

Nativity of Our Lord, Christmas Eve, Year C, Old Testament

THE GREAT COSMIC MAKEOVER

Isaiah 9:2-7

Christmas Eve

Analysis by Cathy Lessmann

2 The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined. 3 Thou hast multiplied the nation, thou hast increased its joy; they rejoice before thee as with joy at the harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. 4 For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, thou hast broken as on the day of Mid'ian. 5 For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. 6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." 7 Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David, and over his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and for evermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

DIAGNOSIS: A Cosmic Mess

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): “We have seen the enemy—and he is us.” God’s good creation is a mess. Everything and everyone is oppressed, and there’s no doubt about whose fault it is. As Pogo said, “We have seen the enemy and he is us!” *We* humans have ravaged the environment, indelibly damaged the climate, even junked up space. *We* oppress, exploit, terrorize, kill, cripple, and attack each other, causing wars, riots, destruction, and floods of refugees. That’s oppression of immense proportion: It’s like having a yoke slung on your shoulders, or like being trampled on (vv. 4 and 5), or like being in the dark, with no light to “see.” In short, it’s a desperate plight.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): The Enemy Within

We try so hard to fix ourselves and the damage we’ve done. We do the very best we can to make things “right,” but all our efforts seemingly amount to spitting in the wind. We fail at every level. Some of us give up—we despair (Option 1). Others try harder, supremely harder—as if *our* efforts and our super inventions (like technology) could make things right again (Option 2, otherwise known as idolatry). God identifies both options as a lack of trust in him.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): The BIG Enemy

Scripture makes clear that one thing we can count on is for God to leave humans to face their own natural consequences. When we trust other gods to make things right, God hands us over to those gods and steps aside. Alas, this is catastrophic, because

without God we are lost—no life, no power source, no light, only darkness and death. That means the enemy... is God!

PROGNOSIS: The Great Cosmic Makeover

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): “A child is given.”

It's a hopeless situation, unless....unless something happens within God that changes his mind. And this is exactly what Isaiah proclaims in this prophecy. Incredulously, the same enemy-God who rejects idolaters and despairers has decided to be merciful and actually becomes **zealous** on our behalf—zealous to re-connect, zealous to make things right (v. 7). Equally surprising, as Isaiah here announces, is that the “means” by which God will achieve such a re-connection, such a cosmic making-right, is by becoming human himself, arriving as an infant child: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given” (v. 6). His precise mission is to “seek out and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). In this Jesus, born to Mary in a Bethlehem stable and later executed on a cross, God will absorb his own judgment, and in so doing, make all things, on heaven and on earth “right.”

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): A Heart Makeover

Another surprise....this makeover will not be accomplished by brute force, or brute intelligence, or brute persuasion or any other brutal method. Instead, it will be done mercifully. True, there is a “dying” to the old idolatrous, despairing ways, but that dying gets coupled with a re-living, the gifting of a new heart, a new spirit. Option 3, then, is a makeover of the heart,

from despair and idolatry to Jesus-trusting.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): A Cosmic Makeover

With God as friend rather than enemy, the whole cosmos begins to change. Light starts to shine in dark places: first inside human hearts, then inside human institutions. Oppression and injustice are slowly replaced with equality and justice. Not because made-over hearts are *forced* to do so, but because they now long to care for their neighbors, their world, their cosmos. As Isaiah describes it, “of peace, there will be no end” (v. 7). On earth, enemies will become friends—actually, even more, they will become each other’s caretakers, each other’s beloved. It’s not a big surprise then that the night Jesus was born the heavenly hosts joyfully sang, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors” (Luke 2:14).