

Is 9:1-7 rev

Dear congregation, family and friends

Some of us know what it's like to live in darkness, distress, and despair – dispossessed and displaced from family and homeland. Some of us know, because that's the kind of thing war does to people. World War 2, for example, brought death, destruction and displacement for millions of people. 70 million people served in the armed forces - 17 million of them lost their lives. By the end of the war, more than 12 million people had been displaced around Europe including orphans, prisoners of war, survivors of concentration and slave labour camps, and people who had simply fled.

And that probably sounds like a funny place to start a Christmas message. But darkness, distress and despair is the spiritual condition of humanity because of sin. That's why Jesus came to earth to save us. And so it's actually a good place to start Christmas, even if not a good place to finish.

Isaiah starts at that point here in chapter 9 because that's the very thing Israel faced too as Isaiah brought this message of hope. And so the Assyrians attacked the northern tribe of Israel not too many years later. It was only a matter of time before the Babylonians attacked the southern tribe of Judah as well. And all of this was a reflection on their spiritual state of rebellion and sin.

But in contrast to the darkness, death and despair of unfaithful kings, occupation and exile to a foreign land, Isaiah came with a message of hope. God, through the perfectly faithful king that he would eventually send in Jesus, would bring light, life, joy, peace, justice, and righteousness.

Point 1

And so there's a couple of contrasts here. *The first one is between the rule that Jesus brings and the rule the Assyrians brought* when they came from the north in 733 BC. They brought war, fear, death, unrest, occupation, and exile. *But the kingdom Jesus brings is a kingdom of perfect peace.*

It's hard to imagine *perfect peace*, isn't it? During his reign, Caesar Augustus brought a Golden Age of peace to the Roman Empire - peace to all the countries around the Mediterranean that came under his rule.

But imagine that things could be so much better than that again. That all conflict would come to an end. That all the issues of race and religion and law and order were solved and we lived together in perfect harmony. That everyone could concentrate on building close loving relationships with others. That poverty, homelessness, sickness and suffering were completely done away with.

Can you even imagine a world like that? Because that's the kind of kingdom Jesus brings with him. God's promise to Israel as they faced the Assyrians, was that one day he would bring peace, harmony, life, light, honour, victory. Their choice was to either keep rebelling against God and face death and despair, or turn back to God and move ahead in faith and hope.

In fact, *the same symbolism was there as Jesus died*. On the cross he suffered ultimate distress and humiliation – forsaken by God. To make it obvious, the land went dark for three hours, and Jesus cried out, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me'.

At Christmas we remember that Jesus came into the world as a baby. But it's important to remember that he came to die. He came as one of us, to die as one of us, to take our sins upon himself, so that by trusting in him we can have perfect peace. Jesus brings light and life and honour and joy and victory and peace for everyone who trusts him and lives for him. He shatters oppression and war. And he does it by taking the root cause of these things on himself. We have these things in part now, we'll have them completely when he returns again.

The *challenge of Christmas* then, is to bow to him as the Prince of Peace - to follow the wise men's example and bow to him as our King, follow him, live for him, put our trust in him, and obey him.

The challenge of Christmas is to stop trusting in ourselves for this ultimate solution to our problems, or other people for that matter. No one can do what Jesus has done for the world.

CS Lewis has said, "The grounds for belief and disbelief are the same today as they were two thousand or ten thousand years ago. If Joseph had lacked faith to trust God or humility to perceive the holiness of his spouse, he could have disbelieved in the miraculous origin of her Son as easily as any modern man; and any modern man who believes in God can accept the miracle as easily as Joseph did."

Point 2

The *other contrast in this passage is between the king that Jesus is, and Ahaz, the king of Judah* at the time. Both are descended from David. But Ahaz was rebellious and unfaithful. Jesus on the other hand rules in perfect faithfulness, justice, and righteousness – the perfect king after God's own heart.

You see *the way that plays out* if you go back and read chapters 7 and 8, and 2nd Kings 16. The northern tribe of Israel was trying to form alliances against Assyria. They threatened to invade Judah if they didn't join them. But God tells Ahaz through Isaiah not to worry. It wouldn't happen. And that sets the scene for the well-known prophecy of chapter 7, 'The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel [God with us]'.

But *what does Ahaz do?* He turns to their worse enemy, Assyria, for help. He forgets that once they conquered the Northern Tribe they'd be looking over the border in his direction next. Ahaz becomes an example of the kind of king Jesus isn't – faithless, desperate.

But *Jesus saves us from desperation*. And so Jesus is the one who ultimately fulfills the Immanuel prophecy. He is 'God with us'. He is God in the flesh. Verses 6 and 7 here in chapter 9 describe the kind of faithful king he is, in contrast to Ahaz. God and yet man. A descendant of David ruling on his throne, coming with wise counsel and perfect peace, in line with God's saving purposes.

They're the kinds of attributes that a peaceful, warrior, king could be expected to have.

I can imagine that as General Peter Cosgrove entered East Timor not that many years ago, most of these attributes were the kinds of things that people looked for in him - a wise counselor, using strength to establish peace and justice - a father-figure for a troubled time.

But how much more wouldn't we expect these attributes in the one come to earth to

save the world from its sin and suffering? And Jesus has have them perfectly.

Conc

And so, again, the challenge of Christmas is to stop trusting in ourselves for the ultimate solution to our problems, or stop trusting in others - the Ahazs of the world, or the Assyrians. No one else can do what only Jesus can do for the world. No one else can save us from our most basic problem of sin. No one else can rule in perfect faithfulness, justice and righteousness. As someone has said, 'Jesus turns life right-side-up in an upside-down world.' And so, on yet another Christmas, we can look to Jesus to bring us light and life, joy and peace, justice and righteousness.

Lk 2:1-20 rev 2

Dear Congregation, family and friends

Where do you go to find out if someone's had a baby? You could look up the births column in the newspaper. You could depend on the good old grapevine.

Imagine how much more difficult it would have been in the first century to get that kind of news out. No printing presses. No newspapers as we know them. No family announcement column in the back section. How would you let the world know about a birth if you lived in the first century?

But when Jesus was born, God made sure that people found out about it. God used his own angelic news service to start getting the news out that Jesus had been born. And from there word of mouth took over - to the point that today, 2000 years later, the gospel has traveled around the globe, to the ends of the earth.

Point 1

You see that God wants people to understand a few things about this new child.

He wants us to understand that *Jesus is descended from great King David himself.*

Jesus has royal blood flowing in his veins. There may not have been a king from the line of David on the throne in Israel for centuries, but God made sure that people

knew that Jesus was eligible to that throne.

And it's interesting to see how God did that. Jews are pretty careful at keeping their family trees. Jesus could have carried his family tree around with him and tried to convince everyone that he was descended from King David. But how much better an idea to have him born in Bethlehem at the time of this particular census, fulfilling Old Testament prophecy about the Messiah, and demonstrating that he came from the line of King David.

And knowing that Jesus is in fact King Jesus, do you bow before his authority? The wise men acknowledged him as king. They came a long way, bringing rich gifts of gold, incense and myrrh. They laid their gifts before this baby king, bowed down and worshipped him. But do you bow before this king? Do you lay your life at his feet? Do you put everything you are and everything you have at his disposal? Do you worship him today and forever? Because that is what king Jesus deserves.

Point 2

In fact *Jesus is the divine King*. He's God and king all wrapped up into one.

That comes out in the titles the angels use to describe him. They call him things like Saviour, Christ, and Lord. Through him glory comes to God and peace to those on whom God's favour rests.

Jesus is the Christ. He's the Messiah, the 'Anointed One'. In the tradition of the Old Testament, that makes him the ultimate king, priest, and prophet. And so the words from Isaiah 61 are fulfilled in Jesus, 'The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,

because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted, proclaim freedom for the captives, release from darkness for the prisoners, and proclaim the year of the LORD's favour.'

And Jesus is Lord. By New Testament times that had become the title for God. And so when the angels refer to Jesus here as Lord, they're saying that he is God.

And *Jesus is Saviour.* Matthew in his gospel tells us that the name Jesus means, 'the Lord saves', because he will save his people from their sins.

And then *the angels praise God.* They sing 'glory to God in the highest'. It's actually through Jesus that we come to know God's glory best. He's the window through which God reveals his glory to us most clearly. He's the radiance of God's glory, the exact representation of his being. When we want to know what God is like we should look to Jesus. When we want to know what God is doing in history, we should look to Jesus.

And *the angels sing, 'on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests.'* Jesus is the one who brings God's peace to those on earth that God loves. That's why Jesus is called Saviour. It's through his salvation from sin that peace comes to those who are forgiven. One ancient writer wrote, 'while the Emperor may give peace from war on land and sea, he's unable to give peace from passion, grief and envy. He can't give peace of heart, for which man yearns more than even for outward peace.'

And Jesus doesn't only give inner peace. He gives peace with God, forgiveness from sin, for everyone who put their faith and trust in him.

And knowing that Jesus is Saviour and Lord and Messiah, do you look to him in faith and trust? Do you put your future in his hands? Do you love him more than everything else? Do you trust him with your eternal well-being? Do you live for him as your King and Saviour?

Point 3

And then having received this message from the angels, you notice that the shepherds do two things.

Firstly *they go and see for themselves*.

And who wouldn't go and see for themselves after hearing a message like that? They go and find Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. They see with their own eyes the Messiah whom the Jews had been waiting for, for so long. They taste and see that the Lord is good.

And secondly *they can't keep the news to themselves*. They spread the word about what they've seen and heard. They return to their sheep glorifying and praising God. And everyone who hears them is amazed.

And we are those who have now also heard. Maybe not directly from the lips of angels or shepherds, but through God's word, based on eye-witness reports like this. We've also had a taste and seen that the Lord is good.

But then, do we follow that up? Why stop at a taste, a sip, when God has given us the whole of his word to feast from? Why stop here when we can grow in our love for

God through Jesus Christ and come to know him even better?

And also having heard the news, have you joined the shepherds in spreading that news? Everyone needs to hear and believe that Jesus is Saviour and King. Are you a part of the kingdom network around the world that continues to grow, spreading the good news, until everyone has heard and had the opportunity to respond to the gospel themselves?

Conc

Martha Snell Nicholson explains why it is so important that we receive the Christmas message for ourselves and then also share it with others:

Suppose that Christ had not been born
that far away Judean morn.

Suppose that God, whose mighty hand
created worlds, had never planned
a way for man to be redeemed.

Suppose the Wise Men only dreamed
that guiding star whose light still glows
down through the centuries. Suppose
Christ never walked here in men's sight
our blessed Way, the Truth, and Light.

Suppose He counted all the cost,
and never cared that we were lost,
And never died for you and me,
nor shed His blood on Calvary
Upon a shameful cross. Suppose
that having died He never rose,
And there was none with power to save
our souls from death beyond the grave!

As far as [those unsaved might] know,
these things that I've "supposed" – are so.