

The Nativity of Our Lord

THE BROKEN YOKE

Isaiah 9:2-7

The Nativity of Our Lord Analysis by Marcus Felde

*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.*

*3You 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.*

*4For 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.*

*5For 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.*

*7His 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. By your leave, I will employ a word play. In Latin, since then it rhymes and sounds truer. "In re" means "in fact." "In spe" means "in hope." The facts of our human situation are dire indeed. The hope which trumps those facts is glorious indeed. Stretched between those two strong truths, affirmed respectively by God's law and the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, is the helpless little baby who would grow up to save the world.

Our hope is stronger than any amount of "facts on the ground," and will prevail.

*"Some say the world will end in fire, some say in ice,"
pundited Robert Frost.*

I say "Bunk, Robert." The world is being saved from both fire and ice, by the power in the tiny hands of one who was just born, who will use those hands to bless and bless, whose hands will be nailed to a cross, and who will ultimately display those tortured but resurrected hands to all of us and invite us to join Thomas's John 20 confession: "My Lord and my God."

All this, from a baby being born? Yes, and amen.

DIAGNOSIS: The Crushing Yoke ("In Re"—in fact)

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Bad People*

Isaiah, addressing a downed people, does not dial up "The Innocence Project." He is not out to prove that they were put in prison through a mix-up. The people who here are receiving a wonderful message of eventual release knew their faults, and

their sins were ever before them.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : An Unruled People

We have to back-translate from the good news what the bad news was. The crime of these people boiled down to their having abandoned the God who would be their Lord. For each time Isaiah pounds in the positive (“Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace”) we have to imagine that these people did *not* listen to the counsel of the Lord; thought God was *too weak* to suit them; acted like they belonged to *another* father; and let a *different* authority define and defend their peace. Their folly vis-à-vis God is what got them in trouble. Bad hearts!

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : Done!

That their doom was complete, until now, is expressed in vivid imagery. They wore a yoke, and their enemies beat them with rods. They were a defeated, bloody army. They had no hope. They had, as a people, been “killed.” Curtains.

PROGNOSIS: The Cracking Yoke (“In Spe”—in hope)

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : Dawn!

“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.” “From this time [this dawn] on and forevermore,” the future stretches as far as can be imagined, under the aegis of a new ruler! The fulcral moment is when you hear the crack of the timber yoke. The snap of the rod breaking. No more bondage and death.

“The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.” (“God is excited to make this happen!”) And how? Through the one who is the Word, who fulfills this prophecy.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : Ruled People

The exulting people come under the One whom to fear is to fear nothing else. Through faith in Jesus we have a Lord who matches the description in this prophecy, and commands the vision of the people of the world in an unprecedented fashion.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : Peacefull People

As the authority of this One expands (v. 7), the people who love him accomplish his will, employing the justice and embodying the righteousness which will make this ruler ever more attractive to the world of those who are still in darkness. Time and space belong to this Lord, and his rule will expand to fill both, to the accompaniment of the sounds of happy people, happy the way people are happy when their greatest, most crushing burden is suddenly lifted off their shoulders and they can see blue sky and breathe free.

The answer to the riddle "How do you break an unbreakable yoke?" is "Give it to a child. This child."