

## Sermon Summary for November 28, 2010

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### Isaiah 2:1-5 (English Standard Version)

<sup>1</sup>The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem:  
<sup>2</sup>It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, <sup>3</sup>and many peoples shall come, and say:  
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths."  
For out of Zion shall go the Law and the Word of the LORD from Jerusalem.  
<sup>4</sup>He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.  
<sup>5</sup>O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD.

### WHEN MESSIAH COMES:

## There will be light

Dr. Rob Boyd tells the story about Charlie Stink. As long as he could remember, both friends and strangers had made fun of Charlie's name. His friends kept asking him to have it changed. Finally he went down to the court house and had his name changed. A few days later he saw some of his friends. "What did you change your name to?" they asked. He answered: "'George Stink,' but it hasn't seemed to make any difference."

Well, poor Charlie missed the point of having his name changed. Just like so many people miss the point of Christmas! They think Christmas is a holiday that involves a lot of preparations, parties, and presents. They don't even know why they're celebrating, except that they've always done it before.

Little Joey asked his mom, "Why do people put lights up at Christmas?" She answered: "Because they're celebrating Jesus' birthday." "When was Jesus born?" asked Joey. "On Christmas," answered his mother. "Jesus was born on Christmas?" said Joey, "What a coincidence!"

People like Joey are the reason we have those signs and bumper stickers: "Jesus is the reason for the season." This Advent season we will be looking at some of the memorable prophecies that Isaiah gave concerning the coming of Christ into the world. The first one we could call, "There will be light." Jesus brought a light from God into the world that had never been seen before.

Now if you attended last year's Adult Bible Class on the end times you know something about how the prophets saw the future. Whenever they prophesied about the coming Messiah, it was like they were looking at two mountain ranges, one behind the other. The first one could be described as low mountains or hills. The second one was a range of high and mighty peaks. If you look at two mountain ranges like that from a distance, it will seem like they are right next to each other. Actually, there could be a lot of space between them. So, when the prophets looked at the events surrounding of the coming of Messiah, they saw two mountain ranges. The first one, the lower one, was His first coming. The second, higher range, was His second coming. Many Old Testament prophecies will have glimpses of both the first and the second comings of Christ in the same passage.

Today we live in the valley between the two mountain ranges. We look back at the first coming of Christ, which we celebrate at Christmas. And we look forward to His second coming. That's why Advent is always

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looking two ways: backwards and forwards. The pulpit and altar hangings in our church at Advent are colored royal blue. The King has come! And the King is coming!

In today's lesson, we read: *"He shall judge between nations, and decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nations will not take up sword against nation, nor will they study war anymore. Come, O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord!"*

The first part of this passage is inscribed in the little plaza across First Avenue from the United Nations. What hope must have filled the hearts of the creators of that wall! But, alas, nations are studying war more than ever. But these are not empty words, dear ones. The Day of Peace will come—because the Prince of Peace has been born. So, *"let us walk in the light of the Lord!"*

The same tension is found in the New Testament. The Apostle Paul wrote this to the Roman Christians: *"you know the time—that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. <sup>12</sup> The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light (13:11b-12).* Put on the armor of light! Have you ever thought of that as a Christmas passage?

On May 5, 1942, a group of Jews from the little village of Korolówka in the Ukraine were warned that the Nazis were coming. They decided to hide out in a large cave. Thirty-eight people, ranging in age from a toddler to a 75-year-old woman, created a home underground. They brought in some lanterns, cooking pots, firewood and food. There was a spring in the cave, so they had plenty of water. They covered the mouth of the cave with brush and debris. No one came out during daylight hours. Finally, on April 12, 1943, 344 days after they first entered, they heard the news that the Germans had retreated from the Russian army.

Imagine what it was like for those cave dwellers to come out into the sunlight for the first time in almost a year. How the sun must have been both painful and wonderful! It reminds me of Isaiah's famous words, *"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them has the light shined"* (9:2). That's what finding the real meaning of Christmas is like; it's like coming out of deep darkness into beautiful light.

North and South Korea are in the news nowadays. Travelers have described what it is like flying over Korea at night. The North is dark, with only a small light here and there. The South is speckled with brightly lit cities, shining like jewels. This is only a fact of geography, but it also illustrates that darkness in the Bible is a symbol for sin and evil; and light is a symbol for grace and love. North Korea is a dark and oppressed land, where believers are immediately jailed or even put to death when they are discovered. South Korea is home to some of the largest Christian churches in the world.

That's why I love Christmas lights, even when the people don't know why they're putting them up. The lights themselves speak to me about the meaning of Christmas: God's light has come into the world through Jesus Christ. And, as the Apostle John tells us, the darkness cannot put the light out (1:5).

Light is a symbol of God's presence in the world. Sometime back the city council of Fort Collins, Colorado, tried to ban red and green lights from the city's holiday display. A huge protest quashed this idea. But the forces of secularism will keep trying to extinguish Christmas. They might succeed in banning decorations and Christmas carols in school, but they won't be able to put out the light.

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In 1973 Margaret Craven wrote a book entitled *I Heard the Owl Call My Name*. The central character is a young priest, Mark Brian, who has only three years to live. His doctor and bishop have not yet told him of his diagnosis. The bishop sends Mark to a remote Eskimo village called Kingcome. He believes that there Mark will be able to find enough meaning in life so that he will be ready to die when the time comes.

It is his first Christmas Eve in the village. Mark is in the church. Everything is ready. He is alone, waiting in the silence by the candle that shines by the altar. The young priest walks slowly down the dark aisle. He doesn't want to open the door too soon and lose the precious heat. He walks to the window and looks out.

The snow lies thick on the ground. He sees the lights in the houses go out, one by one, and the lanterns begin to flicker as the members of the local tribe come slowly, single file, along the path to the church. How many times have the people of his parish traveled that path, he wonders. He goes to the door and opens it, and steps out into the snowy night. He greets each person by name as they enter the dark church. Soon the sanctuary is filled with light. That night the light of God's love will fill every heart as they are united in celebrating the birth of the Bethlehem babe. Darkness is all around them, but they are bathed in light, and bathed in God's love and grace.

Margaret Craven captures the meaning of Christmas in that scene. The world is still dark with evil and sin. The month of December is the darkest month of the year. But the light has come. When we put up our Christmas lights we are proclaiming that truth. We are affirming the presence of God in the world.

There was a young girl named Jana who was given a part in her church Christmas program. She was so excited by her part that her parents thought she must have been chosen for one of the main roles. When they got to the church, they discovered that Jana's only part was to hold up a big cardboard star covered in tin foil. As the children playing Mary and Joseph walked toward the manger, Jana got up and followed them, jumping up and down with her star. When the shepherds came she did the same thing. And then she led the wise men to the manger. Her face was shining—almost like a real star.

After the program, when the children and their families had enjoyed their refreshments and were walking to their cars, Jana turned to her parent and said with great satisfaction, "I had the main part!" "You did?" her mother asked, wondering why she thought that. "Yes," she said, "'cause I showed everybody how to find Jesus!"

That's what it means to walk in the light, to put on the armor of light – to show the world how to find Jesus. That is our part in the Christmas season, and, it is the main part: showing people how to find Jesus.