *faith*. And so, his kingdom hasn't finished growing yet. That will only happen when Jesus comes back to this world at the end of time. And that's why we also look forward to him coming back – because then, the whole of creation will be made right. Darkness will be gone and light will reign forever! Sound good?

Christingle

We're going to make something now to help us remember that truth and picture it. We're going to make a Christingle, so again, I hope you have your things with you!

First of all, you take your orange. The orange symbolises the world. Then take your ribbon or piece of red-coloured paper, and tie or stick it round the orange, like the equator goes round the world. Can anyone guess what this red ribbon might symbolise?

[Take answers]

Jesus' blood, that he shed on the cross to save the world, to wash the world clean of its sin.

Now here comes the messy part. Use a finger and poke a hole in the top of the orange, through the skin – you can lick your finger afterwards if you like, but please sanitise your hands before you leave the building! Into the hole you've just made, if you're at home, you're going to put a candle; if you're in the church, bend your glow stick so it glows and put that in the hole. If you're using a birthday candle then just poke it into the orange, now. So, what do you think the candle or the glow light represent?

[Take answers]

Jesus, the Light of the world! Then lastly, we're going to take our four cocktail sticks, and we're going to poke them into our orange diagonal to the candle, so they all point up and away from the candle and from each other. And on each stick put your sweets or raisins or whatever you're using. They represent two things: they represent all of God's creations that benefit from his light. And they represent the fruit of good character and good works that God's love produces in our lives.

Lastly, if you're at home, light the candles. And you have your Christingle. Jesus the Light of the world came into his broken, dark world to make it light. He gave his life on the cross so we could be forgiven and made right in our hearts. And when we experience his love we produce fruit that makes us more and more like him, so we begin to bring even more light into this dark world. And all of creation benefits from that light. Amen?

We're going to pray together, while our lights are glowing.

Intercessory prayers (in family groups)

- *Thank God for sending Jesus*
- *Pray for yourselves to know more of Jesus' light this Advent and Christmas*
- *Pray for someone you know who doesn't yet know Jesus.*
- *Pray for the hurting world, for the ways in which it needs Jesus' light*

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

The First Noel (if time)

- *Please wait in your seats, until you are directed to leave.*
- *Please leave your masks on until you leave the building.*
- *Make sure you take all your stuff and rubbish with you.*
- *Please make sure you spread well away from the building to chat to one another, and only outside in groups of 6 or fewer!*

Benediction

*Lord Jesus, Light of the world,
born in David's city of Bethlehem,
born like him to be a king:
be born in our hearts afresh this Christmas,
be King of our lives today.*

Amen.

[Pray]