

ISAIAH 9:2-7  
“WAITING AND WAITING!”

Waiting – there are all kinds of waiting

You’re waiting for something good to happen; you’re expecting a great event to take place, a personal event, a national event, a church event, and you are really looking forward to it because it will be wonderful; you are counting down the days till it happens; children are a bit like this with Christmas, or birthdays, they can tell you how many days there are to go! This waiting is full of anticipation and excitement, the expectation builds as the day gets nearer and nearer; you can hardly contain yourself; you can’t sleep at night for the excitement and you wonder how it will be when the great day arrives, but you still have to wait and wait; the day will not come any more quickly for trying; the days seem to drag!

You are waiting for something good to happen but you don’t know when. Perhaps you are in pain and are waiting for a medical appointment, but you have no date yet and the pain is building; that kind of waiting is full of frustration, wishing it was all over, but having to hang on and hang on. This kind of waiting is full of uncertainty, not knowing, but wishing it was sorted.

Waiting for something bad to happen is a different kind of waiting; you are trying to put off the evil day; you are full of foreboding; you know that the day will come when this bad thing will happen, but you wish you could just switch off the clock, stop time and make this thing go away. Again there are all kinds of events that can be like this. You know the ostrich’s tactics when something bad happens: it literally puts its head in the sand and pretends that there is no threat, and by pretending there is no threat it tries to make it go away; I wonder how many ostriches have been prey for wild animals by this tactic. It doesn’t really work, but there are lots of times we wish it did. Our waiting is full of fear and foreboding. Sometimes even waiting for good things can be tinged with a sense of fear and anxiety, just in case something goes wrong!

Advent is a season of waiting; for children it is so much now about counting the days to Christmas; even what once were called advent calendars are sometimes called ‘countdown to Christmas’; so it becomes a time for children to get more and more excited about presents etc. Adults share that sense of excitement, especially if you’re a parent watching your child; we can actually enjoy Christmas as adults. For some people, though this season is full of foreboding because they don’t enjoy Christmas, it is a time of family stress, or a time when some feel their sense of loss more than ever, a time when some are on their own and this picture of happy family Christmas is just another world.

In Church, the season of Advent is meant to reflect the waiting time for the coming of Christ. Jesus has come; the events at the heart of Advent have already happened 2000 years ago, so we are not waiting for them to happen. This time in calendar is meant to reflect the days, months, years, even centuries before Jesus came and the sense of waiting that was in the hearts and minds of people of faith then, so that when Christmas comes, we have that sense of the waiting being over and everything being fulfilled. There is another sense of waiting: Jesus promised another coming, that He would come again to the world, when everything would be completely fulfilled; we still wait for that to happen, for that promise to be complete; that too is part of Advent, and we’ll think more about that this evening.

Isaiah 9 is one of the passages responsible for the sense of waiting in Israel. He paints a picture of a people transformed; there is no greater transformation than darkness to light, black to white; it is a total transformation that one day will happen in

Israel and will affect the whole world. These words were spoken some 800 years before Jesus came and so for 800 years the people lived waiting for God to complete His promise. When Jesus came, understandably any keen anticipation and expectation had died amongst most of people of Israel, but there were still a few people who remembered the prophecies and promises of God and who held on to them and believed them and when they saw Jesus, the baby, they knew that what Isaiah had said had now happened.

Most of Isaiah's words are in the past tense: "*The people...*" (v.2) Why is that? He's looking forward, not backwards! It was quite common in prophets' words to speak in the past tense of something still to come and it comes from a deep confidence in God: "Look forward to it, it is certain, He has already done it!" (Motyer) He is describing something that God will do and because this is something that God will do God has promised it, it is as good as done. Now the people only have to respond to God. God will give light, people will see it; God will set people free, the people will rejoice.

It is a picture of a great transformation. There is no greater contrast than darkness to light. If you have ever lived in or visited any part of world in the tropics or near the Equator you will know that night falls almost instantly! Not for people in these parts, the long evenings in which sun gradually goes down, producing wonderful sunsets that linger and the gradual transformation from day to night. No! One minute it is light; the next minute dark. Well, not quite, but almost! The change is pretty quick, a complete transformation. Isaiah pictures people walking in darkness, which is a picture for all that is bad about the world; for Bible evil people love the darkness because that's where they live; darkness is all about evil, it causes fear, God is not there; it is a bad place to be and people have got there by their faults, failings, mistakes, and rebellion against God.

"*The People...*" (v2) Transformation – the light has come; the world is changed completely and God has done this. Jesus called Himself 'the light of the world', surely picking up this theme. He came to show us what God is like; He came to set us free from all that is bad about the world, from our faults and mistakes; to set us free from guilt and fear and to bring peace and hope and forgiveness to us in a whole new way. He came to bring us to God so that we know and love God in a new way because God has loved us. It's a better life, a better world, a great transformation for the world that Jesus brings. Who would not want this kind of new world? Who, hearing about the promise of darkness being transformed would not wait for this to happen and pray for God to do this and do it now? They had to wait 800 years from the time Isaiah painted this picture till it happened and when Jesus came it happened; the waiting is over.

The people rejoice: there are two pictures here that show us what this rejoicing is like: "*you have...*" (v3) Harvest, perhaps not so much for us, but certainly for people who live on the land and live by the land – bringing the harvest in safely and abundantly is a cause of great rejoicing; so harvest thanksgiving services were born by people who rejoiced that God had given them a great harvest from the land. Second, conquest – the people have been involved in battle and it has been a long, hard struggle perhaps, but they've won and are now dividing up the spoils of war, plunder. Victory is sweet and to the victor goes the spoils of war and as they divide up the spoils amongst themselves, they rejoice. So it will be a day when people rejoice; people will be glad when this transformation happens.

"*For to us...*" (v6f) "The emphasis falls not on what the child will do when grown up but on the mere fact of his birth. In his coming all that results from his coming is at

once secured.” (Motyer) The transformation from darkness to light, that will cause the people to rejoice and be glad, is all secured when the child is born. The birth of the child is not the end of the story; the story will go on into His life and ministry, into His suffering and death, into His resurrection, but all of that is secured the moment the child is born. The transformation is as good as done the moment Jesus is born and the waiting is over. God is at work and he will complete the work that He has begun. The titles that the child is given show us something of the bigness of this promise: God Himself has come to birth in the world in the shape and form of this child; He has come to change world forever.

Imagine a relationship with God based solely on love and not fear, based on grace and not guilt. Imagine a sense of being at peace with oneself, so that we know we are loved, accepted, forgiven, helped. “Imagine human community without lies, or anger; without dishonesty, laziness or selfishness. Imagine human relationships in which slander is not spoken; in which bitterness, rage, violence and hatred are all absent. What would be left as the currency of human commerce? Perhaps kindness and compassion? Perhaps even forgiveness? Imagine a world... in which we are safe because others do not hate us; in which our time is given not to strife and dissent but to love and generosity; in which the energy we once used to bring others down is redirected to building them up.” (Word Live 26/11/09)

All of this is the transformation that Jesus came to bring. He came to transform completely our relationship with God, to open up the way for us to come to God freely and gladly, to love God because God loves us. He came to transform our relationships with one another, that we may live at peace with one another, brothers and sisters together in family of God, all loved alike by Father, all of us people in whom God is at work in the same way. He came to transform the way we see ourselves, that we are loved, accepted, forgiven sinners. He came to transform the way we see the world, as a place to serve God and share the gospel so that others are transformed. He didn't do all of that at Christmas; some of this is the Easter gospel, but it was all secured and settled and guaranteed when He came.

A whole new world; total transformation. Imagine hearing these words for the first time; perhaps you are hearing them for the first time. God is going to do this in our world, for us; our darkness is going to be transformed into light and when a child is born. What anticipation? Excitement? Looking forward to that day? Advent allows us to catch a flavour of that waiting, anticipating. Rejoice; this is what God does; this is what God has done. Rejoice that a child is born and His name is Jesus and He transforms the world; rejoice and believe the good news.