

## Resonant Zeal

Isaiah 9:2-7  
Titus 2:11-14  
Luke 2:1-14(15-20)  
Psalm 96

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was formless, and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And then God said, “Let there be light”. God’s first touch on earth was to create light. That was God’s first act and God has been illuminating our darkness ever since. Isaiah prophesied that those who live in darkness will see a great light. He goes on to say that the light would multiply and expand ceaselessly. Imagine a sunrise gently glowing on the horizon, the world brightening by subtle degrees until everything and everyone is bathed in the full light of day.

The light Isaiah foretells, the light penetrating the land of deep darkness, is the light of Jesus, our infant king. David’s Psalm is so enraptured by this king, that he invites everyone who hears of God’s reign on earth to sing, to declare his glory, ascribe him honor, worship, tell it among the nations, and rejoice! So, what is it about this throne of David that is worth all the celebration? According to Isaiah, the Messiah is praised because he is the Prince of Peace, and the discord of the world will eventually cease in response to the authority of that peace.

These two authors herald the coming of a kingdom built on righteousness and justice that is so profound that it blesses every nation, every people group, and all of creation. We come here tonight to celebrate this with our loved ones and all the hosts of heaven. We are warmed by the familiar carols and the story of the baby Jesus’ tender arrival. We step into this sanctuary with joy and anticipation, glowing with our full bellies, warm Christmas sweaters, and festive decorations. Entering here is a refuge, and we are grateful. And also, outside these walls exists violence, hunger, pain, grief, and fragility, and our hearts feel the dissonance.

Is the message of this baby really the salvation David promises? The pain of this world challenges our ideas of the expanding peace Isaiah foretells. If Jesus really is such a Mighty God, a genuine Prince of Peace, then why is the world so broken? Why is the world not bathed in Christ's light? Isaiah says the Lord's zeal is the means by which this prophecy will be fulfilled.

Hallmark's romantic haze around the season sometimes makes us forget what really happened in that stable in Bethlehem. The power of God's love pierced the veil between heaven and earth. God was enfleshed; a God who loves us enough to leave the opulence and comfort of Heaven to endure the indignity and deprivation of life in first century Palestine as a Jewish man under the oppressive power of Roman rule. God entered his own creation, suffering under its laws and limitations, to show us the healing power of Emmanuel's presence. God's light was revealed **WITHIN** the fractured dissonance of human existence.

In his letter to Titus, Paul announces the appearance of this light, through our salvation. Paul gives us one of those spiritual realities of the already, but not yet. God's grace has appeared with this magnificent salvation. And as we learn to live under the authority of a different king than the earthly ones we know, WE become the kingdom he promised into the world. We work with God in creating something that is already taking shape. Like our Hebrew Bible authors said, it is growing and developing as we join in preparing the way for this reality to be fulfilled, for the light to genuinely and fully illumine the whole earth's darkness.

Isaiah tells us that it is God's zeal that will accomplish the work of our Prince of Peace. Paul tells us that through Christ, that same zeal infuses us, God's own people. God is working to transform us into zeal-bearers; people who passionately live to enact justice and righteousness. If the light isn't illuminating the darkness, it isn't because God has

withheld that light. God's been creating it for us since the first divine words shattered the world's darkness. It is now in our hands to bring and spread this light.

But light is something that can be seen and God's work does not always begin in visible ways. Sometimes God's work begins in hidden spaces. Jesus wasn't born in Jerusalem where large crowds could appreciate the miracle of his arrival. Bethlehem was a small village. Even there, the Christ child's entry was so inconspicuous that no one noticed or cared enough to make him room. But that doesn't mean no one recognized his appearance. While most were tucked safely indoors, away from the darkness of the night, the shepherds saw what others could not. Transcending the quiet night's sky, the glory of the Lord broke through, declaring the Messiah's arrival and the promised peace he would bring. That display was visible, but only to a select few, a ragtag group existing without the shelter that would have shielded them from that glory. The shepherds were so moved by the sight that they left everything to verify the story. Later their stories rippled out to others. All the unassuming, largely unnoticed activity, hidden from the bulk of humanity, became like the subtle light on the horizon growing into the dawn. What was hidden first became known through the shepherd's encounter.

See, we were made in the image of God, we have divine DNA. We, the world, and all creation are tuned to recognize God's activity. And not just to recognize it, but to rejoice and to participate in it. Our heartstrings are tuned to the frequency of peace-making. It's why war, deprivation, and oppression hurt us so badly. That pitch is off; it literally hurts our ears and our hearts.

If you've ever watched a technician tune a piano, you understand the principle of sympathetic resonance. A tuning fork is struck, and the frequency of that pitch resonates the piano strings. Silent, still, strings come alive when they recognize the frequency of that tuning fork. They vibrate and raise in volume not because they are obligated, but because they recognize the frequency and naturally join in, spreading that resonance.

We are people created to join the Prince of Peace. When we encounter Jesus, it's as if God's master tuning fork strikes, and the frequency of salvation's peace resonates inside us. It may not be immediately visible, but it is clearly felt... and our song begins in response. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts breaks into our darkened, silent, world. Like the shepherds, we experience that contagious passion and cannot hold ourselves back from responding. The story from Luke says the angels revealed the story to the shepherds. In response the shepherds revealed that story to everyone they could. God's people take God's zeal for healing this world and make it our own. - The authority of the gospel does not conquer the world by force or volume; it spreads through resonance.

Christ awakens what creation was designed to respond to. ---The authority of God's kingdom was handed to us through the helpless cries of an infant, through the vulnerable, humble power of God's love. Once it is recognized, once Christ's peace is truly encountered, the human heart naturally responds. The frequency of Christ's presence, the pervasiveness of Christ's reign, awakens what is already waiting within us. And once we respond, those around us cannot help but also be moved.

The light Isaiah says will illumine the world dawns by degrees as we live out the reign of God into this world. But it starts in the hidden places of our hearts. For us to experience the peace this world is promised, we must first allow our hearts to feel and sing the good news. In this broken world it can be difficult to tear our eyes away from the pain of the discord, but our hearts were created to respond to the good news of God's love. If we allow ourselves to gaze into the mystery of that love, to witness the glory of a transcendent God's immanent presence, the frequency of it will resonate inside us, and our hearts will naturally take up the chorus.

Christ's presence changes us. The song of his love is not one we merely hear. It has kinetic force. Once it moves, it moves us. It begins in the hidden places of our heart. But it moves

out into the world. Like light dawning, we join the sunrise in lighting up the world so everyone can see and be blessed by the Light God spoke into existence.

May the song in our hearts make us heralds of that light into this world.