# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“Peace”**

**Isaiah 9:2, 6-7**

 **December 6, 2020**

Growing up in Denmark, I remember being fascinated by stories of the Danish people and their struggle against the Nazi occupation of their country during WWII. The nation had little chance against the German military juggernaut and they were easily conquered. A kind of darkness descended on the land a darkness that deepened when Hitler began to go after the Danish Jews. An order went out that required every Jew in Denmark to wear the Star of David on their sleeve so they could easily be identified and mistreated. The Danes had no choice but to obey the regulation. It was in the midst of this darkness that Christian X, the king of Denmark, declared that every citizen of Denmark was equal: if Jews were to wear the Star, so would he. Following his example, non-Jewish Danes began to wear the Star, making it more difficult for the Nazis to persecute Jews. A ray of light shone in the darkness, a manifestation of good in the midst of evil.

This morning we turn to the book of Isaiah where, in the ninth chapter, the Assyrian Empire has conquered and is occupying northern Israel, bringing about a time of great darkness and despair. It is in this historical context that we are given Isaiah 9:2, 6-7

The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine. For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His government and its peace will never end. He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David for all eternity. The passionate commitment of the Lord of Heaven’s Armies will make this happen!

People who live in darkness need a light to shine. Whether it’s the darkness of an Assyrian or Nazi occupation, the reality of a life-threatening disease, the death of a loved one, the loss of a job, or the darkness of sin that separates us from God, we need a light to shine with the promise of restoration and wholeness and salvation. Through his prophet Isaiah, God declares that such a light will come and, indeed, it has.

The light has come to us in the form of a child born to us, a son given to us. Seven hundred years after Isaiah spoke these words, they were fulfilled in Jesus Christ who came as a child born to Mary, as the Son of God given to us by a loving Father that we might be saved. The apostle John, writing in his gospel, says of this Jesus that he was a “light shining the darkness. To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave the power to become children of God.”

Jesus was the light who healed the sick, opened the eyes of the blind, made the lame to walk, cast out demons, and raised the dead. Jesus was the light who preached the Sermon on the Mount, and who spoke the great parables of the prodigal son and the good Samaritan. Jesus was the light who died on a cross because of the darkness of evil men, but who three days later rose from the dead.

Jesus shone in the darkness of his world, and he shines today in the darkness of our world. One day the light will completely overcome the darkness and the darkness will be no more. On that day he will establish a new government whose peace will never end, where justice and righteousness will prevail, but for now darkness remains with us. That is why we so desperately need the peace of Christ.

The Hebrew word for peace used in Isaiah’s prophecy is *shalom*, a word that means wholeness, harmony, a state of well-being, and even salvation. Darkness disrupts *shalom* as it brings fragmentation, dissension, hopelessness, and death. We could say that darkness is a disturber of the peace.

As believers who through Christ have become children of God, we experience peace *with* God because our sin has been forgiven and we are in relationship with God. But, it is often the case that we fail to experience the peace *of* God. We worry and become anxious because of the troubles of this dark world, and our sense of peace is disturbed. We have taken our eyes off the light as we have become upset over the darkness.

To restore the peace of God to our lives we need to refocus our attention on him. This we do primarily through prayer. As Paul said in his letter to the Philippians: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God will keep your heart and mind in Christ Jesus.” The great anti-dote to darkness-created anxiety is peace-creating prayer. As Paul points out, such prayer includes thanksgiving. Not only, “God, I need your help with my troubles,” but also, “Thank you, God, for all you have done and continue to do to bring light into my darkness.”

I recently read the story of an elderly woman who was struggling with her first Christmas by herself. Her husband had died a few months prior from cancer and she felt terribly alone. One afternoon, just a couple days before Christmas, her doorbell rang. It was a delivery man with a box. As she was signing for the box, she asked what was in it. The man laughed and opened the flap; inside was a little golden Labrador retriever puppy. The man took out the squirming puppy and gave it to her. “This is for you,” he said. “He’s six weeks old, has had all his shots, and is completely housebroken.” As the young puppy wiggled happily in her arms, she asked, “Who sent me this?” The man handed her an envelope and said, “It’s all explained here in this letter. The puppy was bought last July while its mother was still pregnant. It was bought as a Christmas gift for you.”

She opened the envelope. The letter was from her husband. He had written it about three weeks before he died and left it with the kennel owner to be delivered with the puppy as his last Christmas gift to her. The letter was full of love and encouragement to be strong. He said how much he was looking forward to the day they would be together again in heaven. In the meantime, he was sending her this young dog to keep her company.

Just like this loving man anticipated his dear wife’s lonely situation after his death, writing her a letter and arranging for a very special gift to give her comfort, so our heavenly Father anticipated our difficult situation here on earth in the midst of its darkness. He wrote us a letter about a gift that we would be given at Christmas, a gift which brings us his peace. God’s letter is the Bible, his Word to us, and the gift is Jesus Christ, his Son for us. May he be your Prince of Peace today and every day.