

# Our Better King

## Advent 2020

### ADVENT 2020: GOD OF ALL LIGHT

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Scripture Reference: Isaiah 9:2, 6

Merry Christmas Doxa family. Welcome to our Christmas Eve gathering. This is one of my favorite things that we do all year. I am a very big fan of Christmas, but besides the joy of giving gifts or having special traditions and decorations, as followers of Jesus, we celebrate Christmas because it changed the course of everything for us. And often on Christmas Eve or Christmas, we have that clear reminder of the powerful night of Jesus's birth, which was the beginning of the story of redemption and purpose for every child of God. And it is my hope that tonight, many of us remember, or maybe realize for the first time that his birth was for each of us individually. He loves us, Doxa. In Isaiah nine verse six, it says, "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." Merry Christmas, Doxa. Join me in worship as we celebrate the birth of King Jesus.

Hello, Merry Christmas. I'm so glad that you get to join us in this form to celebrate Christmas Eve together. If you don't know who I am, my name is Jeff Vanderstelt. I'm one of the elders here at Doxa and it's my joy to get to take you through the story again of God's great love for us expressed in Christmas. I love Christmas Eve gatherings. It's one of my favorites from all the year and the reason why is the music is just so nostalgic, the mystery of the moment expecting the next day. I love the hot cocoa that we get to have together. Although I don't know that we get to have it this time. Maybe you're having some at home. I hope you are. The profound yet so simple message of God's love given to us in baby Jesus. But it's also the lights. I love the lights. I hope you do too, because Christmas is all about light. I don't know if you've gone to Leavenworth to see the lights there. I remember the first time when I went with Janie's family

and they had the great unveiling of the lights. They kind of, first time of the year, they turn all the lights on and it was, I think I expected more, but now that I look back, I realize what a beautiful experience we had together. I know I love going to Snowflake Lane though, this, we didn't get to do that and just enjoy the lights, enjoy the snow, enjoy the music. We didn't get to have all those experiences, but you could still watch Clark Griswold light up the city and blind his neighbors as you enjoy the mystery of Christmas Vacation, if you want. I know for us, the kids and I, when they were younger, Janie and I and the kids loved to just drive around and we would look at lights all over the place. We love to go down to the U district area and they'd often have homes there that had just beautiful decorated lights with oftentimes cookies and hot chocolate. And we enjoyed those moments. I love the lights. And the idea of light is so prevalent throughout the entire story of God, not just Christmas, but the entire narrative of the Bible. When you look at the Bible and you read the entire story, you read about darkness being invaded by the light.

We've been walking through Isaiah nine this Advent season, tonight I just want to look at two of the verses from that chapter that we've been looking at. Verse two says this, "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; a light has dawned on those living in the land of darkness." And then verse six says, "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." The story of Christmas is all about the God of all light entering into the darkness of our sin, suffering, brokenness, and despair. So I want to revisit that story tonight. And the story really starts with our very first mother, Eve. And then it culminates in a new Eve, Mary, the mother Jesus, through whom God brings light and a new beginning for all of humanity. Adam and Eve were our first parents and they didn't trust God's word. And they walked away from God's ways in rebellion. And the result of it was that there was a deep darkness that came into their hearts and a deep darkness that invaded our world. However, God, in that moment, instead of just condemning them, he gave them a word of hope. He spoke to the serpent. I can imagine while he was doing it. He's looking at Eve, maybe even putting his hand on her belly and says that through her offspring, ultimately one day, the serpent's head would be crushed. Light. That's maybe only a twinkling of light, but it's a twinkling of a future hope where there will be an end to the darkness. There will be an end to the sin and suffering and despair that their rebellion brought into the world. Humanity is not going to forever stay in darkness, not going to be forever under the rule and reign of Satan and sin. A new ruler is coming into the world and on his shoulder will be all of the authority. He will have all of the ruling power over all of the heavens and all of the earth. Unto us a son is born. Unto us a son is given. Well, that first story with Adam and Eve was 4,000 years prior to the story we're celebrating tonight, where a son was given, where the government would be taken away from the evil one. The rule and authority would be taken away from sin and suffering and given to Jesus. The angel Gabriel was sent by God to the Virgin Mary who was pledged to Joseph to marry him. And Gabriel said to Mary, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for God is pleased with you. Now listen closely. You're going to conceive and give birth to a son and you will name him Jesus. He will be great. He'll be called the son of the most high. And the Lord will give him the throne of his father, David. He will reign forever over the house of Jacob and his kingdom will have no end."

Mary asked the angel, how is this even possible since I'm still a Virgin? Now I know Mary is not alone in facing what often feels for many of us like impossible circumstances. Maybe you've been feeling that way this year. In fact, I want to just stop and ask you, where have you felt the kind of darkness that Mary felt, where what seems to be in front of you seems far too great for you. The angel replied to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and power of the most high will overshadow you. Therefore the Holy one to be born from you will be called the Son of God." So Mary carried the light, but Joseph, like many of us in our own circumstances struggled to accept this. I wonder if right now you're in one of those moments where you're going, how in the world am I going to move forward in this?

Joseph knows he's going to be publicly humiliated because everyone's going to know that his wife has been with somebody else. And so he wants to secretly divorce her. Doesn't want to humiliate her publicly, but also doesn't see a way forward. How in the world is he going to do this. Joseph needed light. So an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream saying, "Joseph son of David. Don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son. You're to name him Jesus for he will save his people from their sins." The word Jesus literally means God saves. Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, "See the Virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son. And they will name him Emmanuel, which means God is with us." That's exactly what Joseph needed. He needed to know he wasn't alone. He needed to know that God was with him. That God would not abandon him. That God would walk with him in what he was about to do. When Joseph woke up, he did as the Lord's angel commanded and he married her. While they were in Bethlehem for the census, a time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him tightly in cloth and she laid him in a manger because there was no room available for them at all in the town. Now light has come into the world and the light's about to visit some very unlikely people. In the same region there were shepherds staying out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock. And an angel of the Lord stood before them and the glory of the Lord shown all around them and they were absolutely terrified. But the angel said to them, "Don't be afraid. I've got good news of great joy that will be for all people. Today in the city of David, a savior was born for you, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you. You will find a baby wrapped tightly in cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was a multitude of heavenly hosts with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth to all those whom God has favor upon." When the angels had left them and returned to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go straight to Bethlehem right now and see what has happened, which the Lord has now made known to us." And they hurried and they found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in a manger. And after they saw them, they reported the message to everyone they could find. And all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. Now the message of light begins to spread. After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of King Herod, wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star rising and we've come to worship him."

Now a lesser light is going to point to the greater light. When King Herod heard this, he was deeply disturbed and all Jerusalem with him. So he assembled all the chief priests and the

scribes of the people and he asked them where this Messiah would be born. "In Bethlehem of Judea" they told him because this is what was written by the prophet. "And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means, least among the rulers of Judah. Because out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel." Then Herod secretly summoned the wise men. He asked them the exact time when they saw the star appear and he sent them to Bethlehem and he said, "Go and search carefully for the child. And when you find him, report back to me so that I can go and worship him." We find out later, that's not what Herod intended to do. He was threatened by this coming King and he wanted to take his life. After hearing the King, the wise men went on their way and there it was, the star that they had seen. It led them until it came and stopped above the place where the child was. And when they saw the star, they were overwhelmed with joy. Entering the house, they saw the child with Mary, his mother, and fall unto their knees, they worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Now not everybody responds to the light in the same way. Isaiah nine in verse two said it this way, "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; a light has dawned on those living in the land of darkness." At first Mary is afraid and Joseph wants to run, but the light dawns on them and they eagerly welcome Jesus.

The shepherds are overcome with fear and then when they meet Jesus, the light dawns on them as well and they can't stop talking about him. The bright star directs the wise men to the light, which dawns on them as they rightly discern who King Jesus is, the God of all light, and they bow down and worship him. However, Herod is threatened by the light. He knows that his kingdom will not be his any longer. He knows that this King is going to ultimately rule and reign forever and he's threatened by the light. Not everybody responds the same way to the light. It's one thing to see a great light. It's another thing for that light to dawn on you, for you to rightly discern who it is and what he's all about and what this means for your life, and then to welcome him in. See Jesus is the true light and he reveals our darkness. And some of us don't want that, but some of us desperately need it and welcome it. And then he shows us how we desperately need him to not only dispel the darkness, but to transform our lives so that we have lives full of light. Jesus is the light and he didn't just come to bring light, but he also came to take the darkness of our sin and suffering on himself so that we could be forgiven and healed through his death on the cross. But not everybody responds the same way to the light. John says it this way in John one verse four and five, "In him was life, and that life was the light of men. That light shines in the darkness, and yet the darkness did not overcome it." And then verse nine, he says this, "The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world and the world was created through him." And yet the world did not recognize him. He came to his own and his own people did not receive him, but to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to become children of God, to those who believe in his name. We've experienced a lot of darkness in 2020, it brought a lot of despair. And yet the light of Christ is still shining in the darkness. Here's the question though, has the light dawned on you? It's one thing for it to shine on you, it's another thing for it to dawn on you, for you to recognize your need for the light.

Have you received Jesus, the light of the world into your darkness, into your own heart that needs to be forgiven of sin and transformed by his glorious light? As the song Joy to the World states, have you received your King? Have you prepared your heart to make room for him? Have you recognized the darkness of your own sin and received Jesus the light who came to take away the sins of the world? Have you experienced the darkness of despair this year and invited Jesus to come with his light, God with us, Emmanuel, so that you're not alone in your despair? He wants to bring light into the despair that you've experienced this year. Have you known suffering this year? He wants you to welcome his light and healing power into your suffering so that you can experience him be with you in the midst of it. I'm sure like me things have not turned out like you hoped this year. Have you invited Jesus to not only be the light of your life, but to bring joy to the places where you've experienced disappointment? To satisfy you where things didn't this year? To meet you in your place of need? Where do you need the light of Jesus tonight? He is the God of all light. And he came to bring light into your life. He wants to do it tonight. Prepare your heart, make him room in your heart and in your life. Receive King Jesus, the God of all light tonight. In a moment we're going to light the final candle for Advent, the Christ candle. It's a way of saying we experienced the culmination of all of our hopes and longings and dreams in Jesus, come to earth to save us from our sins and to give us new light and life. As we do, you might even want to light a candle at home. What I want you to do as you do it, is say a prayer to God. Invite him through Jesus, to bring light to wherever you're experiencing darkness right now in your own life. And as you light the candle, or as you watch us light the candle be reminded that Jesus is the light of the world who wants to bring light into your life right now

Now as we each receive the light of Christ into our lives, like the shepherds who went everywhere and spread the good news that the light of the world had come, I want to encourage you to bring the light you've received into the lives of your friends and family, neighbors, coworkers, in the coming weeks. The light has come. Has it dawned on you? And if it has, give it away. Let me pray that God will enable you to do that so that light can spread from your heart to the world. Let's pray. Father, we thank you that you love us enough to not leave us in darkness. that you don't leave us in despair. But you came, Jesus you came to bring light to our hearts and light to our world. And so I pray right now that we would not only receive the light dawning on our own hearts, but Lord, would you enable us to bring light to a dark world this year? In Jesus' name. Amen.

