

Sermon for Zion Presbyterian Church, December 30, 2018

Hymns: 808 – Come in, come in New Year; 150 – Jesus Our Brother; 173 – We Three Kings; 145 – In the bleak mid-winter; 148 – It came upon a midnight clear  
Scripture: Isaiah 9:2-6; Luke 2:8-11; Luke 4:14-21

Sermon Title: “This Day”

*Isaiah 9:2-6 NIV*

*The people walking in darkness have seen a great light;  
on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.*

*You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy;  
they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest,  
as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder.*

*For as in the day of Midian’s defeat,  
you have shattered the yoke that burdens them,  
the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor.*

*Every warrior’s boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood  
will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire.*

*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given,  
and the government will be on his shoulders.*

*And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

*Luke 2:8-18 NKJV*

*Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.*

*Luke 4:14-21*

*Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:*

*“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”*

*Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."*

"What did you get for Christmas?" I've been asked this question more than once over the last few days; I'll bet you have too. I try never to ask it, since I'm trying my best to help people focus on something other than the gift-giving aspect of the season, but I realise it is an uphill battle. Besides, it's embarrassing to admit that all I got was a lump of coal.

All bah-humbugs aside, though, I still remember things I got for Christmas when I was a kid. I'll never forget the racetrack, or the trainset, or the Legos. I'll never forget the toboggan, either, mostly because that was the year it didn't snow until February. But most of all, I remember the year when instead of a present, I got a promise.

I was ten years old, and my parents knew it was time for me to get a new bike. My old bike was one of those banana-seat, sissy-bar jobs. I loved it (it was great for popping wheelies) but I had grown a couple of inches in the years I had it, and it just didn't fit anymore. It also didn't fit my new, increasingly cool image.

So my parents decided a bike would be the perfect Christmas present, but, practical folks that they were, they knew I wouldn't get much use out of a new bike in the bleak midwinter. Plus who knew if I would grow any more between winter and spring, so they decided that instead of buying a bike and putting it under the tree, they would make me a promise instead. They wrote the promise down in a card: "***We promise to buy you a new bicycle in the springtime,***" it said.

Finally, Christmas came. When my sister and I came out to look at all the presents under the tree, I was wondering which one was mine. None, as it turned out. Except for the ones with sweaters and socks and pyjamas, but any ten year old boy will tell you those don't count. Where were the Hot Wheels? The Legos? Where was the "Official Red Ryder Carbine-Action Two-Hundred-Shot Range Model Air Rifle?" Instead, my parents, happy and proud, handed me an envelope. In which was a card. In which was written a promise. It said: "***We promise to buy you a new bicycle... in the springtime.***"

Talk about conflicted. I still remember the tears springing to my eyes. Oh, there were many possible reactions to the card, many different ways to read it. My horrible perfect sister would have said, "Oh, how wonderful, Mother and Father, and how generous. I will look forward to it everyday! This is the best Christmas ever!" My analytical brother would have devoted himself to thoroughly researching all available

bicycles and developing a business model in order to choose the best one when the time came. But me? Eyes filled with tears, I looked up at my parents, and said, “Nothing? Nothing for Christmas? Nothing till Spring?” Ten years old, and I didn’t understand the value of a promise.

I wonder what the nation of Israel was thinking, 700 BC, when things were going to heck in a handcart, the Assyrians reducing the land to rubble, the nation in total collapse, the future utterly bleak, and the prophet Isaiah, instead of producing a secret weapon to pull victory from the jaws of defeat, produces a promise.

*“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son... And His name will be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace... Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end.*

A promise. A promise. No secret weapon; no military miracle; no immediate solution; a promise. “Not yet,” says Isaiah; “Someday.” A promise.

Jeremiah, Micah, Zechariah, prophets major and minor, followed in Isaiah’s tradition, and kept the promises coming.

From Jeremiah (23:5-6): *“The days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteous Saviour.”* “The days are coming.” Someday.

From Micah (5:2): *“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.”* “Out of you will come.” Not has. Will. Someday.

From Malachi (4:2): *“But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings.”* “Will rise.” Someday.

From Zechariah (9:9): *“Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion. Sing aloud, Daughter Jerusalem. Look, your king will come to you. He is righteous and victorious. He is humble and riding on an ass, on a colt, the offspring of a donkey.”* “Will come.” Someday.

A Saviour. A Messiah. A Healer. A King. Prophet after prophet, promise after promise. Someday. Someday. And so the nation waited for that day. And waited. Spring came. Summer. Fall. Winter. Again. And again. And again. Hundreds of

Springs. Hundreds of winters. Hundreds of years. When would the promise come true? Would the promise ever come true?

And then: Not someday; One day. To the shepherds - Came the angel - With the promise - Come true.

*“For unto you this day is born in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.”*

For unto you. This Day. Not someday; This Day. *“For unto you This Day is born in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.”* The promise, hundreds of years in the waiting, fulfilled. This Day. This Day. As Jesus himself was to declare, quoting from the Prophet Isaiah:

*“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”*

*“Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”*

Today. Not someday: Today. This day. The fulfillment of that promise is what we celebrate This Day. The promise that God hears us. The promise that God cares. The promise that God knows our hurts, knows our fears, feels our heartaches, dries our tears. The promise that we are not alone, but that there is someone who is with us through all our days. Someone who knows us, who calls us by name. Someone who gives purpose to our lives; someone who looks at us with eyes of unfathomable love; someone who welcomes us home. This day. This Day. *“For unto you – unto you – This Day - is born in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.”*

The waiting is over. The promise is fulfilled. The Saviour is born. Are you still waiting? Or will you say Yes? Will you receive the God’s gift? This day? And start living God’s promise for you?

One last thing. Spring came; So did the bike. My parent’s promise was good. Of course it was.

Your Father has a promise for you. And your Father’s promise is good. Of course it is. All he asks you to do, is all the angel asked the shepherds to do, that day so long ago: Seek him for yourself.

Find the Christ Child. Find the promise. Find the gift. In finding, believe. In believing, receive. This day. This day. Amen.