



Saint John United Methodist Church
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Message for December 20, 2020
“Signs: Birth”
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb
Scripture: Isaiah 9:2-7

The Blessing This Year Needed

The Christmas cards have come rolling in at the Grieb household. Every one of them has been special. We have so enjoyed hearing from friends during this very special season of the year.

One of the cards was most special. It was the one we received from our kids in Nashville. We won't be seeing them this Christmas because of Covid. That makes their card even more special. Such is doing Christmas during a pandemic.

Cheryl and I were initially struck by the envelop. Clearly, the handiwork on the envelope is courtesy of our beloved Charlotte, who is a first grader. She addresses it to Gigi and Big Da Grieb. How did Gigi get top billing?

What really struck me was the card on the inside. It was one of those Shutterfly deals where there are a lot of family pictures. I just love those kinds of cards, whether they are of my family or someone else's.

As you may know, our youngest grandchild, Miles Thomas was born on April 2 of this year, right at the beginning of the pandemic and he is prominently featured on the card. What Brian and Cassie had printed right below Miles' picture really hits home.

You might not be able to see it, but it reads, *“Many blessings from our family to yours this holiday season. We welcomed Miles Thomas Grieb into our family on April 2, 2020. He is the blessing this year needed.”* Indeed!!

It has been quite a year, yet through it all you and I have seen rays of light all around us. We would do well to consider them, particularly this season of the year. I am confident our lives will be brightened.

Hear what the prophet says, *“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.”* Isaiah 9:2

I hope you are seeing that light. It is all around you. The good news of God's love in Jesus Christ is piercing the darkness in wonderful and profound ways. I pray that you have eyes to see.

The Greatest Birth Announcement of All

Birth announcements are simply wonderful. We love hearing the news of a baby about to be born. We rejoice with the parents and offer prayers for the child. Birth announcements carry with them all sorts of excitement. All concerned are filled with anticipation. If you think about it, they announce the most joyous news you can receive

Some of the birth announcements we get in the mail can be quite creative. I remember receiving the birth announcement from Brian and Cassie announcing Charlotte's birth. It was right around Christmas. It was a card with a photo of the two of them, along with their dog, Lousi. To Lousi's side was a small blackboard with the words, "*Big Sister.*" We got the message.

The prophet Isaiah offers the greatest birth announcement of all. It was a birth announcement to beat all birth announcements. Seven hundred years before Christ was born the prophet Isaiah explained Christmas before anyone ever experienced Christmas.

The Prophet Isaiah offered good news to a people who found themselves in a pretty tough straight. The Assyrians were bearing down hard on the northern Kingdom of Israel. In the midst of that Isaiah offered a word of hope that the oppression would soon pass.

He offers that same word of hope to all people for all time.

We read it just a few minutes ago, "*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.*" Isaiah 9:6

A Brand-New Kingdom

The authority of a brand-new Kingdom would rest on his shoulders.

You will remember that whenever Christ spoke those who heard him marveled at the authority with which he spoke. We would do well to heed what he says.

Jesus is king over a Kingdom unlike any the world has ever known. And think of it, you and I are citizens of that Kingdom, not because of what we have done or what we have earned, but by the very grace of God.

The prophet speaks of the promised One "*reigning on David's throne and over his Kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.*" Isaiah 9:7

God has done marvelous things through Christ and continues to do so to this day. He is, after all, the salvation of the world.

In the midst of this time when we are keenly aware of all sorts of injustice perpetrated on others, Christ seeks to lead his people to promote "*justice and righteousness*" at every turn.

It is simply the way of his Kingdom.

Called by Name

The prophet Isaiah is not at all shy about calling the One who is to come by name. Names have always been important. To be called by name heartens us to no end. Names give us identity. In some cases, they define who we are.

Hear what names the prophet Isaiah gives to the One who is to come.

"He will be called,"

- Wonderful Counselor. Isn't it great that we have one who will lead us? Jesus offers direction to our lives. He points us in the ways we should go. He is always ready to listen, always ready to give good counsel.
- Mighty God. Christ is full of all power. He is the very embodiment of God and is all about reflecting God's love in our lives.
- Everlasting Father. Jesus is one who provides and protects and isn't it great that he does? I don't know what I would do without Jesus in my life. I depend upon him so much. His provision and protection mean everything.
- Prince of Peace. Jesus is all about promoting peace, worldwide and otherwise. Jesus is all about healing and wholeness. *"Peace I leave with you,"* he says, *"my Peace I give you. I do not give as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."* (John 14:27) That's a good word for today.

And if those names aren't enough, then hear what others have said:

- The angels said, "Unto you a Savior is born, and he is Christ the Lord." Luke 2:11
- John the Baptist said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." John 1:29
- The Roman Centurion said, "Surely this man is the Son of God." Mark 15:39
- Thomas said, "My Lord and my God." John 2:28
- Peter said, "God has made this same Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." Acts 2:36
- And Paul said, "Nothing compares to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ my Lord." Philippians 3:8

What name do you use? Who do you say that he is?

For Isaiah, it was, *"Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."* And by naming the child this way, the prophet once and for all answers the question, *"What Child Is This?"*

A Card of Hope, Health, and Happiness

I received another card this year that really touched my heart. It was from a good friend of mine, Carolyn Jones, who had serious eye surgery in March. Her recovery was slow and right scary. She wondered if she would fully recovery.

Enter a couple of neighborhood children, Katherine and Hannah. They took chalk one afternoon and wrote on Carolyn's driveway the words, *"Hope, Health, and Happiness* in large letters." Carolyn's husband, Jay took her out to see what the girls had done, even though everything was a fog. Miraculously, as Carolyn looked at the driveway the fog began to clear and the words the girls had written came into clear view.

“Not only was I touched emotionally,” she said, “but physically as well. Those girls were the very definition of faith. It never occurred to them that I would not be able to see their work. They saw me as completely seeing, while I saw myself as not seeing. God restored my hope through that gift of Pure Grace.”

As Carolyn goes on to explain, *“The name Katherine means “pure” and the name Hannah means “grace”—Pure Grace.”*

That too is another name for our Lord—Pure Grace. He is the very One whose birth we celebrate this season of the year.

Merry Christmas. Hope, health, and happiness to you and yours.