

# **Series: Christmas at Grace 2021**

## **Sermon #3**

### **Light in the Darkness**

**Isaiah 9:2, 6-7**

**Jeremiah Ebeling – December 12, 2021**

Good morning, Grace. My name is Jeremiah Ebeling. I serve as Family Life Pastor here at Grace, and I want to welcome you to Christmas at Grace. The music, the messages, the tree, the lights—they're all meant to direct our heart to Immanuel, God with us.

In fact, lights are really the first signs of the Christmas season—the lights dancing on Christmas trees, candles flickering in windows—they're meant to brighten our moods. They bring us a sense of happiness and warmth, especially when the darkness sets in so early in the evening and the cold weather hits and it's finally here. It's the lights of Christmas that introduce us to this Christmas season.

And in our family, the day after Thanksgiving we spring out of bed and we begin setting up the Christmas tree, and we stream lights inside and outside of our home. In fact, you need to know that at the Ebelings' we kind of go all out at Christmas.



The neighbors don't even try anymore. They've just decided We're going to leave it up to the Ebelings. So, it is dark everywhere but our house. We're known as the Griswolds of our street. That's who we are.

## What Do Christmas Lights Signify?

But we all love the lights of Christmas, don't we? But there's a deeper reason for the lights of Christmas that we light up our homes and Christmas trees with. And that deeper reason is what Isaiah gives us in the first testament when he's writing to the people of God, the people of Israel almost 3,000 years ago.

Isaiah says that the reason that we love the light, the reason that we need the light, is because of all the darkness in the world. Isaiah describes this time in the life of Israel, in the life of the people of God, as a time of distress, a time of gloom. He calls it darkness; he calls it "the deepest darkness." And Isaiah writes that there is a darkness out there, that there was a darkness that the Jews were surrounded by. They lived in a land that was being torn apart by civil war, that was being torn apart by invading nations. The northern kingdom of Israel was being captured at that time by the Assyrians, and the southern kingdom of Judah was next. In fact, the sound of Babylonian boots would soon be heard in the distance marching towards Jerusalem.

And so, Isaiah writes about this darkness that is out there that the Jews were facing. And there was reason for fear. There was cause for anxiety and uncertainty among God's people. Darkness had settled over the land and over the people themselves.

In my time as a pastor here, what I've discovered is that there is a darkness out there that many of you know all too well. And the reality is that Christmas time can sometimes be when that darkness is heaviest for us. The amount of evil and pain that individuals and couples and families experience, and even experience right now, is devastating: bodies ravaged by disease, selfishness tearing apart families, loved ones who will be missed from this year's Christmas celebration and all the ones going forward. There's a darkness out there that we know all too well.

But there was something worse happening as Isaiah writes these words that we're going to be studying today. There was a darkness in here that he says is more dangerous, more insidious, than the darkness that was swirling around them. There was a darkness within their very hearts that was threatening Judah. It wasn't just this danger from outside its borders; it was this darkness that was in their own hearts. It started there.

The Assyrians and the Babylonians were coming for Israel and Judah because they had been sent by God, because they had turned their backs on God. They had rejected Him. And in

reality, the truth was that Israel had been rotting from within. That these other nations were really windstorms sent by God to blow Israel over and to reveal how hollow Israel had become from the inside out. You see, instead of turning to the Creator to meet their needs, they were turning to mediums and to fortune tellers to tell them where to go, to give them direction in life. Instead of giving to those in need, Isaiah writes that the plunder from the poor could be found in the homes of those who had much. There was a darkness in here. Their hearts were hardened, their souls were darkened by the sin that was within them.

Now, I wonder if you feel the oppressiveness of the darkness within here. I wonder if you're aware of just how evil our hearts truly are.

You know, there was a moment in my life when my kids were young when I came to this realization of the darkness that's in here. It was the day that I realized that for all the time I had spent protecting my children from the darkness out there, who was going to protect them from me? I'd spent a lot of time cautioning them and counseling them to avoid selfish and impatient people. But what scared me most was me at the dinner table after a hard day at work. There was a darkness out there that they needed protection from. But even more, there was a darkness in here that they needed protection from.

It's not just out there. It's within us.

And one of the core truths of Christianity is that our situation, our darkness, is more desperate than we could ever imagine. You see, Christianity says that our most threatening problem is not out there; it's the evil in our own hearts. It says that I'm not just walking through a land of darkness, but I'm walking with a heart of darkness. Yeah, there's a darkness out there that I need help with. But even more, there's a darkness in here that I can't do anything about.

You see, we don't just need assistance. Christianity says that no, we need rescue. We don't just need help, we don't just need wisdom; we need to be saved. That's what Christianity tells us.

And so, Isaiah points out this darkness, but he doesn't just point it out and walk away. No, he says that God has a plan to do something about that darkness. He says that God has been planning this from eternity past. And you can see in Isaiah chapter 9 if you want to follow along in your Bibles. You can turn there now to Isaiah chapter 9. And what does God say that Isaiah will do to address the darkness that's out there and the darkness that's in here? Isaiah says that God is sending a light. He's sending a light.

## **Isaiah 9:2, 6-7**

**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.**

**<sup>6</sup>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. <sup>7</sup>Of the increase of his government and peace there will be on end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing it and upholding with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.**

Verse 2 of Isaiah 9, Isaiah writes, "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned." You see, a light is coming that will shine on the dark places in our lives and light them up, as Isaiah says. And what is this light that shines in our darkness? Isaiah says that light is a child. Look at verse 6 of Isaiah 9. He writes, "To us a child is born, to us a son is given." And this isn't just any child; this child will grow up to be a ruler. Verse 6 continues: "The government will be on his shoulders." He will carry the government on His shoulders and His shoulders alone. But this child who will be a ruler won't be another king, another mediocre, half-hearted king in a long line of Judah's kings. No, this will be *the* King; He will be *the* Messiah. He will be that Messiah that's been promised from long ago, who will be in the line of David, who will sit on the throne forever. Verse 7 assures us of this. Isaiah writes, "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 it and upholding with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever."

The Messiah will be the light that will deal with all the darkness of war and injustice and sin. That's what Isaiah tells us. But he doesn't say when the Messiah will come. And so, the people wait. And then they wait some more.

**Matthew 4:16**

**“The people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.”**

Generation after generation kept watch. They waited 700 years until this moment when Matthew picks up a pen and writes in his gospel the words, “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.”

You see, Matthew is quoting Isaiah from 700 years earlier, and he’s saying that great light that Isaiah spoke of is here. The light has come, the light has shone among us. The child has been born, the Son has been given. The Messiah has arrived. And the Messiah’s name is Jesus.

**John 8:12**

**When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”**

And Jesus confirms that in John 8:12 when He says, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” Jesus is the Messiah, the light who has come to rescue us from the darkness, the darkness out there and the darkness in here. He is that Messiah.

**Four Titles for Jesus Christ**

And Messiah means “the promised one.” God has promised that this Messiah will be some things. And what is that? What does God promise that the Messiah will be like? Who does God promise that Messiah will be? Well, look at the second half of verse 6 and we see that. Isaiah says, “And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” Isaiah says that he’ll have these four titles, that he’ll possess these four titles of Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

And why four titles? Why not just one or two? Because Messiah will deal with all the needs, the deepest needs, of the human soul. Messiah, in our foolishness, will bring us counsel, will show us the way forward. For our frailties, He'll be mighty. For our desire and need to be cared for forever He'll be that eternal father who will give us that love that we long for. For the time we're embroiled in conflict or we're suffering in grief, Messiah will bring peace to us and will give us from His peace.

So, let's look at each of these four titles and see the profound meaning that they have for our lives, for each one of us.

### **Wonderful Counselor**

First, we see that Messiah is the Wonderful Counselor. God promises that Jesus will be this wonderful counselor for us. And why is He called that? Well, because anytime you're going through a very difficult time, what you need is somebody who has been that way before, someone who's walked along that path, someone who knows what it means and what it looks like to take that difficult, painful path. We need somebody who understands us, who gets us, somebody who can take us by the hand and lead us through this place we've never been before. We need somebody who can lead and somebody that we can count on, somebody whose wisdom we can listen to and learn from. That's what we need.

And so, if you've lived under the uncertainty of a threatening disease, then you know the hope, the encouragement that a person like that can bring for you. So, if Jesus, the Messiah, has been born in a manger—if God Himself has been born in a manger—and He has—then we have the most wonderful of counselors in God. He is that counselor for us. The manger means that we have a God who truly understands us, who knows what we're going through, who gets us, right?—who gets where we are and can help us through that time. Because He's not just an outsider who's imagining what it must be like to experience what we're experiencing; no, He's a God who's been on the inside of our experiences. He knows what that's like. He can take us by the hand as our Wonderful Counselor, as our beautiful counselor, and He can lead us through this place, this place of pain that we've never been through before.

### **Hebrews 2:17-18**

**For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. <sup>18</sup> Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.**

We can receive His life-giving advice from above. That's what the writer of Hebrews is trying to convince us of when he says that Jesus was made just like us. In Hebrews chapter 2, the writer says this: that He was fully human in every way. Because He himself suffered when He was tested, when He was tempted, the writer says that He is able to help those who are being tested, those who are being tempted.

**The incarnation means that, for whatever reason God chose to let us fall, to suffer, to be subject to sorrows and death, He has nonetheless had the honesty and the courage to take His own medicine. He can exact nothing from man that He has not exacted from Himself.**

**He Himself has gone through the whole human experience, from the trivial irritations of family life and the cramping restrictions of hard work and lack of money, to the worst horrors of pain and humiliation, defeat, despair, and even death. He was born in poverty and suffered infinite pain all for us and thought it well worth His while.**

**---Dorothy L. Sayers  
*The Greatest Drama Ever Staged***

In the book *The Greatest Drama Ever Staged*, the author, reflecting on this reality that Jesus had to be made like us in order to be our wonderful counselor, says this: "The incarnation means that for whatever reason God chose to let us fall, to suffer, to be subject to sorrows and death, He has nonetheless had the honesty and the courage to take His own medicine. He can exact nothing from man that He has not exacted from Himself."

The author goes on to say that “He Himself has gone through the whole of human experience, from the trivial irritations of family life and the cramping restrictions of hard work and lack of money, to the worst horrors of pain and humiliation, defeat, despair, and even death. He was born in poverty and suffered infinite pain all for us and thought it well worth His while.”

You see, Jesus had the courage, He had the honesty, to experience what He allowed us to experience, what He called us to experience. He took His own medicine and He went through that full human experience. And so, that means that Jesus knows—He gets what you’re going through. It means that He sits with you in those greatest fears and in those deepest hurts that you’ve experienced.

So, if you’ve faced an unanswered prayer and the pain of God saying no, well, He has too. In the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus said, “Father, may this cup be taken from me,” He was turned down. The Father said no to Him too. Have you been betrayed by family or friends? He has too. Have you been lonely and destitute? So was He. He’s been there. Have you been crushed by injustice or faced the reality of death? Jesus went through that too. Have you been afraid and in need of courage? The Christian faith says that God needed courage too. No other faith says that. Jesus needed courage to experience what He endured as a human, fully God, fully man. He needed courage. Have you ever felt like God has abandoned you? Have you felt like you’ve been forgotten altogether by God? You know, Jesus knows what that’s like too. Because when Jesus was hanging on that cross and bearing the sins of the world, God the Father turned away. Jesus knows what that’s like. He understands your experience. And so, He can be a wonderful counselor.

You see, the Wonderful Counselor shares your tears with you. He cries with you. He’s been all the places you’ve been, He’s been in the pain, the loss, that you are experiencing or have experienced, and He will lead you through that. You can count on Him. You can trust Him to give you through His infinite power the comfort that you need, the counsel that you need, the strength that you need. He’ll carry you through it as your Wonderful Counselor.

### **Mighty God**

And so, Jesus was promised to be our Wonderful Counselor. He was promised to be the light when all other lights go dim. And since He is our Wonderful Counselor, that means that we

want to serve Him. We want to serve a God like that. But if Jesus is promised to be Mighty God—and He was—then we also *have* to serve Him. We must serve Him.

And one scholar points out that it's popular today to be inspired by Jesus, to say that Jesus was an outstanding example to follow, but then to stop there. But this scholar says that no one reacted to Jesus that way. Those who saw and heard and experienced Him in His time here on earth never responded that way. No, they were fearful with Him or maybe furious with Him. Or they knelt down and they worshipped Him. But to say, *He's so inspiring, He makes me want to live a better life*, and then to stop there—no, that was not how anybody responded to Him. That's not open to us.

And it's also easy for us in the church to think, *I want to follow Jesus, but not if following Him means I have to do this or that*. You know, we say, *Yeah, I want you, Jesus but I want you on my terms*. But when we do that, we're just saying, *I want you to be my advisor. I want you to be my counselor, but not Mighty God. I don't want to go that far. I'll take your recommendations and maybe I'll even act on a few of them. But I want You to just let me live my life*.

And that's not open to us. We're raised to live by this sacred truth penned by the hand of Shakespeare: "To thine own self be true." Right? We're taught that what we need to do to have a fulfilling life is that we need to seek to fulfill all of our deepest dreams, to satisfy our greatest longings and desires. But there are so many things wrong with that value. There are so many reasons why that value doesn't work—to be true to thine own self only.

And first, it's because our feelings change over time. So, we're never truly satisfied, or at least, not for long, by pursuing our feelings and desires. Second, our desires are often in conflict with one another, and so, we're often not clear about which desires we should pursue. And then, third, we can't be true to ourselves without Him, because we don't know who we're supposed to be unless He tells us who we are, because He's our maker. And so, it doesn't work to live that way. So, if we want this wonderful counselor in our lives, if we want Him in the middle of our lives, we have to obey Him unconditionally. That's the only way to get there.

But look, when we accept Him as Mighty God, and when we don't—we say I just want a little bit of Jesus and that's it—when we say *I'm all in and I want to obey You unconditionally*, what happens is, yes, we give Him our obedience. Do you know what we get in return? He's Mighty God. We get His might. He gives us His power in the midst of our weakness.

And so, what does that mean for us? Well, are you a fearful person? If you're a fearful person, then what the Messiah being Mighty God means for you is that He can help you with those fears. He can help you to overcome them. He brings His power into these places that are scary for us, and He lights them up. He lights up these dark places in our life.

How about—are you insecure about your personality or your giftings or some of the ways that God's made you? Because you have a Mighty God who offers you security and confidence in who He has made you to be and who He is. He gives that to us. He offers that to us.

### **Everlasting Father**

And if that weren't enough, our Mighty God is also Everlasting Father. He's our Everlasting Father. He was promised to be our Everlasting Father and to light up the way before us as the father that we need. And for some of us, we're going to need the Messiah to redefine what a father means. What does that really entail? Because He's not the father that you had; He's the father that you need. That's the kind of everlasting father He is.

He's the Father who continues to love us even when we don't deserve it. He's the father who wants to care for you, who is concerned about you, who wants to show you that love. And it's not that we've earned His affection. It's just that He's chosen to make us the objects of His affection. He's made that choice. And so, when we place our faith in Him, He promises to love us as His children. He says that He's going to love us forever. Messiah will never stop being your father. He's the Everlasting Father. That's who He is.

### **Prince of Peace**

He's not just the Everlasting Father. He's also Prince of Peace. Jesus was promised to be the Prince of Peace who will shine bright in the darkness of our angst. And His peace, His *shalom* (as it's known in Hebrew), means that God gives us a tranquility of soul. It means that we can be settled in heart when we have His peace in our lives. It means completion, it means wholeness.

And *shalom* feels so very far from what we experience right now, especially at a time when a trivial disagreement can blow up an entire family, when one word can sever a decades-long friendship. We need the Prince of Peace right now, don't we?

You know, I wonder if you've experienced a rupture in a friendship, or maybe even in your family recently? I wonder if you've had to endure that. Do you need the Prince of Peace to light up the dark places in one of your relationships? Because Christmas is thirteen days away. And if that's where you are, it could be that Jesus is asking you this morning to be the one to go. Sometime in the next thirteen days, what if you said, *I'm going to take a step forward. I'm going to take a step toward that person.* You could make it your gift to them, that you're going to be the one to go. It doesn't matter who holds more responsibility. Don't get caught up in that. It could be that Jesus is asking you to make that step, and not to forget that the Prince of Peace goes with you. You don't go alone into that conversation.

When the Apostle Paul urges us to be at peace with each other, to live at peace with one another, he adds these qualifications because he knows that the peace that we seek, that we desire, is not all up to us.

**Romans 12:18**

**If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.**

In Romans 12:18 Paul writes this. He adds these qualifications and says, "Look, if it's possible—as far as it depends on you—live at peace with everyone." And why does he say it that way? Well, because he's saying if it's possible. It's not always possible. "As far as it depends on you"—it doesn't all depend on you. There are two people involved here, maybe even more. And so, he's saying, *Look, this is not all on you, but you seek out that peace knowing that the Prince of Peace is the one you've got to trust to bring that peace about. You can't cause it. Only the Prince of Peace can.*

And what if you do if your efforts at that peace have hit a dead end? What do you do if that conversation backfires and maybe things are even worse than they were before? Because you know that happens sometimes. You turn to the Prince of Peace again and you ask Him to still your hurt and disappointed heart. And He'll do that. He will give you peace in that pain.

You'll be able to experience both of those. And that peace will invade that pain and can overtake it. So, you can say to Him, *You know, I did all I could, as far as it depended on me. And I'm going to be okay. Why? Because I have the Prince of Peace who offers me His peace, even in the midst of the loss, even in the midst of this conversation that went the opposite of what I was planning.*

You know, in our family, we are holding onto the Prince of Peace right now like never before. This year's Thanksgiving celebration this last month was smaller than it usually is because of the fallout over some words that were said at last year's Thanksgiving between a few people. And at this rate, next year's Thanksgiving could be even smaller. And there's nothing that Dayna and I can do about it. The only thing we can do is to ask the Prince of Peace to invade our hearts, to settle us in the midst of the conflict swirling around us, the hurt and the sadness from that.

We can do that. We can go to that Prince of Peace.

## Conclusion

You see, that infant in the manger, that infant in that feeding trough, is the one who was promised to be Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. That's who He was promised to be—to be that light in our darkness. And when we accept Him for who He is and not who we want Him to be or who we think He ought to be, then what He does is He brings His light into the dark places in our life. He is the light of life for us.

And what's surprising is that when you look at Jesus' time on this planet, He came to us as the light of the world. And yet what you see in His life is that His life started in darkness and it ended in darkness. When He was born, He came and was born into a cold, dark cave. And then when His life ended, Matthew writes that as Jesus is dying on the cross, as He is breathing His last breath, for three hours darkness covered the land. His life started in darkness; it ended in darkness.

And Matthew Wright said that as He's dying and this darkness covers the land, that Jesus cries out, "My God! My God! Why have You forsaken me!" as He is plunged into spiritual darkness on our behalf. He descends into darkness at His birth; He descends into darkness again

at His death. Why does He do that? He does it so that He can bring each one of us into the light of His presence. That's why He does it.

And so, if you haven't stepped into the light of Jesus' presence yet, if you haven't made that decision to put your faith in Him, I want to tell you this morning that Jesus invites you to do that today--that you could look at His death on the cross where He took your sins and He did away with the darkness, and He came alive to prove that it worked, to show that His payment was more than enough. And all you have to do is say to Him, "I believe that You did that for me." And then you get to enjoy Him for the rest of this life and the next life as Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Would you pray with me? Let's thank Jesus for who He is for each one of us.

*Jesus, the ancient prophecy said, "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." And Jesus, we desperately need You to be each one of those in our life today. Lord, we need You to be our beautiful counselor who can show us the way. We need Your power, Your help. Jesus, we need You to be our Father who cares deeply for us in times of need. We need You to be our Prince of Peace who gives us the peace that we need.*

*And right now as we celebrate Your coming to be among us, Your coming to be with us, at Christmas, Jesus, we just thank You that when You saw our darkness that You didn't run the other way; that You chose to enter into the darkness in order to become the light of the world, in order to become our light, that we may never walk in darkness again. If we follow You, You will be the light of our lives. And we thank You for that. We praise You for that. In Your name. Amen.*