***Jesus Christ: The Hope of Ages***

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

 Please open your Bibles if you have them or refer to the scriptures section of your bulletin. Today we are beginning a four-week study for advent that will prepare us for the arrival of Christ. In our worship service today, we have been discussing hope and why we can look forward to the arrival of the Christ child. There are so many reasons in our lives why we should have hope and we can look forward to the day when we will stand in the presence of God. What we will do this morning is spend some time looking at why the coming of Christ brings hope to those who are walking in darkness. What we will learn is that when God sent Jesus Christ to this earth, He was bringing the light into a dark world. It is through that light that God shows us our sin and exposes what we are in our fallen state. We come to realize that without God we are lost and will never be able to enjoy the blessings of this life or the life to come if we do not have the right relationship with Him. We will be using the scripture from the lighting of the advent candle for our passage of study. Please read with me once again Isaiah 9:2 and 6-7 **“The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; Those who live in a dark land, The light will shine on them… For a Child will be born to us, a Son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of armies will accomplish this.”**

The prophet Isaiah was writing this prophecy to show the nation of Israel how God would continue to show His faithfulness to them in the future even though they had shown nothing but disrespect for His laws and had chosen to betray Him by serving false gods. In chapter 9 of the book, he is providing a description of the coming Messiah. As we begin in verse 2 of chapter 9, we read that the Messiah is coming to bring hope and restoration to the people who have been walking in darkness. Isaiah says that the people are walking in darkness and that they are also living in a dark land. The solution for this darkness is the light that will be brought to them by the Messiah. For us to understand how the coming of the Messiah brings hope we first need to explain what Isaiah means when he says that the people are living in darkness as well as living in a dark land. I believe the best way to explain what is meant by darkness is to allow scripture itself to tell us. In the Apostle John’s first epistle chapter 1 he writes these words **“This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; 7 but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous, so that He will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.”** In this passage the Apostle John teaches that walking in darkness is when someone says that have fellowship with God, but still choose to go their own way. Also, walking in darkness is when someone says that they have no sin, which basically is the argument a person makes when they say they do not need God because they are a good person. Both of these descriptions are very applicable to the condition that all people find themselves in when they do not believe or trust in God. If there is no God, then everything is permissible and therefore man must try to save himself. The coming Messiah will bring the light and make man understand that he cannot be his own savior and that without God there is no hope in this world. So, the first point Isaiah makes is that the coming Messiah will bring the light and make man realize that he is a sinner in need of salvation. That knowledge only comes when man chooses to allow the light of Christ to enter his heart.

 As we continue in Isaiah’s passage, we see that the Messiah will come in the form of a child and He will also be a son of man. This is the mystery and the miracle of the immaculate conception. Jesus Christ was born of a virgin and was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit making Him holy and therefore not an inheritor of the sin nature that all of us have inherited from Adam. Being born like us allows Him to identify with our flesh. He laid aside many of His attributes as the eternal Son of God to become like us in human flesh. He placed Himself into time even though He is eternal, He experienced emotions such as joy, sadness, anger and love. God even allowed Himself to experience the pain that each of us face when our bodies begin to fail. God suffered as a human being, which means that He identifies with us in our pain and He understands what we go through. This child born and son given to us is the gift of God’s presence and His desire to connect with His creation.

 Isaiah next states that the “government will rest on His shoulders.” The prophet is telling the people that when the Messiah comes, He will sit on the throne of David and He will be the eternal king promised by God. This is an eternal kingdom that will have no end and it will be the kingdom that will defeat Satan eventually overcoming the power of sin and death. The Angel Gabriel confirms this when he brings the news of Christ’s birth to Mary. He says to her **“He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; 33 and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end” (Luke 1:32-33).** Our hope in the Messiah is that He will defeat all of the power of sin and death that cursed man after the fall. We do not have to fear death or the grave because Jesus Christ has overcome both.

 Next, Isaiah provides four names for the Messiah. The first name He is given is Wonderful Counselor. This title explains that Jesus Christ is wonderful because He is both God and man. His dual nature is perfect in the fact that He has the attributes of being both divine and human. This is a wonder because the God of universe chose to allow Himself to experience life in our corruptible human flesh. Our God wanting to experience life as we do shows how wonderful of a God He is. Also, He is called our counselor. This means that He possesses all knowledge. This is the attribute of God known as omnipotence. God knows all things that can be known and His wisdom is unmatched. In Psalm 16:7 the psalmist sings that it is God who advises him and that it what guides him in his thoughts. The wonderful counselor brings with Him the eternal and unfathomable knowledge of God, which gives us hope because He makes God known to us.

 The next name He is given is mighty God. This means that Jesus Christ has the strength of God in Him. Christ chose to use the power He has to purchase the salvation of those who place their trust in Him. When I think about the power of God it helps me to remember how Christ, even when He was being murdered by His enemies, had the strength of heart to pray for those enemies. He did not use His power to punish them, rather He chose to use His power to forgive them of their sin. Our hope rests in the God who shows love even to those who hate Him. What a mighty God we serve. Like the praise song says “ Angels bow before Him, heaven and earth adore Him, what a mighty God we serve.”

 Next, Isaiah calls Him Eternal Father. Christ shares the same attributes as God because He is eternal and has always existed with the Father. In his introduction to the Gospel of John the Apostle explains that Jesus Christ has always existed with the Father and that everything in the world was created through Him. This is another aspect of the incarnation that is so amazing. The One through whom the earth was created became a baby and entered into human history as an infant. By choosing to do this He reaches out to His creation desiring to experience life as one of His created beings. This is love to the highest degree. He sacrificed so much of His eternal nature to be like us in this fallen existence. Our hope rests in the God who loved us first before we could ever love Him.

 The last name Isaiah gives Him is Prince of Peace. Our God is the source of peace in our lives and He grants this to those who place their trust in Him. In this world we have so many things that cause us stress, anxiety and make us worry. When we trust in God, we have that worry taken away and then we are at peace with our creator. The Apostle James reminds us that only good things come from God. **“Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow” (1:17).** How interesting it is that James also reminds us that God is light, so when we place our trust in Him there is no darkness in Him. This allows us to have hope for the future because no matter how dark this world may seem the light of God overpowers it all.

 Next, Isaiah tells us that the increase of His kingdom will have no end and that He will eternally reign in peace. What we learn is that the kingdom of Christ is growing every day. Whenever someone places their trust in Christ for salvation the kingdom continues to grow. This growing kingdom will usher in a time of peace that will never end. When those who trust Christ enter into the glory of the Kingdom of God, they will no longer have any reason to be sad or have any stress in their lives. The hope of this future peaceful kingdom is what Christ brought with Him when He came to earth. The Apostle John describes what the Kingdom of God will be like for those who trust in Christ **“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among the people, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His [a]people, and God Himself will be among them, 4 and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away” (Revelation 21:1-4).** This promise of restoration, peace, perfect love and joy are what brings hope to those who trust in Jesus Christ as their Savior. When Christ came to earth, He brought this hope with Him and now we who believe in Him have this to look forward to as a reward for faith.

 As we conclude the passage Isaiah says that it is the zeal of the Lord of Armies that will accomplish this. As Jesus said to the Apostle Peter after he had declared that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, the Lord will continue growing His kingdom and He will not allow anything to happen to it until it has been accomplished. Satan is attacking the church every day, but as long as the people of God remain faithful to the word and keep preparing others for the return of Christ, the zeal of the Lord will continue growing the kingdom.

 What does all of this teach us today? I would like to conclude by sharing with you that the prophet Isaiah wants his readers to know that God is faithful and that we can place our trust in Him. He will do all that He has promised. Christ came to earth and gave us hope in the fact that we can rely on His perfect sacrifice to purchase our salvation. As we approach this Christmas season let us live with the hope Christ offers in our hearts. This baby arriving on earth has changed the world and it is because of Him that all of us have a future hope we can trust in. *Prayer: Father God, we thank you for sending your Son to this fallen world. He showed us how we may approach You. Please equip us with the strength to share this good news with the world so that your kingdom may continue to grow. In all we do may we proclaim the good news of the gospel and share Your love to all who are in need. In the name of Jesus Christ your Son, who reigns with You and the Holy Spirit we pray, Amen.*