

Sunday, December 17, 2017

Isaiah 9:1-7

Matthew 4:12-17

Kingdom Peace for God's People

Advent and all its many activities continue. Just over one week until the celebration that tops the year will be upon us. But for some avid Star Wars fans this week marked a special occasion as the release of Episode 8 of the Star Wars series entitled "the Last Jedi" took place. This series of movies has connected with many people since the first Star Wars movie hit the theatres in 1977. Why? Because people are longing for a new hope and a force of good at a time when the world needs heroes. People are looking to escape the realities of nuclear threats on earth, the devastation of climate change with extreme heat, flooding, fires, and polar ice caps melting. People are looking for someone to help them through the next day, month or year and are escaping into a galaxy far, far away, even for a few hours to find that hero.

As we continue in our Advent journey, we have been going back to the words of the prophet Isaiah to help us to understand the time and the ethos of the Old Testament and why God planned to send His Son to earth. When Isaiah wrote his words he too was looking for a change in leadership. The people had been in exile, returned the Promised Land and looked toward building a life. But what they experienced was in fact a life of uncertainty and lack of focus. They were walking in darkness and seemed to be living in the land of the shadow of death. No hope, no light, no future but only to die. All hope was gone.

Isaiah also spoke of the peaceable kingdom which would be made possible by believing in God who would save them through His Son coming to earth. The people were oppressed and truly longed for change and the long promised Messiah. Many anticipated a hero to deliver them from Roman rule and tyranny. Isaiah wrote, "the government will be on his shoulders," and they believed that the Messiah would come as a political or military hero. But this was not God's plan.

Isaiah wrote, "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given." And it is through this child, God's Son, that hope for an everlasting peace was placed. It is upon this child of God that the responsibility of offering hope and a new life was put. And it is upon this child born of a young woman and raised in a faithful family that God promised a release from oppression and hope for a peaceful kingdom.

This baby will be unlike any others because of who he is and his names. Not only will he be called Jesus/ Joshua which means one who will save his people, but he will be lifted up and called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. The Wonderful

Counsellor will be the one who teaches, and listens and shares insight and wisdom, knowledge and experience. The Mighty God is the same one who calmed the sea, walked on the water, and healed many. The Everlasting Father- the child and Father are one and God the Father loved the son and loved his creation so much that the Son was sent to save the people from eternal sin. This Everlasting Father is God who put into the minds and hearts of the prophets what was to occur when Jesus the Son would be born on earth. The Everlasting father is God who seeks us to know and understand who we are and how we might know him.

And this child is the Prince of Peace, the one who would usher in a new era in human history. The one individual who would come and live, die and rise again all for the sake of others. This child would be born into a human family where those who would raise him lived good lives. His mother Mary was both humble and sweet, young and faithful. His human father Joseph was a man of good character who believed in God and trusted the Spirit which told him not to run away from Mary but to take her as his wife, to welcome the child and raise him and to love them all. This child would grow in wisdom and strength and teach others around him about God's kingdom and what this kingdom means—whether it is as a real place or destination easily found on Google Maps with your GSP- and he would understand many more things about the world, its creation, or its future than anyone sitting here. This child would strive to bring peace in a world of doubt, conflict, stress, tension and rivalry. And he would do so non-violently.

As we anticipate and hear again the story of Jesus' birth we might wonder why didn't he come with more grandeur or fantastic effects. He was born to Mary and Joseph as they travelled away from home. And he was placed in the manger (a common feeding trough) to rest. Those who knew of his birth were the angels and those who watched the night sky for abnormal stars. And it wasn't until the angels sang to the shepherds that people were informed of the birth of the One who would become the Christ. Many missed who He was even after the shepherds visited him and sang his praises to God in the streets.

John 1:11 He came to that which was His own- but His own did not receive him. Jesus was born in the hometown of Joseph but people didn't know this family at all. They had to stay in a barn out behind an inn. IT was because there was no more rooms available. But I wonder what would happen if the governor or Caesar himself had come—would a room in an inn open up, or would someone offer a place to stay? This was Joseph's hometown and he didn't know anyone even to stay for a night. He was really a stranger to this community and this is where Mary gave birth to an infant, so dependent on others.

Isaiah also states that there will not be an end of the increase of his government or peace. And this gives us hope today over 2000 years later. Jesus' leadership and influence will

not end. Sharing the story of Jesus will continue and that peace as well as the peaceable kingdom will come. But we must have faith, and we must believe.

Isaiah also stated that the Prince of Peace will reign and he will do so with justice and righteousness forever. And this will be accomplished because of God's desire for it to happen.

God put the plan in place and it happened. Over 2000 years ago there was a young woman and man—Mary and Joseph who had to travel to Bethlehem. She had been favoured by God to be the woman who would bear the infant child. Joseph had strong faith in God and believed the message of angels that Mary was a good woman. And so they planned their lives together with an infant to care for right away. But even from the beginning of their life together, they had to make choices in order to protect the child. They did not return home but had to flee to Egypt as King Herod wanted the New King who threatened his reign to be killed. But Mary and Joseph went to Egypt when they eventually could travel safely.

They knew that this infant was born of Mary but would become the Saviour as he is Christ the Lord. Who is this Jesus now? A refugee seeking to return home and to live life as his parents first deemed. Yet he is also a child needing to experience life however difficult growing up and knowing that he was different from others. Jesus is the Son of God who would soon preach to the nations the need for people to repent because the kingdom of heaven is near. The people would question his authority and watch him perform miracles but they also wanted to know him as a person.

Jesus came as an infant in order to experience life as a human being; so he could identify with those around him and this enabled him to be sure of what he was doing. And years later Jesus knew that his future included death on a cross for the sake of others. But we must not forget that he died with the world's sins upon him. And all he asked then and now is "repent. Believe act and follow. We are to repent—go and share those things which have gone against God's ways; we are to believe in the unconditional love of God and that His gift of Jesus to us is what enables us to have hope forevermore. We are also to act and do what Jesus did—sharing in loving ways and teaching others the stories of hope and healing, faith and joy. And we are to follow him. IF we believe we will live as Christians focused each day upon what we are and can be and we can experience this Spirit of Christmas all year long. This enables us to have the joy within us. This joy is felt because of Jesus' birth and that he reigns in the hearts and minds of those who are faithful.

Kingdom peace for God's people—how do we receive God's peace? By embracing the Prince of Peace born at Christmas but also as the Risen Christ who has forgiven us all our sins.

This peace is experienced within and with others not only in this time of year, but whenever two or three gather together in His name.

Jesus became the Saviour of the world. He is not a hero per se because he wants to save everyone not just one part of the world or galaxy's people. He is not a hero because of what he did or how he did it- he is the saviour because he humbled himself like a servant and was lifted up to die in our place all because of the sin in the world. Jesus is the one who exemplifies peace in non- violent ways- but are we really looking for peace this Christmas. We don't need another hero—we need Jesus to lead us into God's plan for a peaceable kingdom. Let us remember this as hear the story of Jesus birth, celebrate the incarnate God amongst us and be filled with joy that only He can give.

LET US PRAY

Holy God hear our prayers as we give thanks for the prophet's words of the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace coming into our world. Be with us as we share with one another the hope, peace and joy of this Advent time. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.