

“Prepare to Meet the Messiah”^{**1}

Christmas Series: “*He’s Coming! Isaiah Helps Us Prepare for Christmas*”

Main Idea: Isaiah the prophet can give us a fresh appreciation for Christmas. He enables us to see the Messiah from two perspectives.

- I. We see the Messiah in the big picture of Isaiah.
 - A. Isaiah pinpointed man’s problem (chapters 1-39).
 - 1. People are sinners (1:2-4).
 - 2. A holy God must judge sin (5:11-13).
 - B. Isaiah predicted God’s solution (chapters 40-66).
 - 1. God would comfort His people (40:1-2).
 - 2. God would change His people (43:1).
- II. We see the Messiah in the details of Isaiah.
 - A. The Christ of Christmas is a King (7:14; 9:6).
 - 1. We’re told how He would come.
 - 2. We’re told what He would do.
 - B. The Christ of Christmas is the Revealer of God (40:3-5).
 - 1. God revealed His glory through the return from exile.
 - 2. God ultimately revealed His glory through His Son.
 - C. The Christ of Christmas is the Servant (42:1-4).
 - 1. God’s first servant failed.
 - 2. The Messiah would be the Servant who would succeed.
 - D. The Christ of Christmas is a Lamb (53:4-7).
 - 1. As King, He came to rule.
 - 2. As the Glory of God, He came to reveal.
 - 3. As the Servant, He came to restore.
 - 4. As the Lamb, He came to rescue.

Make It Personal: The Messiah has come. What place does He have in my life?

Last week we considered the greatness of God by meditating on Isaiah 6. I’d like to stay in Isaiah this morning, and possibly this month, with a mini-series, “*He’s Coming! Isaiah Helps Us Prepare for Christmas.*”

Indeed, you could write those words over every page in the Old Testament. **He’s coming!** He told Adam and Eve in the garden in Genesis 3:15, “He’s coming!” He told Abraham, “He’s coming!” He told Moses, and David, and Jeremiah, and Daniel, and Micah, “He’s coming!” And He certainly told Isaiah, “He’s coming!”

And when we turn the page and enter the New Testament, we could write the words, “He has come!” The four gospels say to us, “He has come!” The book of Acts says to us, “He has come, and this is the result, the church!” Then come the epistles which say, “He has come, and He is at work in and through His churches!” And then the final book of the Bible, the Revelation, which says, “He who has come is coming again!”

To help us prepare to celebrate His first coming, let’s turn our attention to the message of Isaiah. This morning we’ll take a big picture look at his entire book, and then in future weeks, the Lord willing, we’ll look at two or three specific, key texts. To launch today’s message, I’d like to read what essentially is a praise text which reveals what will be said after He comes, all to the praise of His glorious name.

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 12

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at what Isaiah says about the coming Christ, see messages preached at WBC on 12/22/96 and 12/11/05 PM.

In 1939, after the turbulent years of the depression had taken its harsh effect on the economy and especially on sales, the head of Ohio's Federated Department Stores came up with an idea. Since Thanksgiving was the kickoff date for Christmas shoppers, why not advance the date of Thanksgiving one week, and by so doing, add six days of shopping to the schedule. The idea reached the White House, and the logic so convinced President Franklin Roosevelt that he moved the feast from November 30 to November 23. Then in 1941, Congress set the annual date of Thanksgiving as the fourth Thursday in November--ensuring a four week shopping season each year. In so doing our national leaders recognized the significance of Christmas, not merely its spiritual significance, but as a powerful economic force.

And course, we know where things have gone since then. Christmas has become a holiday that basically has very little to do with Christ. Which is why a series of messages like this is so vital.

How can we as God's people approach this Christmas in a way that will be truly worshipful and pleasing to God? One way is to look at what different biblical characters had to say about Christmas, and more significantly, the Christ who came. This morning we want to invite the prophet Isaiah to teach us about the Christ-child.

John 12:41 says, "Isaiah said this because he saw *Jesus'* glory and spoke about *him*." That's significant. The Bible says that Isaiah, a man who lived over seven centuries before Christ actually saw the Christ! Not only that, what else did Isaiah do? He spoke about Him. Where? In the book that bears his name.

My friend, we have an invaluable resource that can give us a fresh perspective of Jesus. Isaiah was an expert on Jesus, and his book is a written record that points us to the Messiah.²

Let's take a look at the Christ-child through the eyes of Isaiah. Just who was that babe in the manger? Isaiah enables us to see the Messiah from two perspectives.

I. We see the Messiah in the big picture of Isaiah.

We see the Messiah (or, "the Christ") when we take the panoramic view of Isaiah's book. Basically, there are two scenes in Isaiah's big picture.

A. Isaiah pinpointed man's problem (chapters 1-39). God called Isaiah to the ministry at an interesting time in Israel's history. In the middle of the 8th century BC, there was a combination of economic prosperity and spiritual apathy. God had blessed His people, but they failed to respond with gratefulness to Him. The theme of the first thirty-nine chapters of Isaiah's book is judgment, and in it, the prophet pinpointed the problem. By the way, the twofold problem that plagued Isaiah's people holds true for all people.

1. *People are sinners (1:2-4).* "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the LORD has spoken: I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me. The ox knows his owner, and the ass, his master's crib, but Israel does not know; My people do not consider. Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters; they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward."

² There are about 37,000 words in the book of Isaiah. It takes nearly four hours to read it at a "pulpit rate." In case you're wondering, it takes about seventy hours to read through the Bible.

Self-centeredness is the essence of sin. But that's what Isaiah saw all around him in Judah in 720 BC. I wonder what he'd write about America in 2021?

My friend, we are *sinner*s. All people are, including us. Blaming others doesn't alter the fact. Isaiah said our problem is two-fold. Here's the second part.

2. *A holy God must judge sin (5:11-13)*. There are consequences to sin. With a broken heart, no doubt, Isaiah told his people what they could expect in 5:11-13, "Woe to those who rise early in the morning to run after their drinks, who stay up late at night till they are inflamed with wine [sound familiar?]. They have harps and lyres at their banquets, tambourines and flutes and wine, but they have no regard for the deeds of the LORD, no respect for the work of His hands. Therefore my people will go into exile for lack of understanding."

And, as you may well know, into exile they went. In 722 BC the northern tribes of Israel were carried away to Assyria, and in 586 BC the southern tribes left in chains for Babylon. They learned the lesson the hard way that we all must learn. God is holy, and a holy God must judge sin.

Isaiah reiterates this truth over and over in the first scene of his book. We are sinners, and a holy God must judge sin. If we don't understand this fundamental problem of mankind, we'll never appreciate the real meaning of Christmas. That wonderful baby isn't in the manger because we're worthy, but because we're in trouble. We, all human beings, are in serious trouble, for we are sinners who have transgressed the law of a holy God.

Thankfully, there's a second scene in the book of Isaiah.

B. Isaiah predicted God's solution (chapters 40-66). What is God's solution for man's problem? In prophetic terms, Isaiah predicted that God would do two things.

1. *God would comfort His people (40:1-2)*. The first thirty-nine chapters reverberate with the theme of justice, but the tone changes to a note of hope beginning in chapter 40. At the very time His people were facing judgment, God told Isaiah to assure them that exile would not be the end.

"Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she has received of the LORD's hand double for all her sins (40:1-2)."

God doesn't give up on people. Aren't you glad of that?! Yes, because of His righteousness He must deal with sin, and yet, due to His mercy, He extends comfort to the sinner. In the case of Isaiah's people, that meant a return from exile. After seventy years in Babylon, He would bring comfort to the Jews by bringing them back home (40:3-5).

Isaiah also predicted that God would do something else.

2. *God would change His people (43:1)*. "But now, thus saith the LORD who created thee, O Jacob, and He who formed thee, O Israel, Fear not; for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine." Did you catch that? Even before the judgment occurred, God said He would restore His wayward people. He would bring them back to the Promised Land. He would change them.

But how would He do it? How ultimately would God transform His wayward people, and the world? How would He take them from where they were to where they needed to be?

Parents, do you ever ask that question as you seek to raise your children? For that matter, do you ever ask that question as you look at *your* own life? How is God going to take us from where we are, as sinners who are cut off from Him, to where we need to be, reconciled to Him and living in obedience to Him? In prophetic terms, Isaiah tells us. God does it *through a person known as the Messiah*.

This is the backdrop to the special day we call Christmas. We have a problem. We are born as sinners under the judgment of God, and we can't do a thing about it. But, Isaiah says, God is going to do for us what sinners cannot do for themselves, through the Messiah. He's coming!

We see the Messiah in big picture of Isaiah. But Isaiah gives us much more.

II. We see the Messiah in the details of Isaiah.

Remember, John said that Isaiah saw the preincarnate Jesus. As we scan Isaiah's book, we find a massive amount of material about the Messiah. We could easily get lost in the details, so we'll be selective and look at four pictures Isaiah used to introduce us to the Christ-child. This is the identity of that precious baby in the manger.

A. The Christ-child is a King (7:14; 9:6). According to 1:1, Isaiah himself ministered during the reigns of at least four kings, of course, all descendants of King David. There was Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. The coming Messiah will Himself be in this royal line as a descendant of David (as the Lord announced to David back in 2 Samuel 7:12-14).

Indeed, He's coming, said the Lord to David, around 1000 BC. Isaiah enters the world 250 years later, and they're still waiting.

What kind of king will He be? Isaiah gives us two important prophecies concerning the coming King.

1. We're told how He would come. The reference is the familiar Isaiah 7:14, "Therefore the LORD Himself shall give you a sign; Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel." We usually look at Isaiah 7:14 through Matthew's eyes, and that's good since Matthew quoted this prophecy, but first we need to look at what the prophecy meant in its historical context.

Ahaz was king in Judah (1). Frankly, he was a bad king at a bad time. A Syrian alliance was threatening to replace Ahaz with another king. Why was that a problem? It was a threat to the Davidic covenant and lineage. Ahaz was in trouble.

So what did God do? He told Isaiah to go to Ahaz (3) and tell the king not to worry. Furthermore, God told Ahaz to ask for a sign to prove that He would protect His people (11). How did Ahaz respond? He said (12), "I will not ask (for a sign)." Was Ahaz being noble? Hardly. Just the opposite. He didn't want to believe the word of God. In fact, he was already working on his own scheme and planned to appeal to Tiglath Pilezer, king of Assyria, for help.

That's the natural response of the sinner. God extends grace and offers the sinner exactly what he needs, but the sinner says, "No thanks. I have everything in hand. I don't want you interfering with my life, Lord. I'm fine."

How did the prophet Isaiah respond? In essence, he told King Ahaz (13-14), "You'll get a sign anyway! The Lord Himself will give you a sign."

The "you" in verse 14 is actually plural, for the sign was not only for Ahaz, but for the entire nation of Judah. And what was the sign? A boy would be born of a virgin (14). He would be raised in a time of national calamity (15). Before the boy grew up, the threat facing Judah would be gone (16).

That's interesting. Don't miss that final detail. I believe there are two levels of fulfillment to the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14. We see an immediate fulfillment in 8:4 where a son is born to Isaiah's wife. On the day Isaiah stood before Ahaz (in 7:14), he was betrothed to a virgin who would later bear him a son (8:4). In 8:18 Isaiah said his children were "signs." One child was an initial fulfillment of 7:14. And by the birth of that child God sent a needed message to Ahaz and his people. "You can trust me. I'll deliver you from this enemy. I'm a Saving God."

But even as He gave this message to Ahaz, the sinner is already plotting his next move. This sinner, all sinners, need more than this first child-sign. And the Lord already has that in mind, for there's a second layer of fulfillment, indeed, the ultimate fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14.

According to Matthew 1:23, this prophecy in Isaiah 7:14 points to the virgin Mary's conception of the Messiah. Listen to the angel's message to Joseph in Matthew 1:20–23, "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.²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.'²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:²³ 'Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel' (which means, God with us)."

That first child, born to Isaiah and his wife, could not solve the core problem in the heart of Ahaz and every other human being. This would require the coming of another child, indeed, a child that was God Himself come in human form.

So according to Matthew, Isaiah's prophesy points ultimately to the virgin Mary and the child she bore. Did Ahaz know that? I doubt it. Did Isaiah know the sign pointed ultimately to the Messiah? I'm not sure if he did at the time he first heard the announcement in Isaiah 7, but I think eventually he did. I say that because of a second prophecy Isaiah gave concerning the Messiah King.

2. *We're told what He would do.* Where? In Isaiah 9:6, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace."

One of Israel's greatest problems was the failure of its leaders. Kings like Ahaz came and went. Even good kings like David and Hezekiah came and went. God's people needed a king that wouldn't fail. And Isaiah said, "He's coming!!!"

What would this king do? 9:7 tells us, "Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever."

Friends, the Christ of Christmas is *the* King. According to Isaiah's prophesy, He is the final king, the king whose reign will never end.

Do you know what that means? It means He can be trusted, and should be trusted, and obeyed. Why? Because He's not going away. You'll never need another king again.

He will fight your battles, supply your needs, establish His kingdom, and He will do it forever and ever.

That's the baby in the manger scene, my friend. And this brings us to a second picture given to us by Isaiah.

B. The Christ-child is the Revealer of God (40:3-5). In Matthew 3:3 Matthew quotes Isaiah 40:3. By doing so, he communicates two things about Christ the Revealer.

1. *God revealed His glory through the return from exile.* That's the immediate anticipation of the prophecy in Isaiah 40. Notice verses 3-5, "A voice of one calling: In the desert prepare the way for the LORD. Make straight paths in the wilderness a highway for our God...And the *glory of the LORD* will be revealed, and all mankind will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

Wow! Isaiah predicted that a day was coming when the glory of the Lord would be revealed for all men to see.

Which raises the question. When did that happen? And the answer? God revealed His glory when He brought the Jews back from exile in Babylon. That's the context of Isaiah 40. It looks ahead to that marvelous display of God bringing His people back home. But that was just "warm-up" work for God. Indeed...

2. *God ultimately revealed His glory through His Son.* Matthew quoted Isaiah 40:3 as a reference to John the Baptist. How so? It's as if Matthew were saying, "Listen, if the return of Jews from exile revealed God's glory, *how much more* did John the Baptist. It was his privilege to preach and call people to get ready to see THE glory of God!

I don't know if you've thought of it in these terms but Jesus is the glory of God. He is the Revealer of God. The apostle John puts it this way, "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us; and we beheld His *glory*, full of grace and truth (John 1:14)." Hebrews 1:3 states, "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being."

Do you want to know God, my friend? Then you must get to know the One who entered the world at the first Christmas. The Christ-child is the Revealer of God. To see Him is to see God Himself, for He indeed is God Himself.

Wesley's Christmas carol says it well, "Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, Hail th' incarnate Deity! Pleased as man with man to dwell, Jesus our Immanuel."

This is why we read our Bibles every day, and come to church every week. Not as a box to check, but to get to know a person, the One who is the Revealer of God!

C. The Christ-child is the Servant (42:1-4). The "servant" theme is central to Isaiah's message (it appears 37 times in the NIV). If you trace the word through the book, a couple of truths will emerge.

1. *God's first servant failed.* Who was God's first servant? Israel was, according to 41:8-9. "But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham, my friend...Thou art my servant; I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away."

What's a servant supposed to do? A servant is to do whatever his master desires. Israel was God's servant, but Israel failed. Why? The same reason we fail. We've inherited a sin nature that takes us away from our Master's good intent for us. We all like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way," says Isaiah in 53:6. We simply fail to do what God our Master asks of us. Even if we have good intentions,

they end up being just that, good *intentions*. We lack the power to please God on our own. Is there hope? Yes there is, says Isaiah.

2. *The Messiah would be the Servant who would succeed*. Listen to the prediction Isaiah recorded in 42:1-4, "Here is *my servant*, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations."

Who is Isaiah describing here? THE Servant, Jesus. The meek one (2), the bringer of justice (3), the dependable one (4), the one who would be a light for the Gentiles (6). He is the Servant who would succeed where all else failed (Matthew 20:28).

Seems like a contradiction, doesn't it? The Christ-child is a King, but He's also a Servant? Who ever heard of a King becoming a slave...on his own initiative? Why would He do that? The answer brings us to Isaiah's fourth picture.

D. The Christ-child is a Lamb (53:4-7). How is this King, who is the Revealer of God, who is also the Servant, going to accomplish this work of rescuing a fallen, estranged world? Here's how. Isaiah records these words in 52:13, "See, my *servant* will act wisely."

Stop there. How did Isaiah say the Servant would act wisely? He gives the answer in Isaiah 53 where he predicted the Servant would become a Lamb.

I want to spend an entire message on this later in the month, the Lord willing. But for now, ponder what Isaiah said the Lamb would do by listening to 53:4-7, "Surely He took our infirmities and carried our sorrows...He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him. We all, like sheep, gave gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all...He was led like a lamb to the slaughter."

A lamb. What a helpless creature. How vulnerable, and defenseless. And this is precisely what the Messiah willingly became. The King, the Revealer of God, the Servant of God, became a sacrificial lamb. This was His reason for coming. This is why He's laying there in that manger. He has a work to do, and He will not stop until He stretches out His arms and allows wicked men to nail Him to two pieces of wood. And then, the real work begins, for on that cross He will take upon Himself the sin and due penalty for sin for every person who in the course of human history would ever repent and believe in Him. He will die in their place. He will endure the wrath of God as their substitute.

And was The Servant's work sufficient? Was God pleased with the sacrifice of the Lamb? Yes. How do we know? Because of on the third day God raised His Son from the dead, and eventually restored Him to His rightful throne in heaven.

Let all this sink in. My friend, is this the Christ that comes to our minds when we ponder that quaint manger scene? Do we see that baby as the King, the Revealer of God, the Servant, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world? This is the One who is coming, says Isaiah. And indeed, two thousand years ago, He came.

So what does this mean in practical terms, you ask? Let's talk about some implications of these four titles.

1. *As King, He came to rule*. This speaks of His sovereignty. Jesus is not one religious option on the shelf. He is the only option. All others are rivals to Him, for He is the King, the Rightful Ruler of heaven and earth. You can't have two kings. Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me (Matt 28:18)."

All authority. That's comprehensive. It's also very personal. Jesus says He possesses authority over our lives. So if that's true, if He indeed came to rule, then we have cause for great hope. There's nothing in our lives outside of His control. We can trust Him with all things, with the challenges we're facing, with our needs, our questions, our fears, with it all.

We also need to ask ourselves a basic question, again and again. Does the One who came to rule now rule my life? Am I bowing my heart to Him? Am I giving Him my absolute allegiance right now? Am I living for Him, for His kingdom purposes, and joyfully so?

2. *As the Glory of God, He came to reveal.* This speaks of His significance. Are you searching for meaning in life? Look no further than Jesus. He is the very revealer of God Himself, for He is God.

This was last week's message. Is the Great One, the Mount Everest, truly great in my life? He is the Weighty One, the One who matters most. We were created to live for His glory, for His fame, for His significance. And when we do that, we experience what comes along with that, the joy and peace and fulfillment that He gives to us.

Years ago I was struck by the relevance of this simple, Puritan prayer, that says, "Teach me, that if I do not live a life that satisfies Thee, then I will not live a life that will satisfy me."³

3. *As the Servant, He came to restore.* The Servant-picture speaks of His submission. Jesus did not come to do His own thing. He came as a slave. He came to do the Father's will, to do the work His Father had given Him to do. And what was that work? To restore sinners back to God, to enable sinners to live as they were always intended to live, for the glory of God.

So the question is, are we cooperating with the plan of the Father and the work of His Son? He came to restore us, to transform our lives so we live for His glorious purposes, so we become like Him.

This again is why we need the Bible, and church, and encouragement, and accountability, and service. This is all part of what He uses to restore us, and then help others be restored through our efforts.

4. *As the Lamb, He came to rescue.* This speaks of His substitution. Jesus can rescue us because He took our place. He died the death we deserved to die, and then rose again.

My unsaved friend, God will accept you today if you accept His Son as your substitute. No matter what your past, He will accept and forgive you because of what His Son did. Will you ask Him to do so? Will you believe in the One He sent for you?

Answer this question honestly. What place does Jesus have in your life? Beloved, when we look at the Christ-child through the eyes of Isaiah, we see the King, the Revealer of God, the Servant, and the Lamb. The question is this. Is Christ all of this in *my* life and *your* life?

This is why the appropriate response is to worship that babe in the manger, to put our trust in Him, to live for Him, to share Him with others, and to prepare to meet Him, for He's coming again.

³ Taken from *The Valley of Vision*, "Happiness."

Make It Personal: The Messiah has come. What place does He have in my life?

Closing Song: *“Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus”* #124 (two verses)

Harvest Offering (for the Baptist Children’s Home): Please gifts in plate in foyer