

**Southport Presbyterian Church**  
**Rev. Jim Capps**  
**December 8-9, 2007**

**Expecting the Light**  
**Isaiah 9:1-7**

In the early Fall, I received one of the sweetest birth announcements. It came from a young couple I had married a while back and now they have given birth to their first child, a daughter, Katelyn Rose.

The announcement gave all the wonderful information- her name, the date and time of her birth, her weight and length. What made this announcement so special was the picture of Katelyn in a beautiful dress, with a head band with a bow and one of the sweetest looks of contentment you would ever want to see. As you might expect, I melted when I received it and even showed it to some of the women in our office on our Southview Campus.

I always enjoy getting birth announcements. They come in all shapes and sizes expressing wonderful news and great joy.

Today, I want for us to look at one of the most special birth announcements ever delivered to any one at any time. What is really unique about this birth announcement is that it is written and sent some 700 years before the birth of the baby. It is written at a very dark and difficult time in the history of the recipients. That birth announcement caused a discouraged group of exiles to find hope in the child who would be born. Even though their times were dark, they were expecting the Light.”

Please follow along with me as I read from Isaiah 9:1-7.

**The birth of this baby will turn darkness and gloom into light and celebration.**

The Prophet Isaiah writes this birth announcement at a very difficult time. After King David’s reign when Israel was at her zenith, there was jealousy and infighting until the land was divided into the Northern Kingdom called Israel and the Southern Kingdom called Judah.

Isaiah mentions that Zebulun and Naphtali, both a part of the Northern Kingdom up around Galilee, have been humbled. The Assyrians under Tiglath-Pileser III have conquered and plundered them, sending many of their people into exile. The last two verses in the previous chapter give us a good idea of what they are going through. Isaiah 8:21-22:

“Distressed and hungry, they will roam through the land; when they are famished, they will become enraged and, looking upward, will curse their king and their God. Then they will look toward the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom, and they will be thrust into utter darkness.”

It is into this setting of darkness, desperation, and deprivation that this birth announcement comes. It will be as if they were walking in the darkness of a pitch black night and all of the sudden a light has been turned on.

The gloom and doom of defeat will be turned to celebration and joy. Isaiah mentions two kinds of joy about which they were very familiar. It would be like the joy

of a harvest and the joy of an overwhelming victory when the victors divided the spoils of conquest.

To try to help them get the picture of what he was talking about, it would be like the time that Gideon with his small band of men utterly defeated the powerful Midianites. It meant that they would no longer be under the heavy rule of the enemy. When the vanquished would become the victors, there would no longer be a need for the weapons and the uniforms of warfare.

For just a moment, try to imagine what incredibly good news this would be. All was not lost for ever. There was hope! That hope would come because of the birth of this new child.

This son to be born would set up a new government or kingdom. The weight of it would rest easily upon His shoulders

For the Hebrew people, names were descriptive of who the baby would really become. As he refers to these names, G. Ernest Wright gives us insight into their glorious meaning for them:

“Wonderful Counselor refers to him who is all-wise in his plans and purposes.

Mighty God refers to the Lord as a great warrior who cannot be defeated.

Everlasting Father refers to his fatherly relation to and care for his people.

Prince of Peace refers to more than God’s purpose to maintain a world without war. The Hebrew word for peace includes the concept of a harmonious and wholesome existence.”

Isaiah goes on to predict that this baby who will be born will set up a kingdom that will grow and become something above and beyond what any one could dream. Unlike earthly kingdoms, it will have no end. This kingdom will be built solidly on the foundation set by Israel’s greatest king, King David.

Finally, just to make certain that everyone knows that it is not by the whim or the fancy of some earthly individual that all of this happens, Isaiah says, “The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.” This prophetic birth announcement, sent 700 years before the child was born, could only be accomplished by God.

For just a quick moment, imagine how those first recipients of these words must have felt. Even in the murky gloom of the darkest night, there was hope as they expected the light.

### **Jesus came as the fulfillment of Isaiah’s birth announcement.**

Not only did Jesus grow up and began His ministry in the northern part of Israel where the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali had lived, He spent most of His ministry in that area called the “Galilee of the Gentiles.” It was the least religious, most secular part of Israel where there were lots of people who were far from God.

Jesus came as the self-avowed Light of the world. As John’s Gospel states in the Prologue, in 1:4-5, “In Him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.” Jesus is still bringing light into our dark world today.

Jesus came as the fullest expression of joy possible. Even more than the joy of the harvest and the joy of a great military victory, Jesus brought the joy of the resurrection. The final enemy of death has been once and for all conquered. Wonder of wonders,

because of the resurrection of Jesus, funeral services when we say “good bye” to people we love, have become joyful celebrations.

In a way beyond our deepest understanding, Jesus has become the names given to Him in the birth announcement. He is the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace all rolled up into one. He is still accomplishing these functions in our world and lives today.

Jesus’ kingdom is still expanding and growing in a marvelous way in the world in which we live. In fact, as I have said in the past, with phenomenal growth of Christianity in the past few years in places like South America, Africa, and Asia, the center of the faith is no longer in the Western world.

Great King David’s Greater Son reigns over our world in a more comprehensive way than ever before, bringing justice and righteousness to an often ruthless, immoral world. Praise God! King Jesus reigns!

All of this has happened not by the cunning strategy of some denomination or the World Council of Churches or any other coalition of human minds. The zeal of the Lord Almighty has accomplished this in spite of us, not because of us!

With all of that said, the Kingdom of God heralded by the birth of Jesus, is not yet complete. There is still pain, suffering, warfare, and brokenness. We are still praying, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” We are still awaiting the return of Jesus when He will set up a complete and perfect kingdom. We are still expecting the light.

## **Application**

While we certainly live at a different time in history, we live in a world filled with all kinds of gloom and darkness. We were all shaken earlier this week when we heard the news that a troubled young man in suburban Omaha opened fire on a department store filled with Christmas shoppers and killed 8 people before taking his own life. Can you imagine the darkness of grief and despair that his family and the families of the people killed must feel?

I saw in the news this week that the Indiana Army Reserve will have its largest call up in many years for deployment the first part of January. Not long ago I married one of those young men who will be sent to Iraq for a year. He and his wife are expecting a baby in the spring. Can you imagine the sense of fear and anxiety?

Our city has been shocked by the death of a three-year-old who was beaten to death by her mother and her boyfriend. We feel a collective sense of anger and sadness as we consider something like that happening so close to home in a culture that is supposed to be civilized.

Each one of us could cite situations in our lives that are reasons for pain and discouragement- Problems in the family or at work; a difficult diagnosis; an addiction; a divorce; broken relationships; aging; being misunderstood by people you love; and the list goes on and on.

Dear friends, in the midst of our personal as well as collective darkness, we can look back on that birth announcement given by Isaiah so many years ago, “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned.”

Several times this week I have heard people talk about how this One who came as the Light of the world has in fact driven back the darkness in their lives. I'm not talking theory, I'm talking about experience.

Chuck Colson tells the story of meeting with president Borja of Ecuador to discuss the possibility of Prison Fellowship ministering in Ecuador's penitentiaries. No sooner had the conversation started when the President interrupted Colson to tell the story of his imprisonment before he was elected.

Being caught in the struggle for democracy in Ecuador, the military cracked down and he was thrown into prison. Without a trial, Borja was thrown into a cold dungeon that had no light and no window. For three days he endured the solitary fear and darkness that can drive a person mad.

Just when the situation seemed unbearable, the huge door opened, and someone crept into the darkness. Borja heard that person working on something in the opposite corner. Then the figure crept out, closed the door, and disappeared.

A few moments later the room suddenly blazed with light. Someone, perhaps taking his life into his own hands, had connected the electricity to the broken light fixture. Borja explained, "From that moment my imprisonment had meaning because at least I could see."

Even more important than the light we see with our eyes is the light that Christ brings to our hearts, giving our lives understanding and meaning only He can give.

C. S. Lewis captures that idea well when he writes, "I believe in Christianity as I believe the sun has risen, not only because I see by it but because by it I see everything else."

Dear friends, in this season of Advent when we await the celebration of the birth of Jesus and look forward to His Second coming, I challenge you to believe that He can bring light into the darkness of your life. Open the door to your mind and heart and let the Light shine in, driving back the darkness. You can move from expecting the Light to experiencing the Light, right now, today.

As long as we live here on this earth, there will be darkness. It's part of the human predicament. Jesus came to be the light in our darkness.