

## *Our Vulnerable and Authoritative King*

The Rev. Dr. Scott Ramsey  
Isaiah 9:2-7 and Luke 2:1-20  
Lewinsville Presbyterian Church  
Christmas Eve 2023

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Those who lived in a land of deep darkness, on them, light has shined. A child has been born for us, a son given to us. And his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. *Authority* shall be upon his shoulders. The time came for Mary to deliver her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son, the Savior, who is Christ, the Lord. An angel announced that his birth will be good news of great joy for all the people. The shepherds, the humble, down-to-earth shepherds, heard this news, and they left the field where they were, and they went with haste to see this... "thing"... that had taken place. And after the shepherds told Mary and Joseph all that they had seen and heard, mother Mary reflected on all these things for a long time.

The news of this night is that the Light of the world has come. But what we know is that the Light of the world always comes to people and situations that are shadowed by darkness. That is the sadness that belongs to the beautifully good news about the Light of the world. The reason that the Light has come is that our world, and each one of us, are walking in some form of darkness. Darkness is always the context for the coming of the Light.

Everyone here tonight is walking around with some kind of heaviness, some kind of concern that casts a shadow on your life. Some of you are concerned about a hard decision that you're facing; others of you are weighed down with concerns about a medical diagnosis. Some of you have suffered a great, great loss, and some of you are heavy-burdened by concerns about places in our world that are being consumed, right now, with hatred and poverty and violence. Some of you are troubled by the brittle state of politics in our country. Many of you are worried about a good friend or a family member who's going through a really hard time.

What heavy load are you carrying with you in your heart on this Christmas Eve? Underneath all of the Christmas sparkle, what layer of the world's darkness feels close to you this season? What's occupying your heart and your mind, when you're driving around, when you're at school, when you're reading the news, when you're thinking about your future?

Bearing pain and sorrow is part of what it means to be human, for everyone. As the saying goes, we need to be kind to people, because everyone we meet is fighting some kind of hard battle. One core dimension of the good news of the gospel on this night is that Jesus Christ has come to help us carry the sorrows of our lives. This is why

we sing about having trials and temptations and taking them to the Lord in prayer. Jesus is our Friend, who walks with us.

But there is another layer to the gospel news of Christmas, because when we choose to follow Jesus, we not only allow him to help carry our general sorrows of being human, but we also begin to share in his sorrows for the world, to allow the things that break his heart about our world – the situations and conditions in which people find themselves that cause our Lord to grieve – for us to allow those things to break our hearts, as well.

Following Jesus will draw you into a sacred kind of vulnerability, which we might resist at first. We would prefer for following Jesus to make us impermeable to suffering somehow, to encase us in a protective, magic bubble that will keep bad things from happening to us. But of course, following Jesus has the effect of enlarging your heart, which means that, far from making you impervious to sadness, your heart will become bigger, so that you can carry more sorrows, with his help and by his grace. Receiving the Christ child into your life expands your heart, so that your heart can carry more. Following Jesus stretches your heart out so that you love more. What that means, of course, is that following Jesus leads you into the sorrows of the world, but it will do so out of his faith and love.

Without faith and love, the sorrows of the world can turn to bitterness and resentment and grievance. And you can feel that kind of bitterness in so many places in our world these days, as we point our fingers and our words and our guns at each other, upset about things we have lost or that we are afraid of losing. But following Jesus gives us a different relationship to sadness and loss and vulnerability.

As we hush our voices and gather about the manger tonight, the story tells us about a vulnerable little baby, born to a very young mother, Mary, who was in a situation of real insecurity and very real threat. There were the threats from the Roman authorities who were taking a headcount for their imperial purposes; there were the threats from the regional king Herod, who had a fragile ego and was quick to use violence to get rid of any rivals to his own kingship; and there were the threats from the religious rule-keepers of Mary's own community who may very well have sat in judgment over Mary. The baby, our Lord, the Light of the World, was born very vulnerably.

But he was also born with all authority in heaven and earth, being given to him. Vulnerability and authority. Jesus' vulnerability is a peculiar kind of vulnerability, and Jesus' authority is a peculiar kind of authority. The New Testament tells us that Jesus lives and leads and teaches and loves with authority, not like the scribes and religious leaders who hide behind their codes and their rules and their requirements. Jesus comes this night to save you from *your* sin, so that you can forgive the sins of those who sin against you. Jesus comes this night to help you with *your* fears about the future, so that you will be able to walk with *others* and help to carry their fears. Jesus

comes to rescue and redeem *you* from a life of fear and anxiety, so that you can walk with others who are caught up by the fears that exercise so much sway in our world.

Jesus comes this night to save you, and he comes to enlarge your heart. He comes to lead you, he comes to forgive you, he comes to save you from your sins, he comes to walk beside you through every situation of your life, walking with you in total vulnerability and total authority. Will you and I receive him into our lives? Will we allow him to stretch and enlarge our hearts, an enlarging which will expand our own vulnerability and deepen the authority with which we live? Our vulnerable, authoritative King is born tonight. To God and to God alone, be all the glory, Amen.