

A MERRY CHRIST—MASS!

Hear again the Word of the Lord to His Church this Eve of the Nativity:

*For to us, (a) Child (is) born, (a) Son to us (is) gifted;
and the government will be upon His shoulders,
and His Name will be called
Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty – God, Father-Everlasting, Prince-of-Peace.¹*

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

Merry Christ--Mass! Or, perhaps you prefer to be greeted: "Happy Holidays!" With the right understanding of the etymology (development of the word), that is a fine greeting, for you actually saying - "Happy Holy Days!"² Maybe you are one of those who likes to "push-back" against those who by such greetings try to capture and make equal with the Christmas the spirits of Kwanzaa, Hanukkah, Yule, or the anniversary of the death of the Zoroastrian prophet, Zarathustra.³ Perhaps you are one who "goes with the flow." You attempt to give as little offense to others possible in giving or responding to holiday greetings. Personality types do make a difference in our responses!

In any type of Christian response you desire to give to non-believers' greetings, you are free to keep in mind that God is big enough to defend Himself. He is also strong enough to protect you against the slings and arrows of your family, friends, and society in general when you may give a response not palatable to their sensibilities. In Christ, you are free to set aside the next twelve days as a time to remember the

¹ *Isaiah 9:*

² cf. *Oxford English Dictionary*, Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1995, 647.

³ Internet: <http://interfaithcalendar.org/>, accessed 12-24-12.

greeting God gave when He sent the greatest of gifts anyone has ever given. That might guide you in your well-wishes, whether you are a “Merry Christmas,” a “Happy Holidays,” or a “Blessed Holy Days” kind of person.

On the other hand, if you are a Kwanzaa, Yule, or death of Zarathustra well-wisher – well, then you are not so free to celebrate the next twelve days. You should give attention to your heart, thoughts, and emotions before receiving Christ’s Body and Blood this “Most Holy Night” so that you do not receive Him to your judgment!

Let us pray that God moves each of us to be faithful persons. In Christ we desire to be those who resist any temptation to place, by our words and deeds, the One True God on par with any other so-called god. Let us be turned to the reality of God’s revelation of Him Whose birth you have been divinely called here to recall as Advent ends and the Christ-Mass begins. Hear again a translation of how the Baby was described over seven centuries before His birth:

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and His Name will be called
Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty – God, Father-Everlasting, Prince-of-Peace.⁴*

God, through the man who is arguably the greatest of the Old Testament prophets, Isaiah, proclaims God’s hope, peace, joy, and love to a people who are witnessing the darkness that unrepentant sin brings. They were in the midst of witnessing the murder of innocents, the destructions of homes, and the fall of their nation.

⁴ Isaiah 9:

(Sound familiar? There is truly nothing new under the sun, or moon as is the case tonight).

Sin, and the devastation it brings to human lives, even to those who are relatively innocent of offense, was rampant in the kingdom. Israel and Judah, by God's design, were supposed to be composed of God's chosen people, those whom He had gathered to give them His gifts. By human design, sin brought consequences to that land, events that are horrible to contemplate for those who cling to God's Word and His promises.

As the faithful witnessed the destruction of the lands around them, through human agents – the Assyrians – God's people needed to hear a Word from Him. The faithful were suffering right alongside the unfaithful. They were crying out to the Lord for deliverance, for hope, peace, joy, and love to surround them. The faithful wanted to be saved from the effects of sin around them, and truly from their own sins.

Just so it is today for believers. This past year the faithful in this nation have suffered along with unbelievers on account of the effects of sin in this world. We have witnessed the destruction of parts of major cities, due to forces unleashed when Adam fell into sin and brought death into this creation. We have ached over the loss of human life at the hands of humans – were they in medical clinics, or in movie theaters, or in schoolhouses. We too, cry out for deliverance, for hope, peace, joy, and love to surround us and save us from the effects of sin, and from our own sins.

God always hears the cries, the prayers, the petitions, and faithful pleadings of His people. He answers them in His time, according to His ways . He does so all the while holding forth His revealed will – that no one should perish eternally, be separated from His love – and that all should hear and believe His Good News.

On account of that, to those humans who wait in the Faith in the midst of suffering on account of sin and all its wages, God seems to delay. But, even as He seems to us slow in bringing help, He sends forth His Word. He calls the faithful back into the Faith. He moves us to confess our sins. He grants us the ability to receive the forgiveness He offers. He gives us His grace to wait upon the time of His good pleasure. If you doubt that, think of the generations who lived and died in God’s promises as they awaited His fulfillment of this promise:

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To whom was this Child promised?

The scripture says, “to us.” That means the promise is to those who were living in the darkness of sin. “To us,” the faithful of all generations, the Child is born, even as sin’s deep inkiness presses in upon us. The Child is promised “to us,” we who even now ache for release from sin in this world, from our own sins, and from the one who tempts us to sin.

What should the faithful waiting in darkness expect of this Child?

⁵ Isaiah 9:

First, that He is the gift of God. He is given, to us, to believers, even if we, in the persons of our forefathers and foremothers in the Faith have to wait over seven centuries from the time of Isaiah's prophecy. He is gifted by God to us who in ourselves do not deserve Him.

For what is the Child, the Son, given?

He is given to rule. The "government will be on His shoulders." That is, as a shepherd carries a wayward sheep across his shoulders that it may learn to follow his voice, so the Child, the Gift, will bear His people. He will, and does, hold them, us, close, enabling us to hear and respond to, and follow His Voice. He rules by also by bearing the weight of our sins, of your sins. See His shoulders burdened by the cross, as He carries the whole load of your sin into death.

How will the faithful know that they have received God's ultimate Gift, the Son, the Child, of the Promise?

Isaiah tells us that He will bear the Name of God. All the Names given for this Gift, this Son, this Child, are the names of God. They can only rightly apply to One Who is truly Divine. There are a few ways to divide His Name as it is recorded in *Isaiah*. Here is the manner of interpreting the Name of the Son of the Promise which makes most sense in terms of tonight's Scripture, its context, and its parallels. It is a five-part name, consisting of seven words in the Hebrew language. The Child, Son, Gift of God given to the Faithful as the Light of God which pushes back the darkness bears this Name:

- Wonderful – this declares His Divine Nature – For God is the God of all wonders, signs, and miracles.
- Counselor – this proclaims that He has all counsel, wisdom, and knowledge in Himself. He has no need of an assembly of advisors in order to rule in justice.
- Mighty God – He is God the Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer of all Creation.
- Father – Everlasting. He, as Divine, must be Eternal. He as Father has perfect concern for the helpless, the widows, and the fatherless. He disciplines those whom he loves. He cherishes His family so much that He is willing, and does, give His all for them, for you!
- Prince – of – Peace. He alone, of all the sons of woman, will effect peace between the Holy God and an unholy mankind. He will work peace for those who are at war with themselves, the world, and all the evil forces of the evil one.

He is the One whom you have been called to hear about this most holy of nights. He is the grace of God Who has appeared. He has brought Salvation in Himself. Why, the Name given Him through the angel of God, Jesus – means, “God is Salvation!”

That is a lot to place upon the shoulders of a Child, a Babe, born to us in a manger. Yet, because that Child is the Son, the Gift of the Promise declared by Isaiah twenty-nine centuries ago, He could in Himself, handle all that the devil, the world, and

our sinful flesh could throw at Him. He alone bears the Name of God: *Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty – God, Father-Everlasting, Prince-of-Peace*. He alone brings God to humans in a way of wonder – God wrapped in the flesh of an infant. He alone gives God’s counsel to fallen humans – the wisdom of the universe wrapped in swaddling cloths, come to die for our sins. He alone holds the might of God – to restore this fallen creation, to conquer death in His death. He alone is the Father in the midst of God’s people, speaking to us of true hope, peace, joy, and love that comes to us in His body. He alone is the Ruler who brings true and lasting peace – the declaration that we are right with God, and with one another, eternally.

He comes to us tonight, through means so simple. This should be no surprise when you consider how He chose to come to us first – small, dependent, His divinity set aside, fully human, needing to be fed, diapered, held, and loved. He comes to you now with the human and divine body and blood that first entered into His creation at the singing of the Angel Armies. He comes to you this night, reminding you of that night long ago, as He joins your voice to those of the angels in heaven. “Holy is God, the Lord of Sabaoth” (of the angel armies), will come from your lips as the *Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty – God, Father-Everlasting, Prince-of-Peace* comes to you, bringing you forgiveness, life, and salvation! For that and so much more, this is truly a Merry Christ-Mass!

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Eve of the Nativity (*Lutheran Service Book* one-year series)

Isaiah 9:2-7; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-14

December 24, 2012

Pastor Michael H. Morehouse

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