

Isaiah 9:2-7

The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
on them light has shined.

3 You have multiplied the nation,
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.

4 For the yoke of their burden,
and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.

5 For all the boots of the tramping warriors
and all the garments rolled in blood
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

6 For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

7 His authority shall grow continually,
and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.
He will establish and uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time onward and forevermore.

Luke 2:1-14

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2 This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 All went to their own towns to be registered. 4 Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. 5 He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

The Shepherds and the Angels

8 In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: 11 to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the

Lord. 12 This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.”
13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

14 “Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

Sermon: The future in the present

A new Star Wars movie is playing downtown. I don't want to hear about it because I haven't seen it yet – though sometime over the next couple of weeks I hope to. I grew up watching Star Wars. The first one came out when I was in grade one, and like all the other kids of my generation I waited three long years between each subsequent movie - yearning for the next installment that would only tease me for the next movie. It was a lifetime of anticipation and delayed gratification for a young boy.

Now, a curious thing about Star Wars is that in the original canon there were 9 scripts – 9 movies. The three movies that came out when I was young were numbers 4, 5, and 6 – they weren't the first three movies in the series, they were the middle three.

So, in 1999 when George Lucas began to make Star Wars movies again the story didn't continue from the last movie – the next three movies all took place chronologically before the ones that I, and everybody else, had seen.

That meant that those of us who grew up on the original Star Wars series had a special foreknowledge when we watched the newer movies. We already knew what was going to happen. This enhanced my appreciation of the movies – as I watched I would begin recognizing patterns in the larger story, seeing how the people and institutions of previous generations led into the stories that I knew and loved.

Knowing what would happen later gave greater meaning and significance to every little thing that happened on the screen. Every glimpse of a spaceship that was a precursor to the familiar X-wings and Tie-fighters evoked a new understanding. I would recognize seemingly casual encounters and conversations that would have galaxy shaking consequences years after those characters were dead. Knowing the future gave extra flavour to the present.

Of course, the Star Wars saga are movies; some of them were quite good, but they remain as only movies. But if we take this same concept of the end informing the beginning we find there are other applications as well; it certainly applies to our purpose here this evening.

Our Christmas worship is a celebration of a momentous occasion – a night when, just for a moment, time stopped, the earth stood still. The creator of all things visible and invisible entered his creation in the form of a baby. Such a thing had never happened before, such a thing had not been conceived of before, and in that moment, when divinity gave it's first cry through tiny lungs in a stable, all of creation held its breath in anticipation, wondering just what would happen next.

The moment was glorious, when divinity entered creation, creation itself was forever changed. So was divinity. You'd think that nothing could add to this event. It seems that there couldn't possibly be any more meaning and value than this already incredible event of God breaking into creation. But there is.

We know where this story leads. We don't know the end yet, but, like with Star Wars, we know the next few chapters. And knowing the middle makes the beginning even more incredible, and even more significant.

In Isaiah 9 we read:

'The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
on them light has shined.
For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.'

Wonderful news. But when we flip forward through Isaiah we read this:

'He grew up like a young plant,
like a root out of dry ground;
he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.
3 He was despised and rejected by others;
a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity;
and as one from whom others hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him of no account.'

A young man with nothing remarkable about him, nothing that would capture our attention. Nothing to look at. He was despised, rejected, people turned their faces away from him. This incredible event of the birth of the Wonderful Counsellor, the Prince of Peace has been reduced to the mundane, the ordinary, the unremarkable, and even the rejected.

This seems a shocking and unexpected turn, but it gets still worse. We know how this part of the story ends. It ends with the murder of the Son of God. 'He was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of the people. They made his grave with the wicked and his tomb with the rich, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.'

And so, this miracle birth ends in death. All births do, but this wasn't a natural birth, and it wasn't a natural death. This birth ended in murder. We know the end of the story, and it isn't pretty. In fact, it's downright depressing.

It's enough to cause us despair even, to think that all is lost. But, there is something more, something crucial for us to understand. We know how the story turned out, but God knew the end of the story at the beginning. Before the Word ever became flesh, God knew what was going to happen. He knew his gift would be ignored by many, rejected by many, and would eventually be killed. But, for reasons only he understands in full, he still sent the gift – he still gave us Jesus, knowing full well what we would do with him. This is our true hope.

Isaiah 7:14 'The Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.' Immanuel means God with us. When the Creator enters creation – that is God with us. When Divinity is revealed in flesh – that is God with us.

A God who already knows the end of the story, a God who sees the terrible thing that we are going to do and still decides to be with us anyway – that is a God who will be with us no matter what. God has thrown in his lot with humanity and will not be moved. The God who sees us at our worst and still chooses to be with us is the God who will never abandon us.

The birth of a child is hope. The birth of the Christ Child is great hope. The birth of the Christ Child when both we and God know how it will end is no longer hope. It is certainty. It is covenant. It is a foundation upon which to build a life. It is Jesus himself in full knowledge of the future saying to us 'I will be with you, even unto the end of the age.'

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I speak to you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Christmas

Last night we heard about the value of the gift of Jesus. That if we want to understand the value we have to begin at the end, and then work back to what God really meant when he said he is God with us.

What if gifts aren't used right or appreciated.

Did you ever give a gift and have it regifted? Have you ever regifted something? Did you ever give it back to the very person who gave it to you? What about someone who never uses your gift? Throws it in the corner?

That guy is only going to buy beer anyway, or pot, or smokes.

What if they sell the gift card for drugs?

Some gifts, the best gifts, are not what we want – they're what we need. Socks. Underwear. Salvation. Not what we'd ask for. But oh so needed.

Jesus is the worlds most unappreciated, valuable gift

Card from wayne. The one leper

How do we receive the gift

When God gave it was an expression of himself. When we give and need appreciation, for the gift to be 'used right' then we aren't giving for the other – we're giving to make ourselves feel good. We get our reward here on earth. But true love gives without strings. It gives because that is its nature. That doesn't mean that there is no cost -there is great cost. God knew his gift would be spurned and abused and he gave anyway because a. we need it and can't do anything without it, and b. because he knew that some would take the gift, some would receive. Parable of sower. God gives because of his great character.

We are made in the image of God, not God, but an image or a reflection. When we give, truly give, not expecting earthly reward, our own character gets formed. We plant seeds in others lives, and we become something. I don't tithe because the church needs the money. I tithe because it teaches me how to live in trust and not cling to stuff too much.

I don't give to people because I think that they will suddenly turn their lives around. I give because I want to be a person who gives. Even if more than half of the people abuse the gift, I want to live as a giver. A few of those seeds will sprout, some will grow strong and bear fruit, but it's not up to me to judge who is worthy, who will be the 'good investment.' I plant, appollos waters, god gives the growth.

We are the beggars. We have been given a gift. We can continue to live far below our potential, or we can receive, becomes sons and daughters, heirs to the King. Ignore the gift, spurn or reject it, talk others out of receiving it, sell it for social standing, or receive, and take it into our heart and life.