

A Child Is Born
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First Presbyterian Church of Waukesha
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Isaiah 9:2-7

- ² 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.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Luke 2:1-20

¹In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴Joseph 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. ⁵He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷And 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.

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

Messiah, the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” ¹³And 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!”

¹⁵When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Every year we hear the same story: the angels say “do not fear” to a bunch of scared shepherds who go to a stable where a baby, named Jesus, was born to a young woman, named Mary, and her betrothed, Joseph. It makes for cute pageants and familiar traditions of animated TV specials. But what new is to be said of this story? What new is to be heard? Well, nothing and everything.

Why do we do this every year? Sure, we like the warmth of this night, with candles and singing of favorite Christmas carols and family members gathered together. But why do we tune in to the readings? Why pay attention to the sermon? This story of good news remains good and if we knew before that it was good, then we still know. Good news of great joy for all the people. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us. To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. We listen because maybe we have lost the joy of the good news since last time; we listen because maybe we’ve developed doubts since last time or, maybe, because we’ve developed hope since last time. We listen because, while Jesus and the promises heralded by his birth remain steadfast, we are not the same as last year. Nothing is new and everything is new.

A child has been born for us. Born in humble abode, not as a king of this world, but laid in a feed trough in the cold of the desert night. The first to be given the great news are not men of high standing but filthy shepherds from both the outskirts of society and the outskirts of town. Great joy for all people, rich and poor, but especially for the poor; for the poor in spirit, for those who mourn, for the meek, for those who hunger and thirst.¹ This baby will grow to the man who dies on the cross and is risen from the dead. This baby holds within him the promise of new life, the promise of forgiveness even when we don’t deserve it, and especially when we don’t. Because this baby was born and grew and died and rose, there is great joy for all people because death will be no more, mourning and crying

¹ Matthew 5:3-6.

and pain will be no more.² This baby has been born over and over for two thousand years - nothing new. This baby is born for the people we are today, the person you are today, the person you uniquely are right now with all your joys and all your sorrows which make you different than you were last Christmas - everything is new.

Because this baby was born for us, and died and rose for us, what was broken will be made whole again - brokenness in ourselves, our hearts, our bodies, our spirits, brokenness in our families, brokenness in our world. You and I know this time is not yet here. We know sorrow and uncertainty and loneliness and pain and even fear. We mourn; we are downtrodden and disheartened and depressed and despairing. The listeners to Isaiah were in dark and frightening times,³ looking for hope in the face of certain domination by Assyria. And, at the time of Jesus' birth, Israel is already dominated by Rome and hopes to be freed from Rome's control.⁴ Nothing is new.

If we trust that Isaiah's prophecy pointed to Jesus, as well as King Hezekiah, and we **do** trust in this, and we know that Jesus has come, what do we make of the promise that his authority shall grow continually and there shall be endless peace? The time has begun. God's reign of justice and peace has already begun.⁵ But God's reign is not yet complete - Jesus, nor Hezekiah, came to solve everything. That was never the point. A son has been given to us; to us is born a Savior. This child was not only born for us but **to** us. The stories of the adult Jesus which we read throughout the year are important for learning, learning about ourselves and about God and about our relationship with God. The infant Jesus, this child of Christmas, reminds us that what was given to us, this gift, cannot be neglected and must be cared for tenderly and with constant attention, must be nurtured. Everything is as new as a new baby.

While the gospel of John does not begin with a sweet birth story, what it offers is a piece of the puzzle in knowing who Jesus is. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The Word has been with us since the very beginning, unchanging. Nothing is new.

It is this Word that is given to us, that is born to us, just as surely as the baby in the manger. While the person of Christ is no longer among us, Christ's Word most certainly is. This gift is not the kind to be put on the top shelf of the closet or under the bed. The Word was given to us and it is a great light in the darkness. There is a mighty and far-reaching darkness around us now. The darkness that **you** sense may be your own. It may be the darkness of one you love or of this community or of the people of a distant land. This darkness changes where it reaches and who it touches. Everything is new.

But, lest we forget, lest it has been misplaced since last year, we remember that there is a light, too.

² Revelation 21:4.

³ *Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 5*, p. 99.

⁴ *Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 5*, p. 103.

⁵ *Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 5*, p. 117.

This light, the light of God, is a great light, and whether we reflect it or not, it has the power to overcome the darkness. But Jesus came to remind us that we are partners in God's working in the world; the light was shared with us so we might also bear it in the world. Bearing this light doesn't change the fact that there is darkness; bearing this light testifies that God is at work in the darkness, just as God has been since the beginning. Nothing is new.

The darkness does not consume the light. The darkness may be mighty and far-reaching, both within us and outside of us, but it does not overcome. As partners in God's working, we are first called to bear the light so that it might change us, that in our own darknesses we might find joy in the promises of the child born, in the hope of new life, with no sorrow nor pain. Even the same, lasting darkness can seem new in this light.

As you light your candle to sing Silent Night, see the light beyond its appearance. See it as a gift to be nurtured and protected, a force greater than any darkness, a measure of hope and joy. Think upon the darkness in which you walk; this light has been given to **you**. Think upon your sorrows and pains and welcome the good news of great joy that God will mend your every brokenness. While we may extinguish the candles when we leave, the true light cannot be lost, the darkness is still lessened, and hope and joy remain. As you walk out into the world, bear this light with you that it might change you, protect it, and, in so doing, share it, for this world will always need the light until this child comes again, once and for all, and God makes **all** things new, once and for all.

Let us pray: God of light, come into our darkness this night and forevermore. Amen.