

Christmas Eve 2020 – Isaiah 9:1-7 — Light in the Darkness – Pastor Bill Limmer

Sermon Bumper

Isaiah 9:1-7 The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. ³You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder. ⁴For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. ⁵Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. ⁶For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

'Tis the season for traditions. What are some of our favorite and cherished traditions of Christmas? Today we hope so many of you are beginning a new tradition of worshiping at Victory, no matter where you live.

Traditions include everything from baking cookies and confections, to listening to Christmas carols and going to school concerts and plays, watching Christmas shows everything from a Charlie Brown Christmas to Hallmark movies to Home Alone to Die Hard (for those of who don't think Die Hard is a Christmas movie I know I'm just saying that because some people here think it is).

Other traditions include dressing up, to decorating the tree, family gatherings and gift giving. One of my favorite traditions when I was growing up in El Paso was going through a neighborhood called East Ridge because most of the houses were shining with lights in the dark. I would sit in the backseat and marvel at all the lights as Christmas carols played on the radio. This is probably why I look forward to going through Candy Cane Lane here in Milwaukee every year.

But this year is different. And because it is different I want us to get back and see **Why did Jesus come?**

Isaiah the prophet who lived some 700 years before Jesus says, (Isaiah 9:2) **The people walking in darkness.** For the people of Isaiah's day, part of the darkness was politics; there was corruption on every side. It was a power grab. **Injustice** was the word of the year, decade, and generation. People were doing evil and calling it good and at the same time those who were doing good were called evil. There were conspiracy theories. And the truth for many of the people of the day was not a pandemic but an outside country and King were about to invade and conquer and not just put them in quarantine but literally take them away into exile away from all their family and from their traditions.

There was darkness in Jesus' day too. When Jesus was born, the government called not for a mask mandate but for a census, no registering through mail or signing up online but a journey sans planes or cars, so on foot miles and miles. Oh, the darkness of stress that brought to Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem in time for the census or so they thought. Jesus didn't come into the world because everything was great. He came into the world because there was darkness.

Why did Jesus come? - Because the world is dark in sin and it's consequences.

We can relate to the darkness. This year some of our traditions are masked. The darkness of the pandemic has disrupted our lifestyles and traditions not just in the day to day but for those special occasions like birthdays, graduations, weddings, and Christmas. For any number of us we will not be gathering as our big families this Christmas. Seating in church is full but limited and spaced out –There is the darkness of polarized political camps. Conspiracy theories. Outside interference. Changing narratives. While many were living in the darkness of injustice, the darkness of injustice for many of us was just that, in the dark. You may not know Psalm 13, but you have probably quoted it when it says “How long, Lord. How long?”

And as you know the darkness is not just out there it is in our own personal lives as well. Mental health issues on the rise in recent years have spiked with loneliness, separation, isolation, and polarization. Depression is a terribly dark time.

Jesus is the light even in the dark tunnel of depression. And we cling to the hope of light in Jesus. And the good news is that Jesus our Savior is holding onto us and will never let go. Jesus brings the light of hope. And he will never let go of you. Jesus is the **Wonderful Counselor** and in his infinite counsel and wisdom he not only came up with a plan to show us how valuable you are he gave up his life to show you valuable you are to God.

For many this year brought not just sickness but the fear of sickness, fear that has been unparalleled for most until you feel the lump or the blood work comes back wrong. The good news is you are actually in a win-win situation through Jesus, the Light of the world! Jesus is the **Mighty God** who gives us victory over sin, Satan and death!

I know some of you have doubts. Instead of dealing with honest doubts, some of you have tried to stifle them, deny them, and pretend they didn't exist. I want you to know God is big enough to handle our doubts. And you can find comfort reading about sincere and committed believers who questioned God in the Psalms or cried out to him in Lamentations. Jesus, you see, is the **Everlasting Father** Jesus as our Everlasting Father who comes to you not with aggression but understanding and compassion. Offering himself as the answer to your doubts.

Darkness is not only something that happens to us. It is something that is in us. Here is how I know. I know there have been times when you have lied awake at night staring at the dark ceiling, clinched teeth, tight shoulders, a queasy stomach, with a pounding heart of regret. *How could I have done that? How could I have said that? Why did I waste so much time even thinking about that? What am I going to do? What if someone finds out?* You feel like a fool. You are so ashamed, and you try to hide your inner darkness, as you are covered with guilt and shame. But God knows because he is light and nothing is hidden from the light. Here is the good news: God doesn't cancel you. Jesus is **the Prince of Peace**. Romans 5:1 **Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we^[a] have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,** And because God doesn't hold anything against you which means you don't have to either.

Why did Jesus come? - Because the world is dark in sin and it's consequences. - Because Jesus, the Light of the world is your Savior from sin and it's consequences

Isaiah 9:2 **The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.**

Scary stuff out there in the dark. For many of us what we need to do is first acknowledge that we're in a difficult season we are in the dark. When we admit we're in the dark, we become poised to see the light.

When I was a little boy, I had these cool night lights that were about 2 inches square and they were a soft blue green in color. There was one in my room and one in the hallway so I could make my way to the bathroom if I woke up in the middle of the night. Now of course being a boy, I was hardly ever afraid of the dark. The only times that I was afraid of the dark were those certain days that ended in the word day, like Monday and Tuesday and . . . And to be honest that night light in the hallway, while it helped get me to the bathroom if I needed it, it was really there to light the runway to my parent's bedroom. Light makes all the difference.

In the time of trials or darkness some of us serve whole heartedly by living by faith in God's promises and letting those promises lead the way. That's a beautiful lighted path to joy. But then are those days, seasons, or even years, when you need encouragement. Who do you feel like most of the time? The one who serves wholeheartedly or the one who needs encouragement. It can be such a mix, can't it? Sometimes you feel like you are following the Lord so well. You are doing what you are supposed to do and with the proper attitude too. But then in the next moment you feel the exact opposite way. The shadow of fears and doubt envelop you. You feel like you are living in darkness and you need some encouragement. God serves you whether you are strong or a flickering candle with the Light that scatters all darkness. For those who serve faithfully God will not disappoint you. For those of you who live in darkness of weakness, brokenness, inability and need, you won't be disappointed because Jesus your Savior, is the Light of the world,

Christmas lights symbolize the light of Christ who has come into the world. **Unto us a son is given.** Jesus is the gift of light and salvation. He is the **Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.** John 3:16,17 **For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.** ¹⁷ **For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.** John 1:4,5 ⁴ **In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.** ⁵ **The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome^[a] it.**

Whoever you are and whatever you feel like: Because Jesus suffered the ultimate darkness on the cross—separation from the Father while paying the consequences for our sins—he is more than qualified to handle the darkness of sin and its consequences in our daily lives. Jesus is your Savior. Being in the dark doesn't keep the Light from piercing in and shining on you. Here is what you need to know, **Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord.** Jesus isn't just for the manger, he is for you! And because of that, your Victory starts now! Merry Christmas!