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ADVENT DEVOTIONAL DECEMBER 17, 2024

Weekly theme: Joy

SCRIPTURE

ISAIAH 9:2-7

2 The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness —
on them light has shined.

3 You have multiplied the nation,
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.

4 For the yoke of their burden,
and the bar across their shoulders,

the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.
5 For all the boots of the tramping warriors
and all the garments rolled in blood
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.
6 For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
7 His authority shall grow continually,
and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.
He will establish and uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time onward and forevermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

DEVOTION

The Rev. Drew Himes '13

Days of sorrow, destruction, gnashing teeth, and rending garments. These were the days of Isaiah 9. These were the days of Assyrian domination spoken of in the book of Judges (6 and 7). These were dark days of hopeless prayers not uttered and gloomy, tear-streaked faces as all eyes watched the invading Assyrians lay waste to people, plant, and animal, scouring the land with death, annihilation, and distress.

But right there . . . right in the midst of this unimaginable fear and grief . . . God does a new thing. God calls out to the people through the voice of the prophet and offers them something that seems not only improbable but also impossible: A new king; a new day; a new chance; freedom; liberation. I wonder how many of the hearers of this good news at first scoffed.

In the midst of our lives, we too face an onslaught of uncontrollable forces: illness and death; separation and break ups; loss of jobs, physical ability, economic plight, and even the loss of our human dignity.

But into these moments, God shines light. And as Isaiah tells us, it's the light of none other than God's own kavod, God's presence.

While this passage has nothing to do with the coming of Jesus Christ, it does teach us something about God and God's ways. It shows us that desperation, oppression, and hurt cause God to show up in a big way and reveal our liberation. This passage should not put us in mind of Christ's coming but instead of a pattern of God's doing: God freed the people many times before (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon) and God is doing it again in our Savior.

That which harms us and keeps us separated from God and one another has been torn asunder in the advent of our Christ, and the blood-stained clothing of our broken world is being thrown onto the fire to fuel the redemptive consummation that God is breaking forth.

This was good news for Isaiah's people. And it's good news for us too.

PRAYER

Liberating and loving God: Come. Enter into our world of sadness and hurt, pain and grief, and bring forth your light once again. Shine into all the dark places and illuminate them with your goodness and mercy. Come, Lord. Come. Amen.

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