

SERMON FIVE

Home at Last

CHRISTMAS DAY



SCRIPTURE:

Isaiah 9:6-7

For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,
on 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 forevermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

BIG IDEA

Everything good fades—except the gift of Christmas. What begins in Bethlehem grows without end and welcomes us forever.

LAW THEMES

All good things in this life fade, decay, or come to an end, even the most joyful moments we cherish. Our world is broken by sin, marked by disorder, and constantly winding down, leaving us weary, wounded, and longing for more.

GOSPEL THEMES

In the birth of Jesus, God inaugurates a Kingdom (a Home) that is good, growing, and will never end. Through Christ's ongoing work, we are daily renewed, forgiven, and upheld as citizens of his everlasting Home.

It's Here

Merry Christmas! We've made it, friends.

The parties and planning of Advent, the anticipation (and yes, the anxiety), have all been building toward this day, to this morning. No longer must you answer the all-important question, posed by your 5-year-old: "How many sleeps till Christmas?!" It's finally here, with the presents, the food, the family traditions, and the precious memories we get to make.

If we took just a few minutes to swap phones and scroll through each other's camera rolls, we'd see that most of us have already captured some favorite moments: grandkids flying down the stairs to see what Santa brought, Mom making her famous cinnamon rolls, Dad with an Irish coffee in one hand and a garbage bag in the other, dutifully collecting wrapping paper. We've made it!

Now, I don't want to rain on our Christmas Day parade, but if past Christmases are any indication, we should be honest: this day is going to fly by. The magic of the moment always feels so fleeting, doesn't it? All that buildup, and then, just like that, it's over. In fact, some of you, despite enjoying today, are already plotting how to pack it up and put it away. Every family has one, the person who can't wait to get the house back in order, the presents stored, the tree dragged to the curb. You know who you are.

The joy of this morning is real, but it is fleeting.

Which is why it's good for us to remember that while the celebration may feel transient, the gift we've received today in the birth of Jesus is anything but. What he brings with his arrival is a Kingdom (which is nothing other than our true Home) that is good, that is growing, and that is, best of all, unending.

It's Good

The prophet Isaiah, writing to God's beleaguered and battered people—some 700 years before Jesus' birth—foretells his arrival. And what becomes plain is this: when Jesus comes, he brings with him a Kingdom. A reign. A Home and haven under God's care that is very, very good. "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6).

We could spend hours this Christmas morning unpacking the blessings held within each of those titles given to the Christ-child. But we don't have that kind of time—this day is already slipping through our fingers. So let's say it like this: Jesus has established a Home, where he is the head, and in this Home divine wisdom and comfort abound. His strength is unmatched, allowing us to sleep soundly and live boldly in his care. His doting presence is never absent. And a sense of deep shalom—that "it's all gonna be okay" kind of peace—fills the air. The great reformer, Martin Luther, reflecting on these words adds, "The peace is not only peace of mind but plenty and soundness of mind and good health of the body."² It's that good.

The Home Jesus has established in his arrival—and into which you've been welcomed through your baptism—is better than even the best moments of today. And today will have some great moments. Like that post-dinner Christmas Day nap. Talk about shalom!

And yet, what has arrived for you in Jesus Christ is even greater. Do you believe that?

² Martin Luther, *Lectures on Isaiah*, in *Luther's Works*, vol. 16, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Daniel E. Poellot, translated by Herbert J. A. Bouman, Concordia Publishing House, 1969, p. 101.

It's Growing

But there's more. It's not just really good—it's also growing. Take it from Isaiah: "Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end..." (Isa. 9:7a).

Think of it like the living room floor as the family sits down to tear open presents. It starts out clean and sparse, with each member of your crew claiming their spot to enjoy the fun. But before you know it, piles of torn wrapping paper emerge, and with them, mounds of opened treasures (one for each member of the family) dot the living room landscape until you can no longer see the carpet.

The Home that Jesus establishes today, the reign and rule that arrives with him on Christmas morning, starts out offensively small, weak, and vulnerable. It's the size of a newborn, held in the arms of parents who are far from home and who, in short order, will be on the run from a political leader willing to murder any perceived threat to his power. But this King and his Kingdom grow. He secures forgiveness of sins and victory over death through his cross and empty tomb, and then he gives it to humanity. He gives it to *you*. His Good News travels the world. His gifts are given on every continent, in every corner of the planet. It's growing, indeed.

Granted, for you it may still seem too small. There is still evil in this world, tragedy in our lives, and horrific headlines we scroll past every minute of every day. There is still division in our relationships, cancer in our bodies, and all manner of disaster, natural and otherwise. There is greed coursing through your veins, lust raging in your heart, jealousy and pettiness running rampant in your mind. Taking it all in, "there is not yet enough peace," you say. And you are right. So right.

But it's coming. The promise is that the reign and rule, the hospitality of Jesus's House, will continue to expand until one day, at his return, it will cover the whole earth like wrapping paper on the floor on Christmas morning, covering and wiping away every last remnant of difficulty and dysfunction that linger today.

And that would be a ludicrous thing to believe, given all that we see and suffer in this broken world, were it not for today. Long ago, God made a ludicrous promise, that he would send a Savior. And his people waited in weakness, sin, exile, and struggle for what seemed like forever. Until, finally, one morning, it happened. Christ was born. God came through. And the same God who kept that promise can be trusted to keep this one too.

It's good. It's growing. And it will last forever.

It's Unending

Yes, Christmas Day may feel as though it's already slipping through our hands, but the Household of Jesus, the Kingdom of Christ, will continue to expand, and it will last forever. Again, from Isaiah: "Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this" (Isa. 9:7).

"Established and upheld, with justice and righteousness, forever." What a promise. And what a contrast to everything else we experience in this life. This side of Christ's return, certain things are guaranteed: death, taxes, and the fact that all good things come to an end. There's a timer on the good stuff. Maybe you're mourning that truth today, realizing you've only got so many more Christmas mornings with the kids running down the stairs. Or perhaps this is your first year without a beloved grandparent at the table. The good stuff fades.

And not only does it fade, but even when something sticks around, eventually it starts to fall apart. It decays. It loses integrity. It's the second law of thermodynamics: every system, from the house we live in, to the gifts we unwrap, to the families we cherish, even our own bodies, all of it naturally moves toward disorder. Entropy is undefeated in this life. Everything is winding down, breaking down, wearing out.

But Isaiah proclaims, and Jesus promises, that his House will never become dilapidated. His Kingdom will never corrode. His hospitality toward us will never run out of energy. "Forevermore," he says, with "justice and righteousness," which means there will be no loss of integrity, no breakdown of beauty, no erosion of love. His Kingdom will grow and flourish for eternity. What comfort in a world of decay. What joy in a life marked by loss. What we have in Christ will endure!

And here's the part we often overlook: you are a part of that enduring work, that unending Kingdom. You, by virtue of your baptism and your identity as God's chosen child, are part of what Jesus has established and what he promises to uphold forever. You might wonder, "How can that possibly be true, with all the evil and decay I see around me and at work within me?" It's true because this same Jesus, born on Christmas Day, is at work this Christmas morning, and every morning, renewing, restoring, and revitalizing you.

In this world of entropy, anything that is going to last must be acted upon from the outside. You must treat it differently. Shield it from the elements. Repair it when damaged. Polish it when tarnished.

Friends, this is what Jesus Christ is doing to you. Though pressed, you are not crushed. Though persecuted by the pain of life, you are not abandoned. Though beaten down by burdens, you are not destroyed. Because day after day, your Prince of Peace intercedes for you at the right hand of the Father. He speaks forgiveness over every sin. He reaches down to raise you up on eagle's wings with strength to endure tomorrow. He declares to all that you are dead to sin and alive in him.

And he will keep doing this—this alien work of restoration—until the very end. On that last day, he will pull you from your grave, reunite your soul to your body, remove every molecule of decay, and you will stand with him, in flesh and blood, in the full expression of his heavenly Home.

And on that day, it will be Christmas morning—replete with all of the joy and peace—forevermore and without end. Indeed in Christ's own resurrection, which we celebrate on Easter, we get a glimpse of our own resurrection at his return: he was resurrected in a glorified, eternal body, which will never again experience the pains of death. And so too shall we.

Good Things

So yes, the cinnamon rolls will get eaten. The wrapping paper will be tossed. The tree will drop needles, and eventually, the decorations will come down. Like every year before, this day, this beautiful, chaotic, joy-filled Christmas morning, will pass. Because that's what happens with good things in this life: they come to an end.

But not the ultimate gift of Christmas. This King and his Kingdom, this Prince of Peace and the Home he's establishing, is the one good thing that doesn't fade, spoil, or slip through your fingers. His Kingdom is good, it's growing, and it's not going anywhere.

So here's your invitation: maybe we don't pack this up too quickly.

Remember, on the Christian calendar, Christmas isn't just a day. It's a season! Christmas has twelve days. That's twelve days to savor the songs, stretch out the celebration, and keep the joy going. Twelve days to remind yourself (and declare to a watching world) that what we've received is something that lasts. So let your joy linger. Let your praise keep rising. Keep the lights up, the carols playing, and the cookies coming.

Because in Jesus's House, Christmas has only just begun. And the party never ends.