

The Promise in the Darkness

Week 1: The Long-Awaited King

Scripture: Isaiah 9:2-7; Micah 5:2-5a

Date: November 16, 2025

Welcome to Advent

Advent means "coming" or "arrival." For the next few weeks leading up to Christmas, we'll explore how God's people waited centuries for God to keep His promises—and how their ancient waiting teaches us to wait faithfully today.

This sermon's central truth: **God specializes in speaking light into darkness. And the promises He makes, He keeps—even when the wait feels impossibly long.**

The Power of a Promise

In August 2010, thirty-three miners were trapped 2,300 feet underground in Chile after a mine collapse. Sealed in darkness, limited supplies, temperatures above 35°C. For seventeen days, no one knew if they were alive.

The miners survived by rationing tiny portions of food and never giving up hope. On day seventeen, a drill bit broke through. The miners attached a note: "We are well in the shelter, the 33."

That note changed everything. Their circumstances hadn't improved—they were still trapped. It would be fifty-two more days before rescue. **But they had a promise. And that promise turned their waiting from despair into disciplined hope.**

This mirrors the world Isaiah spoke into. God's people were trapped under oppression, wondering if rescue would come. Into that darkness, God sent a message—not that rescue might come someday, but that it had **already** dawned.

Point 1: Light Has Already Dawned

Isaiah 9:2-3 speaks of people in darkness seeing a great light. When Isaiah wrote this (around 732 BC), darkness was literal. The Assyrian Empire had invaded northern Israel, targeting Zebulun and Naphtali with deportation and violence. By 722 BC, the northern kingdom collapsed. Judah watched and wondered: "Are we next?"

This wasn't theoretical darkness—it was real political oppression, violence, and fear.

Isaiah spoke into that darkness using past tense: light "*has* shone," not "*will* shine." Hebrew prophets used the "**prophetic perfect tense**"—speaking of future events in past tense because they're certain from God's perspective.

Like a soldier and wife who wrote letters saying "Today, I came home to you" before deployment ended—writing with confidence as if it had already happened.

When God makes a promise, it's more real than your current circumstances.

The beautiful irony: Zebulun and Naphtali, the darkest, most forgotten places, would see light first. Seven hundred years later, Jesus began His ministry in Galilee—not Jerusalem or Rome, but the despised, forgotten place.

God's pattern: He brings light to the least likely places first.

Point 2: The Child Who Shatters Yokes

Isaiah gets specific about how light comes.

Isaiah 9:4-7 stacks images: yoke broken, rod shattered, warrior's boots burned, blood-soaked garments as fuel. God doesn't promise gradual improvement—He promises **total deliverance**.

When Isaiah references "the day of Midian," he recalls Gideon's 300 defeating massive Midianite forces. God reduced Israel's army from 32,000 to 300 so no one could claim human strength won.

Deliverance is God's work, not ours.

Then Isaiah announces: *"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given."*

The Four Titles

1. Wonderful Counselor – Supernatural wisdom; He is wisdom itself.

2. Mighty God – The Hebrew *El Gibbor*, used only of God Himself. Not "god-like" but God.

3. Everlasting Father – Eternal care, provision, protection.

4. Prince of Peace – He embodies *shalom*: comprehensive well-being, restoration.

These titles cannot describe a mere human king. **Isaiah claims the Messiah is fully God.**

Seven hundred years later, Gabriel told Mary her son would sit on David's throne forever—requiring eternal divine authority, not just human lineage.

Isaiah ends: *"The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this."*

The Hebrew "zeal" means jealous passion, fierce commitment. God's reputation is tied to His promises. When you're at the end of your strength, divine zeal is your anchor.

Notice: *"The government shall be upon his shoulder."* Not ours. We often live as functional atheists—believing Jesus is King intellectually but living as if we must control everything.

The invitation: Surrender. Let the King carry what only He can carry.

Point 3: The Shepherd from Bethlehem

Micah 5:2-5a focuses on Bethlehem—so small it didn't rank among Judah's clans. Yet God chose it. David was a shepherd there but made Jerusalem his capital.

God's pattern: He exalts the humble, chooses the weak, works through the overlooked.

When the eternal Son entered creation, He came to a Bethlehem manger—not Rome's emperor or Herod's palace.

Micah says: *"He shall stand and shepherd."*

Kings were called "shepherds," expected to protect and provide. But Israel's kings failed. Ezekiel 34 indicts them: *"You eat the fat but do not feed the sheep."*

Micah promises different:

- **Standing** – stability, permanence, unwavering presence
- **In the LORD's strength** – divine resources, not human limitations
- *"They shall dwell secure"* – safety for people who knew fear
- *"He shall be their peace"* – not bringing peace, but **being** peace

Jesus: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

Because we have a Shepherd, we become shepherds to others.

Living in the Tension

We live between "already" and "not yet." The miners had a promise but waited fifty-two more days. **The promise made waiting bearable.**

We have the promise. We're waiting for final rescue. But the promise is certain.

Three Practical Steps

First: Let the promise reframe your darkness.

Name your shadow. Find God's promise that speaks to it. Preach that promise over your situation daily.

Second: Let the King's government displace your self-rule.

Ask: "What control reflex must I surrender?" Not vague "trust more" but specific: "Stop micromanaging my child." Confess self-rule. Take concrete action.

Third: Let the Shepherd's peace flow through you.

Choose one person whose waiting feels endless. Don't text—show up. Bring a meal. Watch their kids. Cover a need. **The gospel becomes real when truth becomes love someone feels.**

The Certainty of God's Promises

God kept His 700-year-old promises about the first advent. He will keep His 2,000-year-old promise about the second advent.

- Light has dawned—but we still walk through valleys.
- Victory is won—but we still face battles.
- The Kingdom has come—but we still pray "Your kingdom come."

Waiting is bearable when the promise is guaranteed.

Revelation 22:20: *"Surely I am coming soon."*

The church's response for 2,000 years: *"Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!"*

An Invitation

For those who've never surrendered to this King: you've been carrying the government yourself.

The gospel: The child born in Bethlehem is the eternal God who entered history to rescue you. He lived the perfect life you couldn't. He died the death you deserved. He rose victorious. He offers light, liberation, and shepherding care.

The invitation: Stop trying to save yourself. Surrender to the King. Let the Shepherd find you.

Discussion Questions

These questions are designed for personal reflection, small group discussion, or family devotions. Take time to wrestle honestly with the text and its implications for your life.

1. Isaiah used past tense ("the light has shone") to describe a future rescue because it was certain from God's perspective. What would change in your current darkness if you spoke God's promises over it as if they were already accomplished? What specific promise do you need to preach to yourself in past tense this week?

2. The sermon emphasized that "the government shall be upon his shoulder"—not ours. Where in your life are you functioning as a "practical atheist," believing Jesus is King intellectually but living as if you must control everything? What specific control reflex is God asking you to surrender right now?

3. God chose forgotten Zebulun and Naphtali to see light first, and later chose insignificant Bethlehem over powerful Jerusalem. What does this reveal about the kind of people and places God uses? Where in your life do you feel "too small" or "too broken" for God to work? How does God's pattern of choosing the overlooked challenge that belief?

4. The miners in Chile waited fifty-two more days after receiving the promise "We are well in the shelter, the 33." Their circumstances hadn't improved, but the promise made waiting bearable. What promise of God are you struggling to believe while you wait? What would it look like to wait with "disciplined hope" rather than despair or denial?

5. Isaiah says "the zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this"—God's fierce commitment guarantees His promises. When in your life has God's zeal felt distant or questionable? Looking back, how did His zeal prove faithful even when you couldn't see it? How might remembering past faithfulness strengthen present faith?

6. The sermon concluded with a call to let the Shepherd's peace flow through you by showing up for someone whose waiting feels endless. Who came to mind when you heard that challenge? What concrete action will you take this week to bring Christ's shepherding care to them—not just words, but tangible presence and help?

Next Week: "Gabriel's Announcements: Fear Not"

Date: November 23, 2025

Scripture: Luke 1:26-38; Matthew 1:18-25

When God breaks into human history with impossible promises, He begins with "fear not." Next week we'll explore the angel Gabriel's announcements to both Mary and Joseph. God invites ordinary people into extraordinary purposes—but always with His presence and enabling.

We'll discover how to respond to God's unexpected callings with faith rather than fear, trusting that what God initiates, He will sustain—even when His plans disrupt our own expectations.

Prepare by reading:

- Luke 1:26-56 (Gabriel's announcement to Mary and her response)
- Matthew 1:18-25 (The angel's appearance to Joseph)
- Isaiah 7:14 (Background prophecy of the virgin birth)