

Sonoraville Baptist Church
Sunday, November 27, 2011 – 11:00 AM
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Getting Ready for Something Big - Isaiah 7:14

Introduction: Today's message is entitled "Getting Ready for Something Big." We all know that big events require a certain amount of preparation. You who have ever gotten married or graduated from school, or planned to have children - you know what I am talking about. Sometimes the preparation for those big events can take months – even years.

Well, Christmas can be considered a big deal too. And as you all know, the Christmas shopping season is officially upon us. Last Friday was Black Friday which has traditionally marked the official beginning of the Christmas shopping season. However, this year, some retailers chose to get an even earlier start by opening their doors Thanksgiving night and try to jump ahead of the rest. Perhaps some of you got in on that madness and lived to tell about it. Maybe some of you are committed shop-a-holics and have continued to shop through Black Friday, Crazy Saturday, Super Sunday, and on into Cyber Monday. Maybe some of you just need to be committed!

Now if you think that is terrible, to start the Christmas shopping season so early, just hold on. It's going to get worse. It probably won't be long until the Christmas shopping season will start the day after Halloween, and Thanksgiving will fade into oblivion. In fact, it wouldn't surprise me if someday we'll see Labor Day launching the crush of the Christmas rush.

We see all this cultural clutter and consumer-driven rush of Christmas, yet against all of this stands a simple yet profound way to launch the Christmas season in an altogether different way. Today is the first Sunday of Advent, which for the Christian church, officially launches the Christmas Season. Advent is a big deal! Now I had not heard of Advent until I became a pastor, and in my first church, I was introduced to it because that church had been celebrating it for years. Their celebration began with a service called "The Hanging of the Greens" in which all the decorations of Christmas were emphasized for their symbolism and meaning. I was reluctant and skeptical of it all at first, but as I joined in the celebration and became educated to the impact of it all, I found Advent to be rich in meaning and significantly profound in making Christmas even more of a truly Christian holiday.

The word "*Advent*" means "*coming*" and it specifically refers to the coronation of a King. Traditionally Advent has been a time that helps us slow down enough to pray, repent, reflect, and prepare to focus on the Savior's birth. As a pastor, I see Advent more in terms of a spiritual journey that helps us worship the Christ of Christmas with all of our heart, soul, mind, strength, and our senses. It helps us focus on more than just the baby Jesus in the manger. As the Apostle John put it, Advent helps us worship the "Word that was made flesh, and dwelt among us." Also, by emphasizing Jesus' first coming, Advent helps us more urgently anticipate Jesus' second coming. The special readings, the lighting of the candles, and the sermons help us reflect on the meaning of it all and rejoice in Jesus' presence in our lives. My prayer is that we experience the Advent season, may it also serve to remind us that you really can't start too early when getting ready for something big – Christmas shopping aside!

We use the Advent readings and light the candles each week to shed light on the various themes of Christmas – themes such as hope, peace, joy and love. But in the Christian church, we are free to use Advent to change those themes from time to time. That is what we have done this year. It is our hope that Advent will help create a sense of expectation in each of us so that we don't get so caught up in the commercialism of Christmas, that we fail to focus on the Christ of Christmas. We want Jesus to shine bright in the busy-ness of our lives.

This morning, Susan and Hannah introduced the Advent season by lighting the Prophet's Candle. I want to continue that theme by using some of the prophecies concerning the first coming of Jesus into the world as they were spoken by the Prophet Isaiah. And as we do, may I remind you that the book of Isaiah was written about 700 years before the time of Christ. You talk about getting ready for Christmas! 700 years is a long time, to prepare. This fact underscores the title for today's message: **"Getting Ready for Something Big."**

This morning, we'll let our fingers do the walking as we look at three passages in Isaiah - chapters 7, 9, and 53. By doing so, we'll get a good idea of how Isaiah perceived Christmas. Although he may not have understood the concept of Christmas, Isaiah knew that the coming of the Messiah was truly something big, and he got a big jump on it. First, looking at chapter 7, let's see:

1. A Sure Sign

In chapter 7, we see that an evil king named Ahaz is on the throne. Israel at this time in history was not the world power it once was. In fact, Israel had been divided into two nations – the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Ahaz ruled in the Southern Kingdom of Judah, and was a king who deliberately disobeyed God. As a result, his kingdom came under attack and everyone was living in fear. Vs. 2 says, “...*the hearts of Ahaz and his people were shaken, as the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind.*” But instead of turning to the Lord, Ahaz begins to think about partnering with the evil empire of Assyria. At this crucial time, God in His great love and mercy, sent Isaiah the prophet to help King Ahaz come to his senses.

Isaiah tells Ahaz in vs. 9 that “*if you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.*” And in vs. 10 we read that Isaiah urged Ahaz to ask for a sign that would help him believe in the Lord, but he refuses. Isaiah questions Ahaz' sanity in vs. 13 by asking him: “*Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God also?*” So Isaiah tells him in vs. 14: “*Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign. The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call Him Immanuel.*” Let's notice a few things about this prophecy:

Isaiah tells Ahaz that if he would not ask the Lord for a sign, the Lord Himself would give him one. However, this sign would not just be given to Ahaz or just the house of David. This sign would be given to everyone. We know this to be true because the angel made clear the shepherds in **Luke 2:10 (NIV)**: “*Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.*”

What was the sign? The sign would be that a Son would be born to a virgin. In other words, this would not be an ordinary pregnancy and birth. This would stand out as a miraculous sign because the Son Isaiah referred to would be none other than God incarnate. His name, or more appropriately, His outstanding attribute is bound up in the title “*Immanuel*” which means, “*God with us.*” Isaiah was saying that from the point of this miraculous birth on, God would Himself be present among His people. There is your sign Ahaz!

Now, did Ahaz understand all this? No. In fact, it wasn't even fulfilled during his lifetime. This was a prophecy. It focused on the future, and was given to all people so that God could be with all people for all time to be a sure sign. Next, let's turn to Isaiah 9:

2. A Sent Son (Isaiah 9).

Chapter 9 needs to be set in context. The original birth announcement was made in the midst of grief and gloom. Vs. 1 says: “*Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan.*” Zebulun and Naphtali were two of the Patriarch Jacob's sons. By this time, these two sons were long gone, but their descendents were still called by their names. So Zebulun and Naphtali were two tribes from the north of Israel, which made up the land of Galilee. For years the people in this area had known only grief because of the attacks of their enemies. These attacks were a direct result of their sin. But because these tribes lived closest to the bad guys, they were the first ones attacked. Isaiah tells of a time in the future where gloom will be replaced with gladness in Galilee, and we know that the basis for Jesus' ministry was in Galilee.

The lesson here is that just as the birth announcement of Jesus came in the midst of grief, Jesus was born in the midst of great grief. While the angels were proclaiming “*peace on earth,*” Herod was preparing to annihilate infants; while Mary was worshipping God for allowing her to be the favored virgin, Matthew 2:18 tells us that other mothers were weeping for their children. Yet, in the midst of all this grief and sorrow came the wonderful good news that indeed was “*good tidings of great joy.*” Jesus, the Messiah, the promised anointed one had been born.

What does this prophecy mean for us? It means that today, if you find yourself in the middle of some kind of trial or sorrow, don't lose hope. The good news is that you are exactly where *Immanuel* will meet you.

Verse 2 describes how the birth of Christ would bring brightness to a dark world: “*The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.*” We'll

be focusing on the light in our Christmas Eve service this year as we light the Christ Candle to show the impact that Christ has made on a dark world. Jesus said of Himself in John 8:12, *“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”* Jesus came so that men and women, boys and girls would not have to stumble around in the darkness of our sins. He would be our light and show us the way to have a full and meaningful and abundant life. And He would be the light that leads us to the eternal life in heaven with the Father.

Looking further in chapter 9, vs. 6 says: *“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”* The phrase *“to us”* means *“for us, for our benefit.”* Jesus came for our benefit and part of that benefit is found in the next statement: the *“government will be upon His shoulders.”* This means that all the expectations of the throne of King David would be fulfilled in Christ. In **2 Samuel 7:13-16 (NIV)**, we find those expectations as they were given to David by God Himself. The Lord said about David:

13 *He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.*

14 *I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men.*

15 *But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you.*

16 *Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.”*

Now, did all that happen personally to David? No! David was a human being. He didn't live forever. He is not still on the throne. But Isaiah was saying that all of this would be fulfilled in the coming Messiah. David's government, and in a larger sense, God's government would be on Messiah's shoulders.

It is amazing isn't it? That little baby bound up in swaddling clothes lying in a manger would be the one who would hold the universe together. The one who was nestled on Mary's shoulders, would bear everything on His shoulders. Jesus would be and is redeemer and ruler of all.

Sometimes we lose that aspect of Jesus at Christmastime because we tend to focus only on the baby born in Bethlehem. But He is far more than that, and Isaiah points out that fact in his four-fold titles. He said that Jesus *“will be called:”*

“Wonderful Counselor.” Jesus is Profound in that came to give counsel for our confusion.

“Mighty God.” Jesus is Powerful in that came to give us strength for our weaknesses.

“Everlasting Father.” Jesus is Personal in that He came to us who have been left the orphaned by our own rebellion, and became the father who would never leave us or forsake us.

“Prince of Peace.” Jesus is Peaceful and came to provide peace for our troubled souls – a peace that the world could not give.

Isaiah not only knew that *Immanuel* would be born to a virgin as a sure sign; but he also understood that He would be the sent Son. He would be sent to us for our benefit! But finally, Isaiah prophesied that Jesus would be:

4. A Suffering Savior (Isaiah 53).

From the very beginning of the Nativity account in we see that Jesus had a special purpose for coming to the world: Matthew wrote: *“She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”* **Matthew 1:21 (NIV)**

By suffering and sacrificing Himself on the cross as our substitute, Jesus accomplished that purpose. And in Isaiah 53, we see some amazing prophecies that describe the substitutionary atonement of Christ on the cross. I want to read three verses from that prophesy. **Isaiah 53:3-5 (NIV)**: *“He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.”*

That is a lot of stuff isn't it? Even more so, these prophecies about the coming Messiah didn't quite match the expectations and dreams most of the people had for their future King. We have the benefit of seeing these truths about Jesus from the vantage point of hindsight, but they must have been confusing and even

unbelievable to the ancient Jewish reader. Why would our King, our Savior, our Messiah have to suffer? That just doesn't sound right.

Perhaps these prophecies can be illustrated by the following story told by a man from China who was converted to Christ. He said: A man fell into a dark, slimy pit. He tried to climb out of the pit, but he couldn't. Confucius came along, saw the man and said, "*Poor fellow, had he listened to me, he never would have gotten there,*" and he went on. Buddha came along and saw the man in the pit and said, "*Poor fellow, if he'll come up here, I'll help him,*" and he too kept on walking. Then Jesus Christ came along and jumped down into the pit and lifted him out.

Jesus had to suffer like we do so He could empathize with us. By taking on human sorrows and suffering, Jesus would be qualified to jump in the pit with us and rescue us in a way that no other person could.

Conclusion: Through the prophetic eyes of Isaiah, we see that Jesus came not only to be born in this world but to be born in us. Isaiah's promises about Christ give us hope and when they're fulfilled in us they bring peace. But like a present offered at Christmas, Jesus must be received. **Isaiah 65:1-2 (NIV):** "*I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me... all day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people, who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations.*"

God revealed Himself to us completely when He sent His Son to us. He completed His plan to redeem us and make us fit to live eternally in His presence when Jesus died on the cross and conquered death by coming back to life. Are you ready to receive the Christ of Christmas? He's ready to come into your world today because remember, one can never start too early when getting ready for something big.