

The Heart of Christmas: Hope

Isaiah 9:2-7; Matthew 1:18-25; Romans 15:4

Christmas is almost here! It truly is a special time of year. Before we open God's Word together, I'd like to invite you on a short journey into the past—to remember what Christmas has meant to you through the years. Many of us carry a lifetime of warm memories—and I certainly do. As a child, I looked forward to Christmas with almost breathless excitement. School shut down, homework paused, and the long, dark evenings seemed to glow with the light of candles, decorated trees, and sparkling ornaments. At church we sang those beautiful carols — Away in a Manger, O Little Town of Bethlehem, Silent Night — and to my young heart, the words felt alive.

But what I loved most were the days before Christmas. I remember lying awake long past midnight — not because I enjoyed losing sleep, but because I was overflowing with excitement, wondering what gifts I and my family might receive. And of course, the celebration didn't end with the opening of presents. Weeks before Christmas, my mother filled the house with the rich aromas of pies, cookies, cinnamon rolls, sweet breads, and chocolates. If I behaved, I even got to lick the bowl! Those Christmas feasts made the taste buds rejoice and the belt loosen. Then came the visiting — aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents — each home warm with wood stoves, shining trees, and hugs that could chase away any winter chill.

But as we grow older, we learn that as wonderful as Christmas can be, it can also be a season of loneliness, darkness, and deep sorrow. The Bible tells us, “The whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time” (Romans 8:22). And Ecclesiastes reminds us that “time and chance happen to them all” (Ecclesiastes 9:11). Life hands us heartaches, losses, disappointments, and uncertainties we never expected. Many face Christmas not with excitement, but with questions: How do we find hope in chaos? Light in darkness? Joy in suffering? Peace when life has shattered our plans?

In Luke's Gospel, the shepherds were watching their flocks in the dark fields of Bethlehem when suddenly, “the glory of the Lord shone around them” (Luke 2:9). In the middle of the night, a great light broke through. And if we're honest, many of us long for that same light to shine into our world today. That is why today's message takes us back to a prophecy spoken seven hundred years before Jesus was born — Isaiah 9:2–7. Isaiah wrote to a people living in deep darkness, fear, and despair. Yet God gave them a promise: A great light is coming. A child will be born. A Son will be given. And His name will be Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Today we will see that the same Child who broke into ancient darkness shines His hope just as brightly into ours. No matter how grim our circumstances, no matter how heavy our burdens, Christmas declares: Light has come. Hope has come. Jesus has come — to set captives free and to give meaning, forgiveness, and peace to all who trust in Him.

Background: Israel's Darkness and Despair

The Promised Hope

Into that deep darkness, Isaiah begins to speak of a hope that only God could accomplish—a hope that would break oppression just as surely as the Lord shattered Midian in the days of Gideon. Isaiah invites Judah to remember that painful chapter in their history when they had done what was evil in the sight of the Lord. For seven long years the Midianites and Amalekites crushed them so severely that Israel hid in mountain clefts, caves, and strongholds (Judges 6:1–2). They were helpless, unable to defeat their oppressors, and in their anguish they cried out to God for deliverance (Judges 6:6).

And God answered by raising up the most unlikely champion—Gideon. Though Gideon saw his clan as “the weakest in Manasseh” and himself as “the least in his father’s house” (Judges 6:15), God filled him with courage even to tear down his father’s altar to Baal (Judges 6:25). With only three hundred men armed not with swords but with empty jars, torches, and trumpets, Gideon was invited into a miracle we still marvel at today. When the jars shattered and the trumpets sounded, the people cried, “A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!” (Judges 7:20)—and God Himself threw the enemy into confusion until they destroyed one another. Isaiah’s point was unmistakable: the same God who brought light and victory in the days of Midian would shine His great light once again.

Isaiah declares that though the people were morally corrupt (1:4–6), idolatrous (2:8), unjust (1:17, 23), and even seeking guidance from occult practices,¹ God Himself would raise up a Champion unlike any they had ever known. Judah feared the Assyrian army, but their greatest danger was not the enemy at the gate—it was the enemy of the soul. Their struggle, like ours, was “not against flesh and blood but against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:12). The unbreakable yoke of sin and death could never be defeated by human strength; it required One from eternity—the Ancient of Days’ appointed Son (Daniel 7), the Alpha and the Omega (Revelation 1:8), the Judge of the living and the dead (2 Timothy 4:1). As John Oswalt rightly observes, “God’s answer to the oppression and hostility of this proud and cruel world is not to come as a jack-booted warrior to smash the oppressor.”² Instead, God promises something astonishing: a Child—born from the line of David—who would bind up the broken-hearted, give sight to the blind, and set the captives free (Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:18).

Listen to how Isaiah describes the arrival of this Champion. The sign of His coming would be nothing short of miraculous: “the virgin shall conceive and give birth to a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel”—God with us (Isaiah 7:14). This Child would not be merely another king in David’s line; “*the government will be upon His shoulders,*” and He will reign

¹ Andrew M. Davis, [Exalting Jesus in Isaiah](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017), 62.

² John N. Oswalt, [Isaiah](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2003), 161.

“on David’s throne... with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever” (Isaiah 9:6–7). Isaiah then gives Him four titles that reveal His divine nature and His saving work.

First, He is the **Wonderful Counselor**, for He possesses wisdom beyond human ability—“in Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3).³

Second, He is the **Mighty God**, the One with divine power to save His people from every enemy—oppression, injustice, and even the wages of sin itself (John 1:1).

Third, He is the **Everlasting Father**, not meaning He replaces the Father, but that He rules His people with a father’s care—leading, protecting, and guiding them as the Good Shepherd who never fails His flock.

And finally, He is the **Prince of Peace**, for the government rests upon His shoulders, and through His reign He establishes true and lasting peace—peace with God, and peace that transforms the human heart.⁴ Through faith in Him, the victory over sin and death is total and complete, and we are reconciled to God through Christ alone.⁵

The Fulfillment of Hope

The promise given through Isaiah waited seven hundred years, but God fulfilled it perfectly in the birth of Jesus, recorded for us in Matthew 1:18–25. Matthew begins by telling us how the birth of the Messiah came about:

“His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.”

— Matthew 1:18–19

Just as Isaiah prophesied, the Messiah would be born of a virgin. Mary and Joseph had not yet come together as husband and wife, yet Mary discovers she is carrying a child. Physically, Jesus was truly Mary’s Son, but Joseph was not His biological father. Matthew explains that her conception was the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit, meaning that God Himself is the Father of Jesus.⁶ And though the mystery of the incarnation is beyond our ability to fully grasp, by faith

³ Andrew M. Davis, [Exalting Jesus in Isaiah](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017), 64.

⁴ Andrew M. Davis, [Exalting Jesus in Isaiah](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017), 65.

⁵ Andrew M. Davis, [Exalting Jesus in Isaiah](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017), 66.

⁶ David Platt, [Exalting Jesus in Matthew](#), ed. Daniel L. Akin, David Platt, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2013), 20.

we embrace the truth Scripture declares—that Jesus is fully human and fully divine, God in the flesh, Immanuel: “God with us.”

But this miraculous conception placed Mary and Joseph in an agonizing situation, because their betrothal was legally binding—and Mary was now found to be with child. In Jewish culture, marriage unfolded in three stages: first, the engagement, often arranged by parents or a matchmaker; second, the betrothal, a legally binding covenant lasting about a year; and finally, the wedding, when the bride and groom came together to live as husband and wife. During the betrothal period, sexual union was strictly forbidden, and breaking the covenant required a formal divorce.⁷

So, when Mary was discovered to be pregnant, Joseph could only conclude that she had been unfaithful.⁸ According to the Law, adultery was a grave sin that could result in severe punishment—even stoning—though such penalties were rarely carried out in the first century.⁹ Joseph, described by Matthew as a righteous man, was unwilling to overlook what he believed was sin, yet he was equally unwilling to expose Mary to public shame. To be labeled an adulteress meant social ruin and lifelong disgrace. Therefore, Joseph resolved to divorce her quietly, hoping to spare her as much pain as possible.

While Joseph was considering his plan to divorce Mary quietly, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said:

“Joseph, son of David, do not 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, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”

— Matthew 1:20–21

With these words, the angel confirmed that Isaiah’s prophecy of the virgin birth had come to pass. Though Joseph was not Jesus’ biological father, by taking Mary as his wife and naming the child, he legally adopted Him—thus placing Jesus fully and rightly in the royal line of David as the promised Son.¹⁰ Mary, too, had received angelic confirmation, for Gabriel told her that the child she carried would be called Jesus, the Son of the Most High, and that He would reign on David’s throne forever. Matthew adds that this child is also Immanuel, meaning “God with us” (Matthew 1:22–23). This is no ordinary baby; this is the Savior who came to deliver His people

⁷ Robert H. Mounce, [Matthew](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 9.

⁸ Michael J. Wilkins, [Matthew](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 75.

⁹ D. A. Carson, [“Matthew,”](#) in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 75.

¹⁰ David Platt, [Exalting Jesus in Matthew](#), ed. Daniel L. Akin, David Platt, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2013), 20.

from a war they could never win on their own—the battle against sin, death, and Satan. And Joseph, rather than hesitating or negotiating, responded in simple, immediate obedience. He took Mary as his wife but did not consummate the marriage until after Jesus was born, demonstrating both righteousness and reverence (Matthew 1:24–25).

Living in Hope Today

And because every promise God made was fulfilled in Christ, we are invited to live in that same hope today—just as Scripture was written to give us endurance and encouragement, as Romans 15:4 declares:

“For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.”

— Romans 15:4

This story of Christ is not meant to be read only at Christmas or admired merely for its wonder. Like all of Scripture, it is written to teach us a living, enduring hope. That great Light which shone on the world that first Christmas night announces that the Child born of a virgin came to dwell among us and to die for us, offering Himself as the atonement for our sins.

Yes, the battle we face is real. Our adversary still prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking to devour our thoughts, our joy, and our faith (1 Peter 5:8). But it need not be the case, for Jesus has come. He declared:

“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”

— John 8:12

So, if your heart is hungry for peace, if your soul is thirsty for hope, then tonight come to Jesus. He invites all who are weary to receive the living water and the bread of life without money and without cost (Isaiah 55:1). In Him, hope is not a sentiment—it is a Savior.

Conclusion

And though the gifts, the food, the laughter, and the warmth of family gatherings are precious blessings—echoes of God’s goodness—they cannot quiet the deepest longings of the human heart. The peace we seek cannot be wrapped in paper, and the hope we crave cannot be placed under a tree. The glow of candles fades, the aroma of Christmas baking disappears, and even the sweetest memories cannot carry us through life’s darkest nights. Christmas joy is real, but Christ offers a joy that is greater. Christmas gatherings are sweet, but Christ offers fellowship that never ends. Christmas gifts fade, but Christ offers a hope that is eternal.

He is the Light who has come into our darkness, the Savior who has come to rescue us, and the King who has come to reign forever. And He invites us—not only in this Christmas season but every day—to come to Him, to trust Him, and to live in the hope only He can give.