

Sermon: Christmas Day

Text: Isaiah 9:1-7 (v.6): “For 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 Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Theme: Born to be King!

Goal: Christmas shows us the new born King who rules over the Kingdom of God with justice and righteousness

Dear Friends,

Introduction: The Old Testament is the book of God’s promises. God’s faithful people from the old were always looking forward, waiting for the accomplishment of God’s promises. Jesus said to His disciples: “Blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it” (Matthew 13:17). We can say that we are even more blessed than the disciples because we have now the entire revelation of God disclosed in the New Testament, while they were living the history and it was sometimes difficult for them to understand what was happening, especially when Jesus was put to death. But after Jesus’ resurrection and ascension they became sure of God’s plan and they wrote their records in the New Testament, so that we, as well, can be sure of God’s love for all of us.

The temptation we suffer is to look only backward to what happened and celebrate Christmas only as an event deep in the past, forgetting the real meaning of Jesus’ coming and the new promises God gave us through Christ. Christmas is an opportunity to look back and to look forward as well, because the child born in Bethlehem accomplished God’s promises of the Old Testament and left new promises for us.

And many of the Old Testament promises are still valid for us as well, as it is the case of our text from Isaiah for today.

I – The shadow of death

The Prophet was speaking to a people in a very difficult situation. As they were living far in the north of the country just on the border of Syria, they had been threatened and conquered many times by their neighbour enemies. Even many foreigners were living among God's people in such a scale that the region was called "Galilee of the Gentiles" and was despised by people living close to the temple of Jerusalem. Their situation was so bad that the Prophet said that they were "living in the land of the shadow of death".

The expression "shadow of death" appears in the beloved 23rd Psalm as well: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me, your rod and your staff they comfort me." Dark hours and days surround our lives too. Stop just for a while and think about some "shadow of death" which is or was threatening you at the year that comes to an end... We need hope and strength. After the happiness and joy of Christmas time a new year comes with all its challenges and uncertainties... and we are scared...

God's promise is renewed this Christmas again: "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned." The light of Jesus shone not only in the province of Galilee when He ministered there, fulfilling this prophecy; but the light of Christ is still shining upon us in His Gospel of love and in His Sacrament of forgiveness. The promise was not only for the Jews as Old Testament children of God, but for the Gentiles, - and for us too, who are not of Jewish background. Jesus is "a light for revelation to the Gentiles" as we sing after each Lord's

Supper (Luke 2:31). The night turns day by the Light of the World, the child born in Bethlehem! As a commentary wrote: *Now, when the light shines, even the cockroaches (of our life) all scurry into the dark cracks.*

II – The child: God with us

“For 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 Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” The child born in Bethlehem was born to be King, as the Wise Men from the East correctly searched for Him; a King that brought light to the darkness of this world. He is the same Emmanuel, promised in Isaiah 7:14. The various titles given to the child show what His tasks would be and what He would do and is still doing:

A – “Wonderful Counsellor” – the Prophet Isaiah speaks more about this King in Chapter 11:2: “The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him – the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord – and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.” After having counselled the disciples, teaching them and comforting them, Jesus promised: “I will ask the Father, and he will send you another Counsellor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth” (John 14:16), who is still with us.

B - “Mighty God” – Jesus is One God with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Therefore He was called “Emmanuel = God with us”. God Himself came down at that first Christmas to pitch His tent among us. Jesus is not a God from far, but He became one of us to understand us in our weaknesses and needs.

C – “Everlasting Father” – Even that we don’t call Jesus as “our Father”, but He said: “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30). When Phillip asked Him: “Show us the Father”, Jesus answered: “Anyone who has

seen me has seen the Father...I am in the Father and the Father is in me" (John 14:8-10). The Athanasian Creed confesses: *Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit... the Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Spirit eternal.* Jesus is forever!

D – "Prince of Peace" – This is the best known title of the child born in Bethlehem. Peace was proclaimed by the angels to the shepherds in the fields of Bethlehem. Peace was proclaimed by Jesus during His ministry. Peace was assured to all when Jesus rose again from the death and said: "Peace be with you" (John 20:19). It is not just a temporary peace among people, but it is the most important peace someone can enjoy: The peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, who paid for our sins on the cross, and who offers forgiveness to all who believe. We were reconciled with God and we are in peace with Him, receiving all the blessings that He has for His beloved children.

Conclusion: Jesus is not the humble babe in the manger anymore. This is part of His story that we love to remember every Christmas again and again. He is now the "Wonderful Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace" in full as He reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit from heaven above over His Kingdom, the church. He is a trustful King in all His promises and actions. We believe in Him, we pray to Him, we obey Him. We come together as His family at the Services not only to meet friends, to listen to what the pastor will preach, but we come to worship Him and to kneel at His Holy table in fellowship with our brothers and sisters, where Jesus offers us the most complete and tasteful supper: His body and blood under the bread and the wine. Through this fellowship and through this Holy Meal He strengthens us for our daily life as we walk through and face the "valley of shadow of death", shining His light to guide us as far as the end of the tunnel where

there are green pastures, peace and tranquillity in the presence of God and all the angels.

May this Christmas renew our faith and our hope in God's promises and fill us with the peace that only the Prince of Peace can give us.

Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle, Cape Town, 25 December 2014