*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness, on them light has shined. You have the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders, and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.* Isaiah 9:2-6

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.* *I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind, just as the witness to Christ has been strengthened among you, so that you are not lacking in any gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the partnership of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.* 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

*A boy was watching his father, a pastor, write a sermon and he asked: “How do you know what to say?”*

*“Well,” – the father replied – “God tells me.”*

*“Oh” – the young lad asked – “then why do you keep crossing things out?”*

**What Does It Mean?**

1. Afew years ago I watched a modern version of a movie loosely based on Charles Dickens’ *“Christmas Carol.”* As you know, because I told you this before, I have seen probably most of the movies based on this short novel, shown or broadcast on TV or stage, and I was not particularly impressed with this version. There was, however, a statement in that movie, almost at the end, which caught my attention. Since this was modern Hollywood production, it did not have too much in common neither with the true spirit of Dickens’ story, or with the Christian interpretation and understanding of Christmas, but the main character in this movie, a TV executive responsible for the production of his version of the “Christmas Carol,” invited people, at that Christmas season, to *“act a little nicer, a little kinder, and to recognize the people around them, even if we normally they would ignore them and pretend they do not see them.”* Today marks the beginning of the *“New Liturgical Year,”* otherwise known as the First Sunday of Advent. As Christians, we have been celebrating this Sunday for almost two millennia, in preparation for the Christmas time. In four weeks, we will celebrate Christmas, the birth of our Savior Jesus once again, but the promise of *“Advent”* which literally means the *“arrival,”* goes much further in time than just two thousand years. The prophet Isaiah might have written his prophecy 2800 years ago, but people received this promise already at the time of Adam and Eve’s expulsion from the Garden of Eden: *“I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers; He will strike your head, and you will strike His heel.”* (Genesis 3:15). Ever since then people have been waiting for the arrival of the Savior.

2. Even though nowadays, Christmas has been so much commercialized, and this even includes some church celebrations, there is still something left of the traditional Christmas many of us have grown to know and celebrate. Because to great degree Christ is ignored today, our society misses so much from the celebrations Advent and the Christmas Seasons. Do you recall the 1990 blockbuster movie *“Home Alone?”* In their preparation for the Christmas’ overseas trip, the family gets so entangled in these preparations that they leave behind one of the children, to whom this was to be also a time of holidays. Since this is the comedy, everything ends well eventually, yet the experience of the events makes the people involved indeed a little wiser, and a little kinder. The question however remains: *“Is this what Christmas is all about?”* As much as it might sound good, this is not what Christmas is all about. Prophet Isaiah says: *“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light.”* His words, spoken 2800 ago, are very much alive and needed today, because people still live in the great darkness, darkness of hatred, of war, and of greed. According to the symbolism of the Old Testament, the darkness is synonymous with sin and sinfulness, whereas Satan is called the *“Prince of Darkness.”* This symbolism makes perfect sense, because it is impossible to walk in darkness without being hurt, without stumbling, and there is very little life in darkness, and whatever this life might be, that life is blind.

3. The Savior was sent to the world of such darkness bringing light and vision. I already shared with you my experience of being deep in the caves of Tennessee and only those who have been in places like that truly know what even a slight ray of light means. Two thousand years ago such a ray of light came into the world in a small Judean village called Bethlehem. From that day on, that light has become our lamp, showing us our paths, our ways, and the places to go. From the perspective of time, we may understand what Isaiah actually meant while delivering his message, unfortunately we also find ourselves in the day and age when his message is once again needed, because our modern society prefers to *“walk in the darkness”* once again. The world of darkness, the world emphasized by the commercial value of Christmas, the time of a great rush and great uneasiness, has again taken *“the upper hand,”* and just as in the days of the prophet, the message of the coming of the Messiah is so valid. This world of ours, filled with the darkness, still needs *“the great light.”*

4. Modern world and modern society worships *“enlightenment,”* but practices life in the *“darkness,”* preferring not to see the long-term consequences of the actions the society takes. Our world is in a state of chaos, but people do not want to acknowledge this, pretending everything is fine. The reason is simple, as the species we have become so proud and so arrogant that we cannot stand to be challenged. Still, the prophet Isaiah challenges us today just as he challenged the people of Judea. Advent reminds us of the importance of the arrival of salvation, but as the society we prefer to ignore it, focusing instead on the celebration of how good, how nice, and how kind we become in this *“Holiday Season.”* We do not even like to call it a Christmas Season anymore, officially because this might be offensive to others, but in reality, because we do not want to admit that we need Christ, and we need true Christmas.

5. Society wants to believe that we can control ourselves and that the only important and true code of our life is the one we create. Unfortunately, this is not the case. It is exactly the opposite. We need the code of life as offered us by Jesus and we need to recognize Christ for who He is, not the child born in Bethlehem, but our Savior and our light in life. Jesus came to this world, just as He was promised, as Isaiah prophesied: *“For us a child was born, for us a son was given.”* He came to bring His light and His code, one of love, equality, understanding humility, honesty, integrity, and most of all the eternal hope: *“To as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become the sons of God.”* So, in this time of Advent, we must focus on our needs and on the promise offered long time ago. It reminds us, and the world, that we have to put Christ in the center of our life, and that He must become a permanent part of it, otherwise we continue to walk in the darkness, being out of focus and out of the goal.

6. What this world desperately needs is the knowledge that we as the Church of Jesus Christ have already possessed. But this must be the knowledge as given by Christ, not by our individual, human wisdom driven interpretation. In preparation for Christmas, in waiting for His arrival, we must glorify our God, who promised us that He will come and in fulfilling that promise, send His Son Jesus to this world to become our Messiah. We are His children and like every child, growing up we need parents thus we need our *“Heavenly Father”* to take care of our needs. All of us who developed a relationship with Jesus Christ must share this with the world simply because our world needs the true *“Enlightenment,”* one that comes only from God. Advent and Christmas Season are to *“keep us on our toes,”* so, we know what and why it means to be a Christian and what Christmas is all about.