

# Learning Expectation: Christ's Birth & Children

Thomas Robinson, December 6, 2015

## Isaiah 9:1-7

<sup>1</sup> But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, **Galilee of the nations**.

<sup>2</sup> The people who walked in darkness | have seen a **great light**; | those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, | on them has light shone. |

<sup>3</sup> You have multiplied the nation; | you have **increased its joy**; | they rejoice before you | as with joy at the harvest, | as they are glad when they divide the spoil. | <sup>4</sup> For the **yoke** of his burden, | and the **staff** for his shoulder, | the **rod** of his oppressor, | you have **broken** as on the day of Midian. | <sup>5</sup> For every **boot of the tramping warrior** in battle tumult | and every **garment rolled in blood** | will be **burned** as fuel for the fire. |

<sup>6</sup> 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**. |

<sup>7</sup> 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.

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## Isaiah 7:14 The Prophet speaks to king Ahaz in about 734 b.c.

<sup>14</sup> Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

## Matthew 1:20-25

<sup>20</sup> But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." <sup>22</sup> All this took place in order that what the Lord had spoken by the prophet might be filled up:

<sup>23</sup> "*Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel*" (which means, "God with us").

<sup>24</sup> When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, <sup>25</sup> but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

## Genesis 17:15-17 God promises Abraham the birth of Isaac.

<sup>15</sup> And God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. <sup>16</sup> I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her."

<sup>17</sup> Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, "Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?"

## Holiday Expectation

Did you grow up as a kid looking forward to Christmas? Different cultures have different expectations. I did. Not too much religious stuff. But the tree and the gifts? Yes! We like to give and receive gifts. It's easily distorted, commercialized, but a good instinct. (Think about giving: Google "Advent Conspiracy" for a wider vision of giving gifts.)

Part of what we love in the holiday as children is the thrill of expectation. Part of what we love as parents is watching and fostering our children's expectation. Yes, it's a rather artificial ritual, but it can point to a deep truth, rich and complex: learning to live life expectantly – in hope. Helping a child to live expectantly, creatively, in hope is a great gift. The gifts the Wise Men bring symbolize the hope and expectation that they believe are embodied in that unknown child, without status, but marked by signs for the future.

We live in a world where it is easy to be cynical and hopeless. There's plenty of violence, injustice, stupidity, racism, death, and frustration to be cynical about. But at the heart of the Gospel is a great affirmation of powerful hope, expectation. God is not finished with things. Life is neither simply running down to nothing nor automatically scaling new heights. On the most fundamental level it is in God's hands. He's going somewhere!

## "To Us a Child is Born!"

Throughout the scripture narrative, God uses a child, often the birth of a child, as his sign of hope. Abraham and Sarah are promised an impossible son. Isaac – "Laughter"! God's signs are astonishing, funny, joyful beyond belief. He does them anyway. The series continues: Jacob & Esau; Joseph; Samuel; in different ways Moses and David. Each birth is a new creation, a glimpse of God's creative love, a potential change in the world.

In Isaiah's time, the cynicism in the court of king Ahaz of Judah was deep and hopeless, beset by enemy armies. If God was going to help, it must be troops and weapons. Ahaz doesn't want a sign and a promise. But God does it anyway: the sign of the child who will be born to a girl not yet married. A challenge to hope, trust. A challenge to believe God is working even in a world in which Ahaz has messed up mightily. God, creator of the child, is creator of the future. In Isa 9, the prophet sees that sign extending into the future: a child, God's presence, Father of the future, Messianic hope, Prince of peace.

## The Tiny Hope

In Jesus, the sign of the child is again a challenge to hope and trust. Can Joseph believe the unbelievable story? He could believe wonders, but this? This is just an ordinary birth with all too ordinary explanation. The sign was too small. This Incarnation of God among us is a story of scaling down, the mighty becoming tiny. The hope for God's whole creation here becomes microscopic. The event goes against modern sensibilities: God should be generic, universal, democratically available to all, recognized universally, using real power.

But God brings hope for all through a few or one. Universal human brokenness and sin is answered by God through the story of one family, Abraham, Israel, David, a Messiah ... a Jewish girl named Mary, a tiny life in her womb. Among an oppressed, long-suffering people, in a tiny village, in an unknown girl, God has prepared a place for the greatest conceivable event in our planet's history: the creator God becomes part of his creation, diving deep into darkness to bring us up. To us a child is born! A world of expectation opens!