

Christmas Day (Eve), 2010
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“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.’”

For the record, these words of Isaiah, the Old Testament prophet, were written about 750 years before the birth of Christ. Isaiah foretold what people had long hoped for, that God would intervene in this world, to save us from poverty and hopeless cruelty, from war, from famine and pestilence, but most of all, from sin and ultimate death. In other words, the hope was that God would save us from ourselves. Isaiah knew that even though mankind had been created in the image of God, made the highest of earthly creatures, that from the very beginning, from Adam in the creation epic, when we tried to do it our way and not God’s way, we failed.

Something more was needed. To Isaiah, our only hope was for God to send a messiah - a savior and redeemer. Isaiah believed that God would have to radically intervene in history, in some ways starting completely new with man. What was needed was for God, himself, to come into this world and take on, for the sake of humanity, the governance of this world. Isaiah understood that corruption, famine and the hopeless cruelty of war are essentially the results of humanity’s own corruption and brokenness. You see, sin is nothing more than mankind’s corruption of God’s intent, our separation in relationship from God, and the problem here is no fault in creation, but rather in our stewardship of creation. It is a fault going back to beginning of humanity, because from the very beginning we have abused free will. So Isaiah understood that what was needed was a new beginning, a new creation, a starting over with human kind.

Isaiah prayed to God for the deliverance of this creation and human kind and God responded. “I will do this thing,” said God. “When the time is right, I will send the world its messiah. I will come into the world as God in human form. I will take upon my own shoulders the responsibility of human sin. I will bear the burden that you cannot bear. I will turn the tide of corruption and my world will become a new place, a new creation. I will do this because I am love.”

In the fullness of time, God’s Word became flesh. The creating and sustaining word took form in Jesus Christ. Let’s unload this a little. Scripture says that God created by speaking his desire, nothing more, because nothing more was needed. God said, “Let there be...” and there was. This creating “Word” of God is known in theology as “*Logos*.” If you read Saint John’s Gospel, the opening verses, you will read that this very *Logos*, this very Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. We have beheld, John wrote, his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father. My brothers and sisters in Christ, God’s only begotten Son came into this world to live among us as one of us, to take upon his own shoulders the governance of the world, to take upon himself our sin so that we might be redeemed before God. Tonight, we celebrate that birth.

Two thousand years, more or less, have passed since Mary gave birth to God's son. Two thousand years more or less have passed since that terrible Friday when, on the garbage dump outside of Jerusalem, God's Word hung on a cross. Wars have come and wars have gone, and sin still marches rampant through this world. It is hard to look at an Adolf Hitler or an Osama Bin Laden and not ask if there really is a difference. Has Christ made a difference? If so, where is the difference? Is it in Buchenwald or Aschwitz? Is it on the USS Cole or at the World Trade Center? Yes, for at Buchenwald and every other death camp since, in the horrors of every single act of terror, for every abduction of an innocent child, every murder, every rape - wherever human sin and incarnate evil have tried to challenge the love of God, God, in Christ, has triumphed. God has triumphed in the love that Christians have for others. God has triumphed in the hope that Christians have for themselves and others. God has triumphed in the acts of kindness and charity that believers have shown to others, even within the surrounding chaos and destruction. And, even in death, God has triumphed over death, because following Christmas there is Easter, and we are a people of Easter faith. In Christ, there is no death, or as Saint Paul once said, "Oh death, where is your sting? Oh death, where is your victory?" Nothing, no evil can overcome the love of God in Christ Jesus and you and I have that love. In Christ, we are invincible.

But, my brothers and sisters in Christ, until this world, in its entirety knows Jesus as Lord, there will be evil. Until this world, in its entirety knows Jesus the Christ as savior, there will be hatred and murder. Love is incomplete that is not defined in God. Life is incomplete that does not know the Cross. Wherever Christ is missing, there can and will rise up children of evil who will inflict untold evil on this world, even mistakenly in the name of God, because they do not know the one true God. But, the day will come, as God the Father has promised, when, in and through his Son, Jesus Christ, the devil, in all his forms will be defeated and evil will be ultimately overcome. The work of Redemption is complete in the life of Jesus, but the work of evangelism, of bringing this world to Christ is very much a work in progress. Until that work is done our struggle must go on. So, this is our task: to know Christ and to make him known. Only if we and others make Christ known will this world move beyond the Bin Ladens, beyond the Stalins and the Hitlers to find the peace for which we long. But good will triumph, love will triumph because God has sent the Christ to us and his Holy Spirit empowers us. The Lord Jesus is in this world. Merry Christmas. *Amen.*