



Sunday, December 25, 2022

Sunday Sermon: Pastor John VanderWindt

Scripture: Isaiah 7:10-17, 9:2-7 Luke 2:25-40

Sermon: An Invitation to Heaven's Home

Hello. It is so good to be with you on Christmas day and we thank the people who are at home watching. Together, we gather to celebrate the Lord's birth. In many ways, it's great that we get to celebrate it on a Sunday, on a day of celebration also of the Lord's resurrection.

Today, we're going to look at a number of verses from Isaiah, and then some verses from Luke. We're going to see how God has said in the past, "Here is what is going to happen. Here is who I am." Then in Luke, we will read about Simeon, who has been waiting, and now understands the salvation of the Lord. So we're going to go through three different passages.

We will first turn to Isaiah 7, then we'll jump over to Isaiah 9, and then we'll jump over to Luke 2. We'll take each of these individually and you'll see at the end, how they're also connected. Before we begin, let us ask God for an opening of our hearts as we look at His Word and what He has to say to us. Join me in prayer.

Dear Lord, we come to You now as we open Your Word. Lord, you have spoken through the prophets of old. You have informed us about the birth of your Son. Lord, today, as we look at these verses, we pray that you will speak to our hearts, that we may hear anew and be refreshed in the glory of Your name, and in the glory of your gift that we celebrate on Christmas. Lord, I pray that the word spoken today may be of you and that nothing of me may come out, but Lord, that we may be formed and molded by your Spirit. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Isaiah 7. You will see on the top of your Bibles, it may say, "The Sign of Immanuel." This is a well known passage in which we get that term "Immanuel" and we'll talk a little bit about that. And here we have Ahaz, one of the kings, and we have Isaiah who is in communication with him. There is some dialogue in the first number of verses. We're going to pick it up in verse 10.

Isaiah 7:10-17 "10 Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, 11 "Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights." 12 But Ahaz said, "I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test." 13 Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also?"

14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. **15** He will be eating curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, **16** for before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste. **17** The Lord will bring on you and on your people and on the house of your father a time unlike any since Ephraim broke away from Judah—he will bring the king of Assyria.”

Here we have Isaiah saying to Ahaz, "There will be a time in which you will go into captivity." But notice how the passage begins. God says to Ahaz, "Ask for a sign that I am here. Let me know. what you want to see so that I can show to you that I am God and I am here." And Ahaz's reaction is a little bit interesting. He's like, "Well, I'm not going to ask for anything like that from God. I'm not going to ask for a sign because I don't want to put God to the test."

We might think, "Wow, he was being kind of humble in that position." Right? You don't want to challenge God on this. You're just going to accept it. But in many ways that wasn't being humble. That was Ahaz saying, "I don't dare to ask God for something because I know he will respond. If he responds, I need to listen."

Ahaz is being challenged to think about how he should really test God? How does he really come to God with his deepest needs and say, "God, here is what I need from you." Yet God says to Ahaz, "This is what you need to hear." Isaiah responds in **Isaiah 7:13, 13** "Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also?" Isaiah is telling the people, "Look, you test each other. You try each other's patience. Now you are saying when God has asked you to do something, you're not even going there?"

Then a response in the verse which many of us know, **Isaiah 10:14**, "**14** Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign." Isaiah basically said, "Ahaz, God wants to tell you something and you're going to hear it. God wants to meet your deepest needs. God wants to deliver you, and this is how He's going to do it. He says that there will be a virgin, will conceive, and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."

Now in the Old Testament, in Isaiah 7, it says that a virgin will conceive and give birth to a son. In the Hebrew word there for "virgin," it simply means "young maiden of the age of marriage." It is not something which we think of when we think of the word virgin - that they have been celibate up to this time. However, in **Matthew 1:22-23**, it says, "**22** All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: (so this is going back to Isaiah) **23** "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

The Greek word here, which they use for "virgin" is specific to a woman who has been celibate. So here God is already in the Old Testament prepared, and in the New Testament telling us that he is going to perform this miraculous birth so that the child that is born will be both human and divine. God had to implant within Mary via the Holy Spirit, the birth of Christ. Because Jesus is divine.

We could spend a long time talking about what it means that God is fully human and fully divine. But here, we see the aspect where God is saying to Isaiah already, "My Son. The God child will become a human and will come and give you healing."

Then we get the term which is very rarely used, "Immanuel" which as it says in Matthew means, "God with us." Immanuel. Jesus has come to be with us. Think about that for a moment. God has come and He is saying at this point, "There will come a time when I will be present with you." And after Jesus rose, He sent the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit is with us at all times. Immanuel. God with us.

So we have this God who is with us. But what does that mean? What does it mean to have God with us? Who is this God? And for that, we turn to **Isaiah 9:2-7**. It says, "**2** The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. **3** 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. **4** 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.

5 Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. **6** 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. **7** 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. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this."

Just a couple of chapters earlier, Isaiah told Ahaz that he is going to be overthrown, that they are going to go into captivity. And now in chapter nine, he says, "You are walking in darkness. You're in a time of captivity. You are in a place in which people are not freely allowed to worship God."

I think in many ways, we could read Isaiah 9 today. How much of the world today is walking in darkness, in a place where they don't really see God, or maybe even desire to know God? And Jesus says, "I invite you this Christmas to come and be freed from the darkness." And it says in **Isaiah 9:3**, "**3** You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy." Jesus says, "I invite you to be part of the Kingdom of God and celebrate that joy as well."

But who is this Jesus? And so for that we turn to **Isaiah 9:6**. It says, "**6** 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."

Often times when you read this, and even in the NIV, if you look strictly at punctuation, the words "wonderful" and "counselor" are connected. And we often read it that way. Wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. That's the way it should be. Right?

Every one has two words. In actuality, in Hebrew, there is no punctuation. In Hebrew, the term which is used there for "wonderful" is the term "wonder." It is separate. It is not, "He is a great counselor." He is saying, "God is wonderful in and of himself. He is that wonder of wonders."

In Isaiah **29:14**, it says, "**14** Therefore once more I will astound these people with wonder upon wonder." It is that saying in which we claim God to be wonderful in who he is as a person. It goes way beyond just his wisdom. It goes in everything he does. But there's another side to it. And that is the aspect of **our** wonder. Do we wonder about God and want to learn more about Him? God invites us in this Word, to say, "Not only am I wonder upon wonder that I can know all things and do all things, but I invite you to also wonder. I invite you to learn more about me and my traits all the time.

So you may gain a new appreciation for the wonderfulness of God. And part of that is His counsel. He is, of course, that Great Counselor. He is that word which is used to give advice. In the Old Testament and even in today's political realms - all your political leaders and the people they have around them - have a number of people that they would call people who give advice to them. God is saying that Jesus is that person, in and of Himself, who gives out the best advice.

You don't need to seek the advice of all kinds of other people. You can find it in Christ. Your challenges about how to live, Jesus is there. And He answers those challenges. Mighty God. Not only is he able to give that advice, but He is also able to execute it. He is able to achieve anything which He says needs to be done. God is the Mighty God. And this term Mighty God is used just a few times in the Old Testament. It is this aspect of Almighty God. Able to do anything. Everlasting Father.

In the New Testament, when Jesus is asked by His disciples to teach them how to pray, He begins with the phrase, "Our Father." In the Old Testament, they would never dare use the word "Father" for God. They wouldn't even say God's personal name, for fear of misusing His name. And yet here in Isaiah, he is saying that Jesus, being God, will be our everlasting Father, the person with whom shows the greatest compassion. The person to whom we may go with our deepest needs, knowing that His love is so deep that He will grant it to us. He is the everlasting Father.

There is also an aspect here which is used apologetically, in the sense of Everlasting Father which means there is no beginning and there is no end. At the time of Isaiah, they didn't know of the concept of the Trinity yet. But even in this piece, he is showing the parts of the Trinity, and the Father, and the Son being from all eternity. Then it gives that aspect of Prince of Peace.

The Hebrew term here - you know, I think this is one of those places where they should have just left it in Hebrew - is Sar Shalom. It means ruler of peace, ruler of Shalom. Shalom is more than just peace in the sense of, "there is no war or there is no animosity." Shalom is this concept that everything is the way it is supposed to be.

In some ways you could say shalom is this idea of what it was like in the Garden of Eden before sin. Where we lived in the presence of God and dwelt with God. Where God walks with us in the cool of the evening.

Going back to this concept of Emmanuel, God with us, the Prince of Peace is that person who brings us to this place where God is with us. So Isaiah has foretold, "Here's what's going to happen." And then we get Christmas. We get the manger, in which Jesus came as a child to be with us. We often think of the manger piece of that aspect. But as we look at Simeon's response in Luke 2, I want to give you a bit of a different picture.

So as you are finding Luke 2, I'm going to ask Paul if he can bring up the tent that he has provided.



In Luke 2, we have the story of Jesus' birth. We have the story that we saw last night of the angels looking to the shepherds. We also have this concept of God dwelling with us. We have the manger. But oftentimes, we leave the manger alone. God dwells with us and He is constantly with us. In the Old Testament, they had what they called the tabernacle. The tent of meeting. God tabernacles with us. God comes and parks His tent with us. So I want you to think about that as we go to Luke 2.

As we start reading **Luke 2:22-40**, it says, "**22** When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord **23** (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord", **24** and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."

25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. **26** It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. **27** Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, **28** Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

29 "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. **30** For my eyes have seen your salvation, **31** which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: **32** a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel." **33** The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. **34** Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, **35** so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

36 There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, **37** and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. **38** Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

39 When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. **40** And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him."

So Jesus is born. Jesus is brought to the temple to be consecrated. Every firstborn male of a family was brought to the temple and said, "Lord, we are dedicating this child to you." You will notice that it says that they gave a pair of doves or two young pigeons. This speaks directly to the economic situation in which Mary and Joseph found themselves. The offer of dedication was really a lamb. But if you couldn't afford it, if you were poor, you could get away with two pigeons and that would suffice.

So here we have Mary and Joseph, the mother of God, knowing that they are also very poor. God did not birth Himself in a place of wealth, but God said, "I am here for everyone." And so they come. And then we meet this man, Simeon. We don't know very much about this man. We do know that the Holy Spirit was upon him and the Holy Spirit, in some way, revealed to him that he would not die before seeing the Messiah, before seeing the consolation of Israel.

The consolation is that saving grace of Israel, that freedom, that time in which Israel will be consoled, knowing that God was there. We might think, because we jump rather quickly from the Old Testament to the New Testament, that that wasn't really a big deal, right? Oh, this should happen fairly soon.

There's 400 years in between that. 400 years. That puts us back to the 1600's. Imagine if you've been living for the last 400 years in this aspect of, "Someday it'll come." Now Simeon is told that it will come in his lifetime. I'm sure this put him in kind of an awkward position as well, right? That's not something you probably go telling your friends, "Oh, by the way, God told me the Messiah is going to show up before I die."

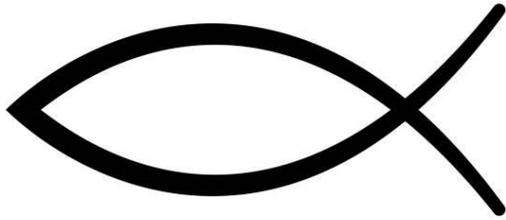
But yet Simeon faithfully waited. He faithfully waited for God to arrive. Each day went to the temple expecting to see God because he knew there would come a time when God would come and be with him and console him. And then he sees the child and he takes him in his arms and says, "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace."

I don't know of any other time where God is saying, "Hey, it's all right to say, 'Okay, now that I've seen this, it's okay for me to die.'" But there is an aspect in Simeon's mind which he says, "I have seen the Lord in the greatest form. I am now ready to be with the Lord for all eternity. I have that peace within me knowing that He is there. Because it says in **Luke 2:30-32**, "**30** For my eyes have seen your salvation, **31** which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: **32** a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel."

It is interesting that Simeon, likely within the upper groupings of the Pharisees and the priests and so on - it is thought that he may have even been the father of Gamaliel, who was the teacher of Paul - Simeon was all about the Jews. And yet he says here, it will be, "... a light to the Gentiles." Simeon understood that God wasn't meant just for the Jews. It was meant for all people.

Then there's a really hard section, for Simeon talks to Mary and says, "Mary, you're going to be blessed. But you need to know your life's not going to be easy. There's going to be pain." He says in **Luke 2:34-35**, "**34** This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, **35** so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

Simeon is telling Mary, "Mary, there's going to be some extremely wonderful times. But Mary, there's going to be extremely hard times as well. There is going to be a time of suffering and pain in which your soul will be pierced." There's an interesting phrase in the middle of that. It says, "... and to be a sign that will be spoken against." How many of you have ever seen a fish on the back of a car?



You know, those little emblems, right? We see the fish. How many of you have seen a fish being eaten by a fish and have it say "Darwin" underneath? That sign of a fish is a sign of Christ. But yet, there are many in the world who will take that sign and speak against it. It is of no consequence that the only faith in which people are allowed socially to abuse the name of God is Christianity. You will hear people swear against Jesus. But have you ever heard anybody swear against Buddha?

Simeon is telling us that when we take up that sign of Christ as a Christian, you'd better be willing and ready for people to speak against you. But you also need to know that you are not there alone. Because Jesus is with you when you are in that place. You will also know that Jesus who came and rose again will return. And we will have a second Christmas, so to speak, in which we will see the kingdom of God be advanced.

So today we think about Christmas and we think about Jesus coming. Even though we know that there won't always be great times, we know that Jesus is with us. Think back to this aspect of Tabernacle, of being with God. Think back to the times for those of you who like to camp out.



You sit by your tent at night. You enjoy the fire, maybe make some s'mores, have a cup of hot chocolate, and just be. Just be. Enjoy the beauty of all the creation around you and marvel at the wonder of God. Christmas is one of the busiest times of the year in which maybe we need to remember when Jesus said, "I am Emmanuel God with you. I have come to put my tent here. I invite you to sit next to me and be. Just enjoy my presence. You don't have to do anything but just be."

That's a mindset. It's not a mindset that we have to leave to our times of vacation. It's a mindset that we can take into every day. That every day can be a day in which we celebrate the gift of Emanuel. The gift of God being with us. In the middle of our busyness, to just pause and say, "Thank you, Lord, that you are here with me."

Max Lucado wrote a children's story called, "The Children of the King." If you've never read it, it's a great one to read. I'll do a spoiler alert and tell you basically what the story is. The story is of a king who goes to a village in which there are five orphan children. These orphan children have been told that the king of the nation is going to adopt them. And so one goes, "Oh man, I've got to learn all I can to do." So he goes away and goes to school. Another one says, "I'm going to impress them with my artistic ability." So they take art classes and they go up in the mountains and they make paintings and everything else.

And another one says, "I'm going to be excellent in music and so I'll take music lessons and do all this kind of stuff." And one by one they go. Except for one little girl. A little girl sits at the gate and she greets people as they come into the village. This man comes on a donkey. She sees that he's tired and she greets him. She says, "What are you here for?" He says, "I'm here on business. I'm here to check out some different things. Will you take care of my horse while I'm gone?" She says, "Absolutely."

So she feeds and grooms the horse and he comes back. She says, "So did you find what you were looking for?" He says, "No. They were too busy for me. They were out doing their art, making their music, doing their studies, working hard on their craft." And she says, "Would you like to sit here for a little bit?" And so he does. He falls asleep and she just sits. He wakes up and he says, "You want to come with me?" She asks, "Where are we going?" He says, "I've got a castle for you. Come home." So the little girl meets the King and goes home with Him.

This Christmas, Jesus is saying to all of us, including myself, "Slow down. Take time for the King. Remember the manger. Sit by the tent and enjoy My presence. The presence of God with us. Emmanuel."

Let's pray. Dear Lord, we thank you for your presence. We thank You, Lord, that you came to adopt us to be your children, that You came on Christmas Day to welcome us into Your family. Lord, may we live in that presence each day. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Transcribed by: *Liza Perry*