

The Joy of Advent

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 11 December 2022

Preacher: Matthew Capone

[0 : 0 0] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's Word to you today. A special welcome if you're new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here, and we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're trying to follow Jesus together as one community, and as we follow Jesus, we become convinced there's no one so good. They don't need God's grace, and no one's so bad that they can't have it, which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say in His Word. We're continuing in the season of Advent.

You'll remember that Advent comes from a Latin word that means to come or to arrive, and so we do two things in this season. First of all, we look back and we celebrate Jesus' first coming. That's why we sing songs like, Joy to the World, the Lord Has Come, and we also look forward and long for the future.

That's why we sing songs like, O Come, O Come, Emmanuel. And what we're doing in Advent is not separate from the rest of the year or the rest of the Christian life because that's what Christians are always doing. We're always looking back to what God has done in the past, and we look forward to what He will do in the future so that we can live faithfully now in the present.

We're continuing our series for Advent in the book of Isaiah. You'll remember that Isaiah was an 8th century prophet to the southern kingdom, also known as Judah, and we looked last week at Isaiah chapter 7 when Isaiah told us about the fact that God is with us, and He's with us in this specific sense. He's with us as He fights our enemies. He's with us as a warrior. He's with us as a military champion. That's what he was trying to tell King Ahaz, who did not believe that God would deliver him from Israel and Assyria. And so you'll remember that King Ahaz trusted man when he should have trusted God, and he feared man when he should have feared God. And so that issue last week was one of believing and trusting that God will fight for us, not relying on our own strength. We're moving from the theme of trust from last week to this week, the theme of darkness. Advent is in many ways about looking for light in the darkness, and we face a variety of temptations as we look at the darkness around us in this world. One of them is just to turn away from it, to pretend that it doesn't exist, just to ignore it, to find some way to numb or hide away from the world. Now the other temptation for us would be to downplay darkness, to think that it's light enough that somehow human effort's going to be able to fully overcome it. It's not so bad that we as mankind can't put an end to it once and for all.

Now both of those are incorrect, but both of those temptations keep us away from what Christmas is supposed to be about, which is a time filled with joy. So you'll notice in our passage, I'm getting ahead of myself a little bit, but we're in Isaiah chapter 9 and verse 3 says this, you have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy. They rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil. And joy is actually a very hard and challenging emotion, so I'm curious if you can remember the last time you felt joy. I feel like that too sometimes.

[3 : 45] For some of you, it might be a recent memory. For some of you, I wouldn't be surprised if it's a hard for you to think, when was the last time I really felt filled with joy? And so that's the question that's before us in this passage. How do we walk in the darkness and also have hope in this world? How do we look clearly at what's going on in this world and also take hold of joy, true joy, as we wait for Jesus' return? It's with that that I'm going to invite you to turn with me in God's word.

We're going to be in Isaiah chapter 9, starting at verse 1. You can turn in your worship guide. You can turn on your phone. You can turn in your Bible. No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's word. And God tells us that his word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path, which means that God has not left us to stumble alone in the dark, but instead he's given us his word to show us the way to go. And so that's why we read now, starting at verse 1.

But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali. But in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, the Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.

You have multiplied the nation. You have increased its joy. They rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil. For the yoke of his burden and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor you have broken as on the day of Midian. Verse 5. For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder.

In his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end. On the throne of David and over his kingdom to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. Like in the darkness, that your word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. And so we ask that you would do that very thing this morning that you've promised, that as we face the suffering and brokenness and sin and trauma of this world, that you would help us to be able to see that but to see you even more. That we would look to you and the hope that you give us and the promises you've made to us and that that would be what sustains us and upholds us. We thank you that we're upheld and sustained not by our behavior or by our performance, but instead we simply ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

[6 : 56] If you've been with us at Cheyenne Mountain for a while, you've probably been here on a Sunday when Jonathan Clark has preached and Jonathan's the campus minister for our college ministry at UCCS.

Many of you know that I've known Jonathan for a long time. I met him in August of 2014, so it's been over eight years, but it wasn't until this year that we lived in the same city since 2017. So 2017 is when I graduated from seminary. I moved out here. Jonathan was in New Mexico.

Finally this year, he comes back to the spring. So I have this close friend who's joined me again, but I knew that there was a problem, which was that Jonathan's busy and I'm busy, so we might end up never seeing each other, even though we live in the same city and we go back. So we started doing this thing together where every other Wednesday at 6 30, we take Jonathan's dog named Tuna for a walk in Monument Valley Park. And Tuna is a Weimaraner, which means Tuna has a tremendous amount of energy. And so sometimes Jonathan and I just stand there and Jonathan throws a ball and lets his dog get all the wiggles out. And we talk about all sorts of things. Sometimes we run into Mark while he's running there. And recently Jonathan told me, he said this Advent, you know, typically he's a Scrooge, so he doesn't really get into the season of Advent. Christmas is not something he gets really worked up about or excited about, but he said, this Advent's been really different for me. I'm actually filled with this new sense of investment and joy and excitement and anticipation about it. Like this time around, this Christmas, I'm actually here for it. I'm in it for Advent. And so I asked him, I said, what is it that's different this time around? Why is it that you've turned away from your Scrooge ways?

And he said, well, this growing excitement, this investment is because of this. He has an increasing awareness of the brokenness of the world. He has this joy because he's growing in his awareness also of the darkness. He's able to see and celebrate the light more because he understands the heaviness.

And many of you know, Jonathan's mom died earlier this year after a long battle with cancer. By the way, I asked Jonathan's permission to share all this. I don't just, if you share something with me, it's not just going to randomly show up in the sermon. And Jonathan said, you can use anything as a sermon illustration. And I was like, well, that's a pretty dangerous blank check.

[9 : 26] I say all this to say this, that in this world, light and dark go together. There is going to be a time when it's only light, it's going to be a time when there's only joy. It's just not right now. So we have both of those things. And you can hide from the darkness of this world during Christmas, and you can still experience warm and fuzzy feelings. You can hide from darkness and you can still have some sentimental moments. But I'm going to suggest you cannot hide from darkness and experience true and full joy.

That those things actually go together. That's what we see here in Isaiah chapter nine. You remember last week or two weeks ago, we talked about Ahaz and the fact that he didn't trust God. He didn't trust that he was going to be Emmanuel, God with us. And so he needed to turn to this treaty with Assyria in the north. He decided that he was going to fear man rather than fear God, trust man rather than trust God. And so Assyria says, yes, we're going to protect you from these invaders from the north. You don't need to worry about Israel and Syria. And God says to this, what in the world are you doing? I'm the most powerful one. I'm the one who can actually protect you. And as sin always does, there are consequences. And the consequences here fit the crime. Judah falls to Assyria. They become a vassal state to them. That's what happens in the parts that we've skipped from chapter seven and eight. And so God is saying this, you wanted Assyria to protect you. You trusted Assyria more than me. Well, you're going to get more than you bargained for. They're going to do more than protect you. They're going to dominate you.

They're going to do more than rescue you. They're going to oppress you. And so there's going to be a time of darkness for Judah as they face the reality of Assyria ruling them. And in the midst of that, there's going to be this small remnant that we're told about in chapter eight, this small group of people who still continue to trust God and believe in him and hope in him. There's going to be a small number of people who actually do believe God is Emmanuel, God with us. So first we're told that there's going to be this group of faithful people in the midst of Assyrian oppression, and it's also going to be really dark. We get this very bleak picture in chapter seven and eight.

Vines are going to be replaced with briars and thorns. They're going to be people who are desperately hungry, and they're going to just walk around cursing God, stumbling in the dark. In fact, darkness becomes a major theme in Isaiah chapter eight. We're told that they have no dawn.

We're told in another place, they're going to look to the earth, but distress and darkness and the gloom of anguish is what they're going to face. And it's going, things are going to get so bad. In fact, they're going to start dabbling in the occult. It's with that background then, that darkness that God's people are facing because of Ahaz's disobedience, his refusal to believe God and trust in him, that gives us the background to chapter nine, verse one. We come here and say, okay, in the midst of all of this, in the midst of a foreign power that's coming in and ruling and oppressing, in the midst of food shortages and darkness and hopelessness, verse one, but there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time, he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time, he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations, verse two, the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Remember, this is written for people who are living in chapter eight. It's written for those who are God's remnant, who are trying to hold on. Their reality, their current circumstances are filled with darkness. And God says, look, here's what I want you to hang on to. Here's what I want you to hold on to. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. The oppression you're facing will not last forever. The frustration that you feel will come to an end. The anger that you're experiencing will have a resolution.

[13 : 40] Continue to hold on and be my people. Continue to see and face the darkness because you know that the light is coming. And so we have this great statement in chapter eight where Isaiah says, I will wait for the Lord and I will hope in him. And that's what these people are doing.

That's why they have this image in Isaiah chapter nine. Isaiah is giving them, he's speaking about it in the past tense, but he's actually talking about something that's going to happen in the future. And prophets would frequently do this as a way of saying, in a sense, this is so real and so true that it's already happened. And yet you're still looking forward to it. And so this beautiful passage that we have that's read over and over again at Christmas that comes up every Advent is a passage that appears as light in the midst of darkness. It appears as a passage of hope when God's people are tempted to despair. There is here sadness and joy, light and dark. And that's the hope that's given to us in verses six and seven. Now, I'm not going to say everything about this passage this morning because it picks up on some themes that we're actually going to see next week in the week after. The week after, by the way, is Christmas, I think, in Isaiah chapter 11. But I do want us to focus on verses six and seven, and especially verse six. And we're just going to talk for a minute about sadness and joy, darkness and light, because that's what we're meant to see here in Isaiah.

So first of all, I want you to think about the dark, the darkness. You look around, you see rulers in this world who are saying and doing foolish and stupid things. They are making decisions and enacting policies that you know, and you're not even that wise.

You know those things aren't going to end well. They're making decisions that are going to potentially throw away the future of a country or a people or a group or a family. They're choosing the good of one group over another. And the question for us is, what are we going to do with that darkness? Are we going to numb the pain and turn away to a great distraction or addiction?

Are we going to give in to the lie that we're going to be able to turn back the tide of history all by ourselves? Or are we going to look to the light? In the struggle of that situation, we're told, verse 6, this child to be born is a wonderful counselor.

[16 : 34] And that here is talking about this sort of supernatural wisdom and skill and ability that this ruler is going to have. He's going to have wisdom even more than Solomon had. He's going to understand how to resolve every situation and challenge that comes up against the nation. Is there a crisis? When the wonderful counselor's in charge, the nation will leave the crisis better than they entered it. Is there an enemy? That nation's going to be stronger then than they were before.

Everything this wonderful counselor touches turns to gold. That's how wise he is. He's going to have answers that no other man would be able to provide.

He knows exactly what to do in every situation so that people can have life and flourishing. By the way, wonder and wonderful are words that are wildly overused in our current context.

People say all the time, oh, that's wonderful. But wonderful is actually meant to be reserved for something that's so incredible and overwhelming that you hardly know what to do with it. It actually goes beyond what your mind can understand and comprehend. That's the kind of ruler that Jesus is going to be. And so what Isaiah chapter nine is telling us is we look around at the darkness of this world and we see foolish and stupid people in charge. What we're meant to do is not to numb. We're not meant to decide that we're going to fix it all, but we look instead to the wonderful counselor.

And we say, look, there is darkness now. There will not be darkness forever. There is darkness now, but there is hope.

[18 : 20] Maybe the darkness you look at is different than the darkness simply of those who are in charge in this world. Maybe you look at wars and oppression and injustice and you just see how powerful evil is.

It's frightening in the strength that it has. It seems like darkness has captured every position. It seems like the bad guys win most of the time, if not all of the time.

And you also don't know exactly how to respond to this. Do you hide? Do you run away? Do you decide that it's your job to make everything right?

Or, verse six again, do you not just look to the wonderful counselor, but the mighty God. Mighty God here is a warrior term. It's saying this God is really powerful in battle.

There is no enemy this God can't defeat. There is no power that this God is not stronger still. There is no stronghold that this God cannot blow apart.

[19 : 28] When you look around at the powers of evil in this world and you say, I can't imagine anything being able to fix this. This God can.

He is the mighty God. And so we're seeing two sides of the same coin here. He's light in the sense that he's wise, he's wiser than your mind is able to wrap around.

But it's not just that he has this wisdom. He's not just a wonderful counselor. He also has strength and power and dominion and authority. He is also the mighty God. And so as we live in darkness, once again, he's telling us we can face it because we know the light.

We can look at what's most powerful in this world and say, there is something still more powerful. We look at things that are dangerous in this world and we can say, our God is even more dangerous.

No matter what, he is the mighty God. He's powerful enough to defeat any enemy. And so wonderful counselor, mighty God are telling us, hey, we can turn off the part of our brains that worry about the future.

[20 : 45] Because we know how the story ends. We know what the future holds. We can look at the dark because we know the light.

Maybe your darkness is you're living in tension with friends and family members. Maybe you're living in tension with people in this very church, in this room right now. And you wonder what your hope is in the midst of that.

Well, verse six, we're told he's not just the wonderful counselor or the mighty God. We're told he's the everlasting father and the prince of peace.

He is going to bring all tension and conflict to an end. He's going to bring that in a global international scale in the sense that he's going to end all wars. He's going to bring that in an interpersonal and community scale that we're going to have this ability to understand and love and get along with each other that we could not have imagined before.

Personality conflicts are going to become a thing of the past. And so again, as we look and live in the darkness, we can also grab onto and hope on the light. We know these things are not the end of the story.

[22 : 03] There's this quality to Jesus' kingdom that people are actually going to listen calmly to each other. Everyone will always respond all the time and they'll never react.

Because Jesus is the prince of peace. That's the light that we hold onto in the dark. That's the hope that we have in the midst of the mess and imperfection and sin of our families and communities in December 2022.

That's what we hold onto when things are awkward around the dinner table on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day. This is not the end of the story. The prince of peace is coming.

Maybe your darkness is that you feel confused like an orphan alone in a merciless universe. And we're told here, he's not just the prince of peace, but the everlasting father.

He's a parent who will not die. And he will not leave. You might wonder what it means for God to be a parent. Psalm 103 tells us a little bit about it.

[23 : 15] It says that as a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame. He remembers that we are dust. Are you stretched to your breaking point this holiday?

Are you stretched to your breaking point this holiday? We're told that God is the everlasting father, which means he knows that you are only dust, that you're fragile and faltering.

And as a father has compassion on his children, the everlasting father has compassion on you. Wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace.

If you're a homeowner like me, you are well acquainted with the electric panel. And in my house, the electric panel is in the garage.

I don't know where it is. It's in your house. But you know in the electric panel, there's a bunch of circuit breakers. There's all these different switches. So you can turn off different parts of the house and the power that connects to them.

[24 : 39] So I looked at mine this week. I don't look at it very often unless something goes wrong. But it turns out I have a specific switch just for the refrigerator. So my refrigerator is a bigger deal than I realized.

I have one just for the kitchen. I have one just for the basement. But you know if you have a circuit board, your electric panel, you know it has one switch that's more important than all the other switches, right?

Which is the main switch, the master switch. And the master switch turns everything off or it turns everything on. When we think about light in the darkness, as humans, we're tempted to believe that our experience of this world is sort of like an electric panel and we can just turn certain things off.

I don't want to experience darkness. I'll turn off the darkness switch. I don't want to turn off fear. I'm going to turn off the fear switch.

I don't want to be vulnerable or uncomfortable, so I'll turn off that switch. But I'm going to leave on the happiness and the joy and the gladness switches. So I'm only going to experience what's good.

[25 : 46] The problem is that this side of heaven, there is only a main switch. Either you turn it all on or you turn it all off.

You cannot have light without darkness. You cannot have joy without pain. If you numb yourself to one thing, you have numbed yourself to all things.

We have Jesus as our light in the darkness. We face the light and we face the darkness. All of us have different ways of trying to make life work apart from Jesus.

All of us have ways of avoiding the uncomfortable emotions and memories that we don't want to face. That's how addiction happens, by the way. Isaiah 9 is saying this.

Face the darkness with this strategy. Turn it all on. Because Jesus can be your joy and your light. Face the darkness and look to him in the midst of it.

[26 : 55] Face the violence in this world and then look to the Prince of Peace. Face the injustice in this world and the fact that those who are in charge are foolish and look to the wonderful Counselor and the mighty God.

Face what is happening that seems out of control and remember that he is your everlasting Father. That's how you turn on the main switch.

You can think about it like this way. Maybe you're a parent with a young child and you take them out to the beach and it's a sunny day and they can't quite look up and open their eyes because the sun is so bright.

And so what do you do as that parent? Well, if you're in a great situation, you have sunglasses on hand. And so you can put those glasses on the child and say, look, now you're able to face what you have to face.

Isaiah 9 gives us the hope and confidence that we need to be able to face the darkness of this world. God has given us his sunglasses so that we can open our eyes and move forward.

[28 : 06] That's the hope that we have here. Isaiah chapter 9 is not some sentimental reminder in the midst of a happy and warm existence, but instead it's something for God's people to hold on to in the midst of darkness and suffering.

Finally, I want you to notice not just what it says in chapter 9, but I also want you to notice what it doesn't say. Notice what it doesn't say in verse 2. It does not say, Note, Note, They have seen a great light.

On them a light has shone. It does not say, The people walking in darkness read a great self-help book so they were able to drown their negative thoughts and can finally experience joy.

No, verse 3, it says, You have multiplied the nation. You have increased its joy. They rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest and are glad when they divide the spoil.

God is the one who's turning on the lights. God is the one providing his people with joy. And of course, that's the message of Christmas, that we are not powerful enough to save ourselves.

[29 : 30] We are not competent enough to turn on the lights. We are not good enough to fill ourselves in this world with joy. We are people who are helpless in need. We are in Isaiah, but I'll remind you of the gospel of Mark.

Need is the price of admission. Of course, we see most of all in Jesus' death and resurrection, the way he comes and meets his people in the darkness, the way that he turns on the lights.

This hope that he provides them in Isaiah chapter 9 is possible because this wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting father, and prince of peace is going to become the prince of peace by laying down his life.

He is going to take the punishment that we deserve so that it will come to an end once and for all and we can live in his kingdom with him forever. And finally, we're told in verse 7, in case we miss the point, the zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Not the zeal of God's people being full of energy and whipping themselves up into a frenzy. Not the zeal of working harder, but the zeal of the Lord of hosts.

[30 : 44] It's God who's going to come and rescue his people. It's God who's going to give them hope in the dark light in despair. When we talked about Isaiah chapter 9, I ended by telling you about what had happened, the two towers, the battle of Helm's Deep, which is near the end of the movie, but not the full end.

After that's finished, we see Frodo and Sam and they're thinking about the darkness that's behind them and the darkness that's ahead. And of course, it feels and looks overwhelming, even in the movie itself, the light is low, so you can feel and sense the darkness that they're facing.

And Sam finally encourages Frodo with these words. It's like in the great stories, Mr. Frodo, the ones that really mattered, full of darkness and danger they were.

And sometimes you didn't want to know the end because how could the end be happy? How could the world go back to the way it was when so much bad had happened? But in the end, it's only a passing thing, this shadow.

Even darkness must pass. A new day will come. And when the sun shines, it will shine out the clearer. Those were the stories that stayed with you.

[31 : 58] That meant something, even if you were too small to understand why. But I think, Mr. Frodo, I do understand. I know now. Folks in those stories had lots of chances of turning back, only they didn't.

They kept going because they were holding on to something, that there is some good in this world and it's worth fighting for. Jesus tells us there's not some good in this world.

There's ultimate good in this world. There is a wonderful counselor, a mighty God, an everlasting father and a prince of peace.

Of the increase of his government and peace, there will be no end. On the throne of David and over his kingdom to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore, the zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we thank you that you are the God who does shine a light in the dark. We ask that you would do that for us this season, that you would show us the wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace, and that he would be our hope and our confidence as we walk in a world filled with darkness, that we would look to him as our light.

[33 : 18] And we ask all of these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ, amen. I invite you to stand for our closing hymn. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.