

Christmas means different things to different people. My earliest recollections of Christmas revolve around family; presents, Christmas trees, lights and ornaments, and these are still an important part of Christmas for me today. In my heart, I always hoped for snow on Christmas, and there were a couple of years when we had a white Christmas in Kentucky. Today, I look forward to the light in my grandchildren's eyes, the love expressed in giving and receiving, and I enjoy spending quality time with family and friends.

Today Christmas is so commercialized that, to many, the season is all about making money, or having to work extended hours. In order to try to be all-inclusive, and politically correct, retailers try to leave Jesus out of the picture, so as not to offend non-believers. The other day Debby came home from Target and said she saw little Buddhas being sold as Christmas tree ornaments. What's wrong with this picture?

In our hearts, however, most of us understand that Christmas is all about celebrating the coming of the Christ, and the relationship we enjoy with God because of His sacrifice for our sins. For this reason, tonight we will take a brief break in our study of the book of Acts to reflect upon a prophecy of the one who was to come, who came, and who is coming again. Please read along with me, Isaiah 9:6-7.

The book of Isaiah is rich in content. It reveals the social, political, and historical context for much of the Old Testament. Using passages from Isaiah provides a strong apologetic for the accuracy and reliability of the Bible, as we see the exact fulfillment of many of Isaiah's prophecies in the other writings of the Old Testament as well as the New.

Much of the book serves as a warning to the Israelites to turn back to God in order to escape God's righteous judgment. But, the writer follows the warnings with promises of a future date when God will make all things right again, as he restores God's people, and rules over them. What we reflect upon the most at this time of year are those passages that point to the coming Messiah, Jesus the Christ.

Isaiah means Yahweh's salvation or Yahweh is salvation. Written about 700 years before Jesus' birth, we recognize a partial fulfillment of our passage this evening in the birth of Jesus Christ, whose birthday we celebrate at Christmas time. More than anything else, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Isaiah wrote to give Israel, and us, the hope of a Messianic Kingdom to come. The Messiah will rule and reign on David's throne, in a kingdom established upon justice, and righteousness.

When we read the words, "For to us a child is born, to us a Son is given," we envision the manger scene as it is recorded in Luke chapter two. " (Read Luke 2:1-20)

Isaiah 9:6 continues with the words, "and the government will be on his shoulders." The government in the day of Isaiah was corrupt, incompetent, and godless. Aren't you glad it's not like that today? By contrast, Messiah will govern in righteousness and all godliness. He will rule over God's people and the whole world.

This phrase has been a source of confusion for many. The Jews missed their Messiah, in part, because Jesus did not become the great political leader that they expected during His earthly ministry. They thought that Messiah would fulfill all of the prophecies about Him at the time of His coming. They failed to see the full extent of the time frame covered in this prophecy.

There is a sense, on a spiritual level, that what God promised has already been accomplished. We just haven't fully realized it yet in the physical realm. That's why we live in faith, and hold on to the promises of what is yet unseen. The total effect of this statement will not

be fully realized until the time when Christ sets up the Millennial Kingdom here on earth. Until that time, we will continue to deal with corruption and godlessness in government, but we live in the hope of the day when Jesus will reign as King of Kings, and Lord of Lord's, over all of the earth.

Notice that in the remainder of verse 6 we have a powerful image of the Trinity. Mighty God is revealed to us as Wonderful Counselor, as Everlasting Father, and the Prince, or Son, of Peace. Let's look at each of these individually.

He will be called Wonderful Counselor. In that day people will gladly listen to Jesus, because they will know that He is the One with all wisdom and authority. We will all sit at Jesus feet, anxious to hear His teachings about God's ways. Today, believers enjoy the presence of the Holy Spirit who is called the Counselor in the New Testament. The writers of the New Testament reveal the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of God, and at the same time, the Spirit of Christ Jesus. When a person first believes, he or she is sealed with the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit we enjoy the very presence of God who teaches us, warns us, gifts us and encourages us. He gives us wisdom and discernment for life and ministry. But there is a day coming, when Christ returns, when God will be with us physically as well as spiritually, and we will know Him as the Wonderful Counselor.

Notice too that Messiah will be called Mighty God. This verse equates Jesus with God. When Jesus came the first time, God took on flesh, and allowed His fullness to dwell in human form. When Jesus comes again, he will return as God in the flesh. This is in keeping with the entirety of the biblical record, and the doctrine of the trinity. There is One God, who has revealed Himself in three distinct persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Each member of the Godhead is fully God, but there is only one God, not three.

When Jesus returns, people will know Him as the Everlasting Father. It is hard for us to wrap our minds around the doctrine of the trinity, but it seems to me that we will understand it better in the Millennial Kingdom. We will see and know God as He is. We will see the members of the trinity as one, and we will know Him as Jesus Christ our Savior.

We are also told that we will call Him the Prince of Peace. A prince is the Son of the King, and the heir of the Father. As the Trinitarian language continues, let us focus on the attribute given to the returning Christ as the Prince of Peace. Regardless of what you might believe about the timing of the events of the last days, I think that almost everyone would agree that Jesus' return will usher in a season of peace.

Right up until His return, the world, and its people, will dissipate, spiritually, in a downward spiral. There will be an increase in wickedness, and lawlessness. In this world there will be trouble, but Jesus said take heart, I have overcome the world. The bible reveals that it will be particularly troublesome for Israel. Her enemies will surround her, and her condition will appear to be hopeless. At that time Jesus will intervene and defeat Israel's enemies. I believe we, who are Christians will return with Him, with glorified bodies, to serve the Lord and the people, both Jew and Gentile, who will survive the outpouring of God's wrath. At that time God will usher in a season of peace, and God's Son, the Messiah, will provide and keep the peace for a thousand years. This is why He will be called the Prince of Peace.

He will reign on David's throne, from Jerusalem. He will establish His kingdom forever, and the zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this. The questions we have to ask ourselves are, "Do I believe what the word of God promises?" Do I believe that Jesus is God in the flesh? Do I believe that He came to offer Himself as a sacrifice for my sins? Do I believe that through faith in Jesus Christ, I have the assurance of eternal life with Him? Do I believe that He is

coming again? Am I truly thankful that God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life? If we say yes to these questions, Christmas take on a meaning that the lost world cannot understand.

Christmas is just over a week away. Most of us will be making preparations, and enjoying fellowship with family, and friends. We most likely will follow certain traditions in our families as to how we celebrate. Perhaps we will watch a favorite Christmas movie, or fill our homes with Christmas music. There will be Christmas trees, lights, and presents. Hopefully there will be joy in all of our hearts. But regardless of what the world may say, let us remember that Christmas is first and foremost about Jesus.

At Christmas we celebrate the birth of God's Son, who is the Savior of the world. In the birth of Christ we see the fulfillment of God's promises, which gives us certainty about the fulfillment of promises not yet fully realized. It is a time of reflecting on God's love, our relationship with Him, and all the blessings that He brings to our lives.

Christmas is really all about Christ, and it is a celebration of born again believers. It is a time to reflect upon the depth of God's love, and the wonders of His grace. So I say, go ahead and enjoy the holidays. Do all the things you love to do this time of year, but don't forget to keep the main thing, the main thing. Enter the season with joy, and thanksgiving. Don't be afraid to speak the name of Jesus in your celebrations. Use this time for you and your family to grow closer in your relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

I realize that a person who has never surrendered his or her life in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ cannot understand, or enjoy, the true meaning of Christmas. But there is no reason why it has to be that way. If there is anyone here who wants to know Jesus as Savior and Lord, all you have to do is to pray from your heart, something like this:

Lord Jesus, my sin is ever before you, and I want to confess and turn away from my sin. I am turning to you. I believe you are God in the flesh, and that you died, taking the punishment I deserve, so that I might be forgiven and have eternal life. From this day forward, I trust you. Lord Jesus, come into my heart and save me. Take control of my life so that I can live for you, and know you personally, and intimately.

If you will do that, this will be the most meaningful Christmas of your life. And for everyone, from Debby and I, and from the bottom of our hearts, we want to wish you all a very Merry Christmas, and a Jesus filled New Year.