

Christmas And The Promise Of Peace  
By Rev. Sharon Lee MacArthur  
For Berkeley Chinese Community Church • December 25, 2016

ISAIAH 9:2, 6-7

<sup>2</sup> \*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.

<sup>6</sup> For a child has been born for us,  
a son given to us;  
authority rests upon his shoulders;  
and he is named  
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
<sup>7</sup> 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 onwards and for evermore.  
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

LUKE 2:1-14

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

<sup>8</sup> In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.  
<sup>9</sup>Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them,  
and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup>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: <sup>11</sup>to you is born this day in the city of David a  
Saviour, who is the Messiah,\* the Lord. <sup>12</sup>This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped  
in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.' <sup>13</sup>And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of  
the heavenly host,\* praising God and saying,  
<sup>14</sup> 'Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace among those whom he favours!'

\*\*\*\*\*



- Isaiah describes a people who were walking in the darkness...
- they lived in a land of deep darkness
- some of us may feel like people in the darkness *now*
- some of us may feel like we are living in a land of deep darkness *now*.
  
- But these words of Isaiah were for the ears of a people 700 years before the birth of Jesus!
- Hmmmm It seems that nothing has changed!
- Back then – the people were facing the Assyrian crisis – people were living in fear!
- Imagine! The whole land - living in fear!
  
- And even in those dark times, Isaiah declares that these same people have seen a great light...
  - on them light has shined...
  - for a child has been born -
  - Wonderful Counselor,
  - Mighty God,
  - Everlasting Father,
  - Prince of Peace...



- Prince of Peace!
- there it is - the promise of peace -
- God speaking through Isaiah...
- there will be peace.
  
- Hmmmm - what happened?
- Nothing Changed!
- What happened to the promise of peace?
- 700 years later Luke tells the amazing story of how Jesus came into being
- of how ordinary folks like shepherds heard about his birth
- of what this would mean for the world.
  - remember?



- suddenly there was a bunch of angels praising God
- 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!'
- There it is again - the promise of peace –
- this time 700 years after Isaiah and over 2,000 years ago!
- Well – what happened? Nothing changed. Where's the peace?
- After all these miracles – nothing changed!
- God did some pretty improbable stuff...
- God talked an unwed teenage betrothed girl into birthing a very special baby
- God talked her fiance in to raising this child.
- God dispatched angels to talk to the shepherds in the fringes of the cities
- God's messengers told them about this special child who will bring peace...
- Even with the such good news, the shepherds were full of fear...

- But they went to Bethlehem
- they, their fear and their sheep –



- and they met the Savior.
- And nothing changed.
- The sheep still needed tending.
- Life continues and does not stop to nurture a growing, squirmy baby even if the baby is Jesus.
- Where's the peace?
  
- And now – 2,000 years later –
- Has nothing changed? Really?
- But today is Christmas!
- Maybe Christmas can give us new eyes to see things differently



- Our world continues along its path,
- BUT God is born again into the world and into our hearts,
- THAT changes everything!
- WE are the followers of this helpless child in the manger, this Jesus,
- WE are the ones challenged and called to change everything.

- We might prefer a God who crashes into the world and zaps all of creation into shape



- We might prefer a God who drops into the Christmas stocking of the world the promised peace



- BUT that's not how it works, folks!



- Nothing changes because we are the ones called to BE the change.
  - God coming into our world and in us has no meaning unless we continue the work of Christmas.



- Remember - God comes to us not with power and authority but in the helplessness of a baby;
- The work of Christmas is our work.
  - The work of changing and transforming our world is ours to fulfill...



- The work of welcoming the outcast living on the edges and margins...
- the work of bringing good news of great joy to all the world...
- We are called to proclaim the transformative power of love in action.
- We are the ones who must love our enemies,
- We are the ones who must turn the other cheek,



- And to bless those who curse us,
- and to love without boundaries.
- We are the ones who are called to visit the prisoners
- And feed the homeless,
- and welcome the stranger.
- And yes - Nothing changes, except everything changes
- with Christmas
- with Jesus/God born in ua.
- And yes - peace cannot happen without our making it happen.
- And yes - Now more than ever does our world need Christmas,
- Now more than ever our world needs the followers of Jesus to proclaim, not in words but in action God's favor, God's hope, God's love.
- Our world needs Christmas not just today but every day.

- God has work to do in this world;
- it is not enough that we be just and righteous,
- it is not enough that we walk with God;
- it is not enough that we gather and say good things about Jesus in our beautiful places of worship.
- God needs us.
- yes - US – even though we are worried and tired and terrified,
- US - the broken messengers with a living message.
- WE are called to go out into the messy, dirty and uninviting places of this world
- We are called like the shepherds of 2,000 years ago to tell of the Good News.
- We are called go out to serve the ones forgotten and counted as nothing, because in serving them we serve Christ.
- God comes into our world and nothing happens without us.

Howard Thurman says it beautifully...

“When the song of the angels is stilled,  
 When the star in the sky is gone,  
 When the kings and princes are home,  
 When the shepherds are back with their flock,  
 The work of Christmas begins:

To find the lost,  
 To heal the broken,  
 To feed the hungry,  
 To release the prisoner,  
 To rebuild the nations,  
 To bring peace among people,  
 To make music in the heart.”[2]

Come, the work of Christmas awaits...the promise of peace is just ahead.  
 Amen.