

Pastor Joe Polzin  
Isaiah 9:2-7  
“Call His Name... Son”  
Year B – Christmas Eve  
December 24, 2017

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

In a survey published by the Pew Research Center about two weeks ago, about 90% percent of Americans say they will plan to celebrate Christmas. However, only about 45% of them, less than half, say they celebrate Christmas primarily as a religious holiday rather than a cultural one...<sup>1</sup>

Now, I don't bring this up to spend time lamenting about the commercialization of Christmas, or how secular traditions have replaced religious ones, or anything like that. I'm not that interested in that discussion. For those who don't know about the true meaning of Christmas, why it *is* and *has* to be a religious holiday, well, then actually that's on us, not them. Why would we expect a world who does not know Christ to know about Christ?

Rather, I bring this up, because it got me thinking about what *our* expectations are regarding Christmas. Those of us who *do* recognize the religious nature of the holiday, rather it being a cultural one. After all, I assume that because you are here this night, you are one of those who know the religious meaning of Christmas.

And yet, even *we* are a people who have been, and will continue to be busy with all the cultural things that surround the season of Christmas, things that don't necessarily have to do with a son being born in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago. And I'm included in that. At my house, we had our seasonal to do list. It involved lights, and a tree, and decorations, then get-togethers, and meals, planning for trips to see people, sending cards, buying presents. And it doesn't stop tonight. No, this will go on for another week or longer! There's an annual list of things that must get done, and I'm guessing if you're anything like me, your household might be the same. And those things are fine, and good even.

But if you were to strip it all back, strip back all the cultural celebration of Christmas, strip back the meals, and the family traditions, and the holiday shopping and everything else, if all that was gone, and it was just us here tonight, you and me sitting in this church with nothing else, what would remain at Christmas? If you're part of the 55% who say that Christmas is a cultural celebration, then there's nothing left. Because for the cultural celebration, that's all there is.

But we know that we're here because there *is* more to it than that. In the absence of all other gifts that we worry about giving, there would still remain that one gift that was given to us. The only gift that matters. 700 years before it happened, Isaiah foretold it, “For *to us* a child is born, *to us* a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (9:6). This gift was promised not generically, but specifically, “to us.”

So, then, do you know what God's people did after hearing this prophecy of the Savior who would come to them? They got busy again. Specifically, they got busy, and fell back into

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.pewforum.org/2017/12/12/americans-say-religious-aspects-of-christmas-are-declining-in-public-life/>

their sinful ways, and their lives apart from God. They lost sight of that divine promise. They did what was only natural for humans to do, which was to turn back into sin, and forget about the God who promises to save.

But God does not forget. His memory is long and His love is faithful, even throughout the generations. Because one night, when the fullness of time had come, an angel of the Lord appeared to some unsuspecting shepherds, and announced, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy *that will be for all the people*. For *unto you* is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:10-11).

Did you ever stop to think why the angel said those words to the shepherds, “unto you”? It wasn’t, “unto, generally, the people of Israel.” It wasn’t “unto those who deserve it.” It wasn’t, “unto the very wise or very powerful.” It wasn’t even, “unto the whole world.” Looking right at the shepherds, the angel said, “unto you.” The promise that God made through Isaiah had now been fulfilled. And even today, it is not just for some people out there somewhere. It is *for you*. *Jesus* is for you.

It’s a cliché, unfortunately, to say that the “greatest gift ever given at Christmas is Jesus.” But I’m going to say it anyway... because it’s true. In fact, he is the *only* gift. If nothing else occurred on or around Christmas, if all the world was oblivious to the fact that something important was going on, we would still gather here, because this fact would remain, and be worthy of a celebration for all eternity, that Jesus came *for you*. And if that is the only thing you take from this service full of wonderful things, may it be that.

That only Son of the Father came because you and I are among those who, as Isaiah says, “walked in darkness.” We had ruined His perfection creation, and generation after generation was blind in the darkness of sin. He came because we were trapped in this cycle of destruction, and we were destined to be separated from God for all eternity. This was the just punishment for all that we had done to rebel against God.

But God was not content with that outcome. His children whom He had created to be with Him forever had been separated from Him long enough. And as our Epistle reading from Galatians puts it, “God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” (4:4-5). The Son came so that you, too, could be made a son. And that’s an important term, “son.” Because a son in that day was the rightful and legal heir to everything the father had to give.

The true and perfect Son came, as a gift from the Father. And Jesus, God in flesh, offered himself as a sacrifice for your sin and destruction. He offered his life on the cross to suffer the punishment you deserved. And he rose again to show that he has that authority to take away the inheritance you earned for yourself, which was death, and instead gives to you the inheritance that only true heirs deserve, which is eternal life.

You are adopted, and you have been given same title in the family as only God the Son deserves, which is the title of son and heir. In other words, the Son came at Christmas to you, so that you could be counted as a son, a legal heir of God, able to cry out “Abba! Father!” to God in heaven, and be certain of your inheritance from Him of eternal life.

That’s a great gift at Christmas. It’s the only gift. And it’s not been given just generally, out there somewhere. It’s been given to you. Tonight. And every day, for eternity.

The hymn we sang right before the sermon ended with this stanza:

*Now through His Son doth shine The Father’s grace divine. Death was reigning o’er us Through sin and vanity Till He opened for us A bright eternity. May we praise Him there! May we praise Him there!* In Jesus’ name. Amen.

And now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord.