

Sermon

“The light that continues to shine”

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer.” Amen.

Today we heard Isaiah’s proclamation of a great light, and we also heard Luke’s story of the birth of Christ. Both readings speak into real human history, into real human struggle, and into the political realities of their time. The readings do not demonstrate that the Bible is trying to endorse a party or a leader, but show that God’s love is always concerned with the world as it actually is.

Isaiah does not begin with celebration, but with a statement: *“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.”* Isaiah wrote during a time of fear, invasion, and political instability. Borders were uncertain, leaders were worried, and ordinary people lived with the weight of decisions made far above them. Isaiah did not pretend the situation was otherwise. He spoke honestly of darkness because only then can the light be fully seen.

In our time, we too know something of that darkness as we live with uncertainty in our world, with tensions in our communities, with a constant flow of news that can overwhelm and divide. We feel the impact of political decisions over which we have little influence. And yet into this very world, Isaiah dares to say: *“A light has shone.”*

And Luke does something similar. He places Christmas in the real world. The nativity narrative does not begin with angels but with politics. Verse 1 states: *“In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus...”*

A census ... government orders ... the machinery of empire. A heavily pregnant Mary and her husband Joseph were on the road from Nazareth to Bethlehem because of political decisions made in a distant palace in Rome. Mary and Joseph were pushed by the weight of power, just as ordinary people have always been pushed. Thus, Luke reminds us that Christ was not born into a peaceful, ideal world but into a pressured and complicated one.

That is why Christmas is good news. God does not wait for perfect conditions. He comes into the world as it really is, and into our lives as they really are.

The Isaiah passage announces titles that sound political and royal – *Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace*. These were not sentimental words. Rather, they were promises of a ruler unlike any other – a king who would not rule through fear, pride, or violence, but through justice and righteousness.

And then Luke shows us the astonishing fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy! This promised king arrives not in a palace, but in a manger. Not with soldiers, but with shepherds. Not in strength, but in vulnerability.

Yes, Jesus is a king, but his kingdom is of an entirely different character. He rules not by decree but by compassion. Not by force but by self-giving love. Not by intimidation but by peace.

In a world where politics often divides and wounds, the peace of Christ heals and restores. The angels proclaimed a peace that no empire, ancient or modern, has ever fully achieved. The angels proclaimed: *"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!"* This is not the kind of peace enforced by might, nor the fragile peace of temporary agreements, but a peace born of God's presence, a peace that can settle anxious hearts.

Many of us may carry worries today: family tensions, financial strains, uncertainty about the future, concerns about our communities and our nations. Christmas reminds us that Christ comes not to increase our fear but to quiet it. Not to take away every challenge but to walk with us through them. Christmas invites us to rest in the God who is with us and to trust that Christ's peace is stronger than the noise around us. Christ brings a peace that no government can legislate and no turmoil can take away.

Christmas brings a hope that belongs to everyone. The angel declared to the shepherds: *"Good news of great joy for **all** the people."* In a world where people are often sorted into groups—insiders and outsiders, winners and losers, us and them—Christmas

breaks down every dividing wall. The shepherds were ordinary folk, working-class labourers living on the margins. And yet they were the first to hear heaven's song.

Christmas is God saying to every person from every background, every station, every story – “You matter to Me. You are included. You are beloved.” This is the politics of the kingdom of God. It's a widening circle of grace!

The angel declared to the shepherds *“Good news of great joy for all the people.”* And several centuries earlier, Isaiah had said: *“The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.”* God's salvation does not depend on the rise and fall of leaders or the balance of political forces. The wideness of God's mercy is for every person—poor or rich, weary or joyful, certain or searching. Christmas expands our hearts. It reminds us that anyone and everyone can draw near to the manger.

And the shepherds show us how to respond. They receive the message. They go to see. They find the Messiah. And then they return “glorifying and praising God.” Their response is simple and deeply missional as they carry the light they have seen back to the people with whom they share their everyday lives.

This is what Christmas invites us to do as well. We cannot fix every system or solve every political tension. But we can bear Christ's light wherever we go – in our families, our conversations, our communities, our prayers, our everyday acts of kindness and justice. This is how the kingdom of God grows. It grows quietly, faithfully, person by person.

Isaiah's world was dark. Luke's world was troubled. Our world has its own shadows. But the message of Christmas has not changed. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. A child is born. A Son is given. And He shall be called Prince of Peace. This is our comfort. This is our hope. This is our joy today and always. Amen.