



About this time each year we hear some poetic words from the Old Testament that put us in a Christmas-frame-of-mind. Consider this verse from Isaiah, whom some have called the Christmas Prophet: “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 Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” (9:6). It’s hard not to feel better when we hear that, especially this time of year. Everybody likes the sound of peace.

Of course, the notion of peace seems to evaporate swiftly before the harsh light of current events. The largest European war since the end of WWII continues to ravage Ukraine with no sign of abating. Over in the land of Jesus’ birth, diplomats urge a “two-state solution” amid a crisis that seems to defy reason, hope, or at present (God help us) any negotiated solution. One can almost sympathize with those who want to stop listening to the news, if only to celebrate the fleeting “peace” of Christmas before getting back to the messiness of the world as we know it.

But I think it might be insightful this year to hear those words from Isaiah in their actual context:

“the people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder. For as in the day of Midian’s defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. For all the boots of the trampling warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. 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 Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever” (9:2-9).

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One notices right away that the red trimming that Christmas scripture is blood – and one can certainly hear the trampling boots of warriors and the cries of the innocent echoing in the turmoil of our world today. The truth is, we who look for the coming of the Prince of Peace should probably be the last to ever be accused of tuning out the world's pain and disorder at this time of year. Instead, it's our job to proclaim to the nations that we are all still very much in need of a Savior – and one who will come into our warring, sinful world exactly the way it is, in order to show it what in God's time it will become.

I count that good news for each of us – because goodness knows there are anxieties and old wounds that we carry, areas of frustration and pain in our lives into which we really don't expect Jesus to show up this year.

Perhaps we might do well to reflect: where in our lives do we most need a Savior to come? What burdens do we carry that we most need the Prince of Peace to take upon his wide, carpenter's shoulders? Advent can be just the right time for such reflection. I hope that in our worship, among our many classes, studies and small groups, and by means of our new Advent devotional, you may yet discern some dawning light piercing the deep shadow cast by our inhumanity to one another.

*~ Pastor Dave*

