

# THE UNEXPECTED LIGHT OF CHRISTMAS – ISAIAH 2:1-5

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**This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem: In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." the law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. Come, descendants of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord.**



This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

After I became a pastor here, one of the recommendations was that I take Dave Ramsey's *Financial Peace University* class. It was a good class, and I certainly recommend it to you if you haven't taken it before. It teaches some wonderful, sound, financial advice. One of the parts of the class I remember clearly was when Dave Ramsey was talking about what qualifies as an emergency. One of the examples he used was Christmas doesn't qualify as an emergency. It is in December every year, it is something you can plan for, you don't have to charge your credit card because you weren't expecting Christmas.

We all know when Christmas is, and yet how often have we rushed around at the last minute like Christmas came unexpectedly. It doesn't matter if you know it's coming, there never seems to be enough time to get everything done – the presents bought and wrapped, the meal prepared, the kids to the Christmas Eve service. The best way that I've found to prepare for something, is to sit down and write a list of all you need to get done and when you need to get it done. The season of Advent (the four weeks before Christmas) is kind of like making that list. It gives us a chance to prepare for Christmas. This year we're going to have a little bit of help making that list from a towering figure in the Old Testament – the prophet Isaiah.

The prophet Isaiah was a messenger of God who lived 700 years before Jesus was even born, before the first Christmas even took place. And yet as a prophet, God gave him a special view of Christmas, when the Savior of God's people would be born. So through the month of December, in the four Sundays leading up to Christmas, we will see four predictions, or prophecies, about Christmas. Today, the prophecy Isaiah brings is that CHRISTMAS BRINGS UNEXPECTED LIGHT. It helps:

1. Remember Jesus' birth and
2. Prepare for Jesus' return

The prophet Isaiah is one of the most well-known figures in all of the Bible, his book takes up a whopping 66 chapters. God certainly gave him enough to say not only for the nations of Judah and Israel, to whom he first wrote, but for us today. The beginning of Isaiah's book is not a particularly comforting message. You see Isaiah was writing to a nation that had abandoned their God. A few hundred years before Isaiah, the nation of Israel split in two – into north and south. The northern kingdom continued to be called Israel, while the southern kingdom became Judah. Since that time both Israel and Judah had king after king that did not follow the Lord's commands or decrees. (If you were here for our Thanksgiving service, you heard that it was what Moses predicted before they even entered the promised land)

God continued to show patience with his people, sending them messengers to proclaim his word. Some of the kings heeded these warnings, while many did not. Through the mouth of Isaiah God gives his most stern warnings – actions have consequences. The day of reckoning is coming. This is how Isaiah opens his book of prophecy. **“If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land; but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.” “The mighty man will become tinder and his work a spark; both will burn together with no one to quench the fire.”** Some dire warning and consequence, to get the Israelites' attention. We might expect more of the same in chapter 2. But Isaiah changes tact. Instead he gives these wonderful words of promise. Words of promise which point forward to Christmas.

Now at first, you might wonder what do these words about a mountain, and people not going to war have to do with Christmas. And that's why it's good you're here, because I will tell you what they have to do with Christmas. And it all focuses around the theme of light. CHRISTMAS BRINGS AN UNEXPECTED LIGHT. Light is one of those concepts people get. Many people would rather be in the light than in the darkness. You can see in the light, you don't know what's in the closet of your bedroom in the dark. Light is used metaphorically too – to “shine a light” on something, is to make known what was previously unknown.

Isaiah was making known what was unknown about the coming Savior, promised since the Garden of Eden. He starts off by mentioning about the mountain of the Lord's temple. This is significant. The temple, built by King Solomon was the pride and joy of every Israelite, it was the goal of an annual pilgrimage. It was set on the highest point in Jerusalem, representing God's place in the life of the Israelites. But Isaiah speaks of a different temple, a temple that will be set on the highest hill, exalted above all other hills. This temple is not a physical temple, testified to by Jesus himself, **“A time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.... a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.”** He also says, **“Wherever two or three are gathered together, there I am with them.”**

This mountain of the Lord's temple would be established first when Jesus was born. He will be higher than all other hills or mountains because he can save. This speaks to the supremacy of Christ and his message. There are other religions, other worldviews, other philosophies out there, but none of them can save, none of them are high enough. This mountain of the Lord's temple will draw people from all nations. We see that at Jesus' birth with the coming of the wise men from distant lands. We see that

throughout Jesus' ministry and afterwards as he reaches out to those who were Gentiles, non-Jews. Those who would come from all nations would look for truth in God's Word, they would have God's Word as the deciding factor, and they would display the light of Christ in their hearts and lives.

The Jews did not expect this messiah. They were looking for someone who would show his authority by power and might, not someone who would welcome in all people lovingly. And that may be the unexpected light Christmas brings us, too. The Jesus who was born in a manger would not be the way I would have saved the world if I was God. The Jesus who came in humility and weakness, would not be the kind of person I would want to follow. The Jesus who says to give up myself, would not keep my attention.

But this messiah was the perfect way, the only way, for God's plan to work. This Messiah's enemies were not the foreign nations around Israel, his enemies were on a different plain. And so his mission was carried out with the invisible enemies that confront us all – sin, death, and the devil. Jesus' birth was the beginning of this battle. Isaiah reminds us that CHRISTMAS BRINGS UNEXPECTED LIGHT – it points us to Jesus' birth.

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And yet, Jesus' birth didn't seem to change much. Even Jesus' life, death, and resurrection didn't seem to change much on the surface. It doesn't seem like Isaiah's Christmas prophecy in Isaiah 2 is complete. You have people, even Christians, bickering and squabbling. You have the effects of sin before your eyes at work and on TV, you are confronted with your own mortality all day long. Christians know this better than anyone, the harder you try to follow God, the more it seems you fail. The world goes on like it did before Jesus was born, so what exactly did he accomplish?

His accomplishments now are not seen by the human eye. They are only seen with an eye of faith. An eye which has been opened by the Holy Spirit to see Christ's saving work accomplished for you. But it will not always stay that way. Prophecies in the Old Testament are oftentimes like looking at a mountain range such as the Catalinas. You can see the mountain range in the distance, but there is not just one peak, there are many, and some of those peaks are closer than others. But from your perspective, you're not able to fully distinguish the difference between one peak and another. So it is with this prophecy of Isaiah. He saw the coming of the Messiah, the Savior, and he correctly predicted Christmas, but in the same "mountain range" of prophecy, he also saw the Savior coming again. So our Advent celebrations are not just looking back and remembering Jesus' birth, but they are also looking forward to Jesus' return.

And just like the Jews didn't know the exact time of Jesus' birth, so we are not given the exact time of Jesus' return. But when that time comes, whenever that may be, this Christmas prophecy of Isaiah will bring a light completely unexpected to many. It is then that this Christmas prophecy will be complete. The supremacy of God's holy mountain will be revealed to all when Christ comes. Jesus will speak the words of God, condemning those who rejected him. He will come to judge not just disputes, but to judge for our eternities. And those who have been found worthy by the blood of the lamb will walk in the light of the Lord...perfectly. The book of Revelation paints a wonderful picture of what that scene will be like when it says, **"After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb."**

Christmas may still come unexpected for some, maybe even many of you. But don't just take this as a reminder to start getting ready for Christmas now, but it should remind you that CHRISTMAS BRINGS UNEXPECTED LIGHT. Not only remembering Jesus' birth, but preparing for Jesus' return. It is a return that we can expect, a return we can look forward to as much as Christmas. Amen.