

*Texts: Isaiah 9:1-7; John 8:12*

*Subject: A Child is Born*

*Theme: What We Can't See*

Christ the King Sunday, November 21, 2021; *Living Hope Lutheran, Las Vegas, NV*

Grace and peace to you from God our Father in heaven and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

It's been busy at our house. That's nothing new. We've got 4 growing kids, and it's been a busy school year. My dear spouse is getting closer to finishing her degree and working hard every day. We had a car accident a few weeks ago, and finally were able to find a new vehicle. Thank God we are ok. Our family is healthy. It's hard to find time for us all to be together and just relax. It's hard to see how we will get through it all. Someone is always doing something, going somewhere, fighting over this or that. Now the holidays approach. Great anxiety fills the days, and we worry about what will get done, what gets added to the schedule, how we can afford it all, and the stress can pile up.

This has not been the year we'd all hoped for. Our city continues to feel the stress of the pandemic. Housing costs and availability have put families on the street. Elected officials argue about masks and money, while our neighbors and loved ones are trying to survive. Many of the ones we turn to for leadership are focused on the next election, when we had hoped they would bring about a change, prosperity, and progress. We know we need to do *something* to avoid a deepening crisis for the earth's climate. Issues of racial justice and gun violence still persist. LGBTQIA+ siblings still fight for their right to exist, and 2021 has seen the deaths of 47 transgender Americans. We're still wearing masks in worship - still we know people are dying from COVID-19. It has been overwhelming. How can we persevere? Some of us are not okay.

We have people here in this congregation who live with unseen medical conditions, autoimmune disorders, some fighting cancer or heart disease, or pushing through each hour, each day, each week with debilitating pain, or depression and mental illness. We have friends here who are without a safe place to sleep. They live daily with what might be our biggest fears in life. Nothing is easy.

Still, we do not despair. We trust that there will be a better day.

Israel had already been mostly conquered by the time Isaiah began his career as prophet to the southern kingdom of Judah. They'd had their share of kings, but none seemed to live up to the calling. They'd get lured into worshipping idols, get conquered by neighboring powers, or become utterly corrupt. The people didn't have any power, they were subject to the whims of the King - the one who held all the power, made all the decisions, and set the course for their lives. Where could they go? They could not see a way out from disaster.

This prophet, the one we sometimes refer to as 'First Isaiah' lived when the Assyrians were the rising power in the region. He preached words of judgement to the people and the rulers who had done evil, who had forsaken the Lord, and called rebellious hearts to return to God. That's the bulk of the book. But today, we hear a more hopeful word. It begins with darkness: in the ancient world that was dangerous. There were no streetlights, no flashlights, no reflective vests. The night was scary. There were dangers everywhere. Light meant a new day, the return of safety and possibility. Just making it through the night was a blessing.

We walk in a more metaphorical darkness, but when things are hard, when we are fearful, when we don't know what will happen next, it can be hard to even imagine a

new day. We struggle to see God's justice, help for our neighbors and peace for our world because we have known so much pain and struggle and fear - but it's coming. What we can't see, we find hard to accept, but faith leads us to believe in what we can't see - faith calls us to live for the future promise, and to live in a way that enacts this future here and now. Something's coming.

Notice that we don't hear that "Thus says the Lord" usually used by prophets to introduce an oracle or a Word from God. What we have here is truly prophetic, but in context it might be considered a psalm, something like a hopeful prayer. This reading from Isaiah is something more like a hymn. It might once have been used for the enthronement of a new king. But the prophet points to a promise. Something's coming. God will save.

When we can't see we have to rely on our other senses. When we get out of bed at night, our eyes groggy from sleep, our brain still asleep, we feel around in the dark for that wall, that corner of the bed - that's what the little toe is for, I've learned from experience. When we can't see, we can use our hearing. We have to listen. If you're struggling to see how our nation is going to come together, if you're anxious about the upcoming holiday season with family and friends, some on different political sides, some vaccinated, others not - if you're unable to see how everyone is going to get through it, or you're just finding it hard to see your way through another day at work, or looking for work, or working on a relationship, or feeling alone, listen to the word.

*"A child has been born for us...authority rests upon his shoulders"*

*He is wonderful, mighty, everlasting, peaceful.*

When we can't see, we trust - we have faith, and hold onto the goodness of God - those promises fulfilled completely in Jesus.

The prophet speaks words of hope: Joy is coming.

Like joy at the harvest - when you don't have to worry about those seeds you planted, or the weather being too dry or too wet, or a natural disaster. The food's ready and on the table - that kind of joy.

Or like the joy like after the end of the fighting, when the boots and the bloody rags will be burned because you know you don't need them any more. Like the end of all war when the victory has already been won - that kind of joy. This kind of joy is promised for the *whole nation* - everyone - everyone gets it. There are no in groups and out groups, no one left on the sideline, everyone's in and celebrating - that kind of joy.

Or like the joy of a mother - whose baby is born, who cries tears of thankfulness for the life of her child - who doesn't have to be afraid any more, who will cherish his life.

This child will be born for us. We might not see it, but we trust and we can have hope again. We can believe in goodness again, we can come together again, and be reconciled and renewed. This child is Jesus the Christ, our King.

We know our help doesn't come from any earthly ruler. Today we call Christ the King, since HE is the power that leads through the difficulties we face into a new day. We call Christ the King because the power of resurrection is His and He has given us the power of forgiveness and vision and healing and hope. Jesus is the one scripture names King of Creation, Lord of Light, and Powerful deliverer. Jesus is the light of our lives and will continue to bring us through every dark night we face. The Lord promises joy. The Lord will deliver what is needed at the right time.

In the meantime... We trust in God, and we work for our neighbors. Our power might seem limited, we might feel insecure and face setbacks, but Jesus is with us, and God's promises will come true. We may be frustrated and overwhelmed, but we do not give up. We will rejoice. We will celebrate. The body of Christ across the globe bears witness to what we have seen and what we have heard. The Lord *has* been good to us, and has given us a King unlike any other. Jesus is the one who leads by leaning into the darkness - he died and went right there. He went to the place we fear the most, and did what we cannot do. He came back from it, bringing peace and breathing the Spirit of life back into the world, renewing relationships, giving hope and joy unlike anything else. Thanks be to Christ our King.