

# Christmas Eve

## WHO WOULD SEND A CHILD THERE?

Isaiah 9:2-7

Christmas Eve

Analysis by Eric W. Evers

2 The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness- on them light has shined. 3 You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. 4 For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. 5 For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. 6 For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

*Note: There is a great deal of background needed for this text. The promise of a blessed child comes amidst war between Israel (with Aram) and Judah, and entangling alliances with Assyria. Reading Isaiah 7:1-8:15 and 2 Kings 16:1-20 will be helpful.*

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## **DIAGNOSIS: This Is No Place for Children!**

### **Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *No Hope***

Isaiah addresses the situation of those who “walk in darkness,” and who live “in a land of deep darkness.” The images are of people who are confused, suffering loss and grief. It is the picture of a decline still in progress, with no upward swing seen ahead, no reason for hope. The people of northern Israel in Zebulun and Naphtali, who had suffered Assyrian invasion, were in such a state of loss. But Judah, too, under King Ahaz, lived in a darkened time of national decline, faithlessness, and corruption. In a season that evokes grief and is so conducive to stress, and in an uncertain chapter in our nation’s life, it is likely we will easily find listeners today walking a similar path.

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Stuck***

The people of whom Isaiah speaks, however, are not merely in darkness; they are stuck there. There is a yoke upon them, a bar on their shoulders, an oppressor’s rod keeping them down. And it’s not just being under foreign military domination or devastation. Their own king, Ahaz, had embraced foreign worship practices, possibly even jeopardizing his own son’s life (2 Kings 16:3). The peoples’ offerings were given on a pagan-styled altar. You can see why there was a sense of deep despair; Judah was not even a safe place for children. How could there be hope? A bar was holding them down, a spiritual burdened them, working through armies and royalty (and a corrupt priesthood, see 2 Kings 16:10-16).

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Cursed***

And this power has turned them into combatants against God. The boots of tramping warriors and blood-rolled garments are symbols of war and violence, a curse delivered onto Israel by God because of their rebellion. Even Judah becomes a participant in

the violence, as it becomes a vassal to the bloody Assyrian Empire (2 Kings 16:7), seeking deliverance by force through these human allies. Judah refused the Lord's help, and the blood now covers them. The displeasure of God has cast them into this darkness, and the warfare yet looming does not give a sense of relief.

## **PROGNOSIS: God sends a Child!**

**Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution)** : *Gifted with a Child*

But then, something surprising comes. Isaiah directs our attention to a fire, but not one of wrath. Instead, it is a purifying blaze. The symbols of violence shall be burned away. How can this be? A child! A child? Who would bring a child into this situation? Only God. Only the Lord in his foolish, abundant grace. And it is not just a birth; No, it is a gift! "For a child has been born for us [catch that gift language?], a son given to us [can it get any clearer?]"! God will not meet the situation of his people from a high, lofty, wrathful position. Instead, he will send a child. And yes, this most likely first pointed to the "good king" Hezekiah (see 2 Kings 18:1-8). But those temporary hopes are now extravagantly trumped. For the Child who comes as the ultimate Gift is God's Son himself, who comes in lowly, merciful, gentle ways. God comes in the flesh, to bear the enmity and curse himself, delivering those in darkness.

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution)** : *Carried Forward*  
Authority rests on this child's shoulders. "When artists want to paint this text, they paint a child who carries a cross on his shoulder. But if I were to paint this text, I would paint... a child who carries a church on his shoulder... If you want to find the Christian church, you will never find it where you do not find Christians resting upon Christ's shoulder" (Martin Luther,

sermon on this text, given Christmas afternoon, 1532. Eugene F.A. Klug, ed. Sermons of Martin Luther: The House Postils, vol 3, p.226). We are powerless to escape the spiritual oppression over us. But where we once carried a bar, now Christ carries us. Where we once struggled, now we can rest. Where we once feared, now we can rejoice and be confident. We have a new power in which we can trust: the zeal of the Lord of hosts. This Child frees us from the crushing forces of sin and death. This Child is rest, and life, and joy, all for us.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *So Much to Expect!***  
And what is the shape of this life? Instead of confusion, we trust the wonderful wisdom of the Counselor. In place of despair, we rely on the power of a Mighty God for us. This Child can take our loss and grief up into his everlasting, fatherly care, and we can find peace in him. Where we were once active co-conspirators with the spiritual powers over us, we are now freed to practice the righteousness and justice. We have none of this by our own power, but by the continually-growing authority of the Christ child born, given, crucified and raised for us. Amen!