

Jesus Came - To The World

John 3:1-21
Isaiah 60:1-7, 19-22

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"Rise and shine!"

So said mom as she waltzed into your room, throwing open the curtains, allowing the morning sun to stream in.

What had been dark was now flooded with light.
Sleep was no longer an option.
The time for laying around is over.
Get up and get going.

We've all had it happen to us at one time or another.

And in Isaiah 60, the entire nation of Israel has it happen courtesy of the prophet.

"Rise and shine!"

There is a period of time which will be characterized by darkness.

But after that will come light, God-light.

And in that light there will be an amazing stream of international wealth and power streaming into the city of God.

"Nations will come to your light
and kings to the brightness of your dawn." v.3

"...the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you,
the wealth of the nations shall come to you.
A multitude of camels shall cover you..." v.5-6

"...they shall bring gold and frankincense..." v.6

"...all the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered to you..." v.7

On one level you can read this as a word of encouragement to an ancient nation in captivity, announcing that they would be restored to Palestine to rebuild their physical city.

And that would be a valid layer of interpretation.

But like so much of prophecy there are multiple layers of fulfillment.

And when you consider the last words of Isaiah 60 it becomes very clear that Isaiah is not just talking about any time around 500 or 400 BC when he says,

*"The sun shall no longer be your light by day
nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you by night...."*

Isaiah, in prophesying about the Holy City, is talking about the end of time.

He is seeing, from a vantage point hundreds of years earlier, what the apostle John saw in the vision of *Revelation*, chapter 21

"And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.... and the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light...."

Different prophecy - Same city.

Rise and shine!

The season of darkness is drawing to an end - and a season of light is on the way.

Where there was once poverty there will be riches.

Where sons and daughters have been scattered far and wide - families shattered - there will be reunion.

Where there was once want, there will now be plenty.

Get ready for it!

It is a prophecy of **salvation**.

And it is given in very physical terms.

Not just because that happens to be language that the people understand,
but because

God's salvation is very physical.

That's something we sometimes have trouble with.

We tend to think of salvation as a great escape from earth and everything associated with our present physical life -

- a great escape to a body-less zone in heaven.

We start to think about the goal of Christian life as getting to heaven for an eternal choir festival accompanied by a harp orchestra.

Which, if you're not into choirs or harps, sounds like something less than a "10"!

And which, if you look carefully at the Bible's message, is not an accurate picture.

In Isaiah's day, sheep and rams represented commerce.

They were bought and sold.

And camels were the transport trucks of the desert.

They represented economic power.

If you take Isaiah 60 seriously, it would seem that when God finishes his great work of salvation,

when what the bible calls "The Day of the Lord" finally comes,

it is going to **involve** international commerce and trade and technology.....

....instead of simply annihilating it all.

And that wonderful, perfect eternity of God is going to involve a glorious **city**, not just a redone Garden of Eden.

And what are cities?

Cities are centres where culture is found. Where houses and shops are built. Where streets are paved. Where work is done. Where things are made. Where people gather.

And **that** is the setting, a very physical and tangible setting, which the prophets give of the Day of God's Salvation coming in its fullness.

Can you relate to that, perhaps, a bit better than harps and clouds and wings?

Have you ever noticed that when we read John chapter 3 we most typically zero in on verse 16? Everyone memorizes it in Sunday School:

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

How many of us have memorized verse 17?

Stopping with verse 16 allows our minds to adopt a very limited understanding of salvation.

We end up with a *"me 'n Jesus; on the clouds of glory; up in heaven"* faith.

Which, unfortunately, sells short the reason for Christmas.

Remember verse 17 of John 3.....

INDEED...

*God did not send the Son into the world
to condemn the world
but in order that the world
might be saved through him.*

We sing, "Joy to.....**THE WORLD**"

We sing that because Jesus is saviour of **the world**.

We sing, "O Come, O Come, Immanuel"

Immanuel - which is an ancient name meaning "God is among us"

because Jesus came **BODILY** to a **PHYSICAL** world to reclaim it from the devastation of sin and the

grip of Evil.

to make it new again
and to claim all commerce and trade and technology
all cities
and all countryside
all land and all oceans
so that, as Isaiah 60:6 says,
"they shall... proclaim the praise of the Lord."

Very soon we'll recount the Nativity story.

And it will involve literal camels coming over the hills from faraway lands, with wise men on them. And they bring to the Babe gifts of the very things spoken of in Isaiah 60.

Did those things leap off the page when Cathy read them?

Verse 6 - *They shall bring gold and frankincense....*

And did you notice the talk of "flocks"?

Remember the Christmas story - who got the first word of the birth of the Saviour?

Shepherds, guarding their **flocks** by night!

Coincidence?

Or was it perhaps God's way of underlining the prophetic Word sent through Isaiah so many years earlier; A huge divine pointer that the coming of Salvation Day, the coming of the Holy City, was coming a huge leap closer?

Coming through the the Saviour
sent not to condemn the world.... but to save it.

John mentions the term '**The World**' more than 65 times in his gospel.

It's a huge theme.

And it carries a dual meaning - a negative one and a positive one.

The negative one refers to attitudes that are opposed to God's control of and claim over life. It refers to life that is distracted from serving God or that distorts God's plan for creation and for humanity. It refers to life that is so busy getting and consuming and building and planning that it forgets about the Creator; life lived on a horizontal plane without any thought to the vertical dimension.

We refer to that kind of living as **worldly**.

It's the attitude that Jesus condemns in John 12:25 -

Those who love their life in this world will lose it.

Or John 16:33 - *"I have overcome the world."*

Or John 18:36 - *"My kingdom is not of this world."*

It refers to life that revolves entirely around the here-and-now, forget-about-God living, that only thinks about stuff..... *the world*.

That's the one meaning. The negative one.

There's also a positive one.

Like John 3:17 -

*God did not send the Son into the world
to condemn the world
but in order that the world*

might be saved through him.

Or John 6:33, telling us that Jesus.... "*gives life to the world.*"

Or John 8:12, where Jesus proclaims, "*I am the light of the world.*"

Or John 12:47, "*I have come to save **the world.***"

That references the physical world - you know... the stuff that the *Arrogant Worms* sing about ----
rocks and trees and water
Or what Isaiah pictures in chapter 60:
culture and commerce and trade

God the Creator isn't about to turn his back on all that.
He's not walking away from his original vision of seeing creation explored and developed and used and celebrated and played in and traveled over.
On macro levels by sailing the oceans or scaling Everest or using Hubble.
Or micro levels through developing particle accelerators or microscopes.
Or cultural levels with music... and art and theatre and cuisine.

God's not against development or city life.

Jesus came **into** the world
because
the world **matters** to God.

He assumed a very physical body
because
the physical side of life **matters** to God.

His mission is to see it restored to rightful patterns
Creator-honoring patterns
Healthy, just, sin-free patterns

And he **will** bring that to pass.
It **will** happen!!

And we get to be part of it!!

Remember that when you go skiing in Gatineau Park, and enjoy the brilliant snow;
or hike in the Greenbelt and enjoy the wonder of a chickadee feeding from your hand.
As you laugh and enjoy them, remember: the Saviour celebrates with you.

Or when you're researching photonics, pause some time to remember that you are exploring part of the world of which Jesus is Saviour. It's a **good** thing to do.

Or when you craft language in subtle and beautiful ways to convey a poetic message, you're using a gift from God to be delighted in.

Your job and your recreation are not just things to fill the time between living today here in this world, and when you get to go to heaven.
It all matters.
Our life in the world matters.

The challenge is - are these activities done in a way that acknowledges the ownership of God?

Here's my take-away question for you today:

*Would you be proud to have Jesus stand beside you,
hand on your shoulder,
as you do what you do this coming week?*

Do you hesitate to answer?

Why is that?

What changes would you need to make to remove that hesitation?

And then - *if you want your celebration of Christmas to be authentic* -
would tomorrow not be a good day to start making those changes?

And then -

beyond just **my** living in the world
here's another Christmas question.....

If Jesus came to save the world

If he's so passionate about it

shouldn't I be passionate about it, too?

If the physical world matters to the Saviour enough that he was willing to become part of it, shouldn't I at least have, say, a passing interest in the debate about CO2 emissions? And wonder about how I contribute to the pollution that defaces this precious world?

And if the rest of the world matters to the Saviour, and not just my own little soul,

shouldn't I wonder, at least sometimes, about the welfare of the souls of others who live on my street?

And perhaps try to build a relationship in which I can share the gospel with them?

And if Jesus came to save the world,

if that is what Christmas is about,

might that also include the AIDS-orphaned children who struggle to survive in sub-Saharan Africa?

and is there anything I can do about that?

(By the way, pay attention to Nick's announcement in a few minutes!)

And, if I'm serious about being an apprentice to the Saviour of **the world** might my pattern of gift-giving, or what I put on my gift list, look different than if I wasn't apprenticing for him?

Back to the take-away question for today:

*Would you be proud to have Jesus stand beside you,
hand on your shoulder,
as you write your Christmas gift list?*

If not, how would it have to change?

And - what would prevent you from prayerfully committing

right now

to make that change as soon as you get home this morning?

Real questions to ask

about physical living

in this physical world

Because our world **does** matter to God!

Christmas proves it.