



**breadfortheworld**  
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

***December 24, 2010***  
***Christmas Eve***  
***Al Krass***

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

LM: Isaiah 9:1 – 6; Psalm 96:1 – 2, 2 – 3, 11 – 12, 13; Titus 2:11 – 14; Luke 2:1 – 14

Although the reading from Isaiah is chosen primarily because of verse 6, linger longer over the whole oracle – it has hidden treasures! Isaiah uses the “prophetic perfect” tense, speaking of things that haven’t yet happened as if they’ve already taken place. You could describe his vision in shorthand: “David’s Kingdom Is Restored to Full Glory.” Look what the vision includes: light bursts forth; the nation is strengthened; joy increases; oppression ends; war is abolished; endless peace, justice, and righteousness come!

Translate this for your hearers by asking what they long for most. Some of the same things! Plus, some may yearn for an end to hunger, the wiping out of AIDS, an end to slavery, the restoration of blighted urban areas, an end to chemical dependency, teen-on-teen violence, and racism. Now, can you see these things as already present? Can you paint such a vivid picture of that for your congregation?

Then ask, How is this related to the Christ Child who has come to us? Does his coming give hope for a qualitatively different future? Can you call your people to renewed hope and to commit themselves to work for that new day? Edmund Sears does that in the latter verses of “It Came upon the Midnight Clear” – look at the hope he holds out for a coming golden age.

Psalm 96 is full of praise for God’s establishing the earth and constantly bringing justice and equity. Though God has come and done this for ages, verse 13 tells us that there is still a greater coming to look for. What good news this is!

The passage from the letter to Titus is a real nugget, succinctly summarizing the Gospel. “The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all” (v.11), calling us to live properly in response. For our purposes, explore what verse 14 might mean for anti-hunger activists. What would it mean to be Christ’s people, “zealous for good deeds”? What would be marks of a church like that?

The danger of the Lukan nativity passage is that it so easily becomes trite. Congregations are so cued in to its familiar words and cadences that it can become a numbing recitation. Here are some ideas to stir people to think:

1. Augustus's decree is for the empire's purposes, not the people's. It is a real burden to subject people.
2. The shepherds are terrified partly because, as uneducated, dirty, lowly, hired hands, they are not "into" religion. Yet the angels come to them, not to the priests or Pharisees. Amazingly, they are told that the Messiah enters human history in a position similar to theirs, with nowhere to sleep but in a feed-trough.
3. When the shepherds tell what they've learned, it blows people's minds (a loose translation of verse 18!). God isn't supposed to act this way!
4. Mary, who is held up as a model – as she should be for us too – is moved to a deep rethinking of what is going on, of how God acts, and of how she is involved.

Where does that lead you as you preach? Can you encourage your well-heeled suburban congregation to reassess its values? Can you help convince your congregation of self-deprecating "little people" to believe God has specially chosen them? Can you witness to how you, as clergy, are shaken up by God's choice of shepherds as the medium of revelation?

### ***Children's Time***

It's very hard to keep children's attention at Christmas Eve services, and many pastors use stories to engage all age levels. If you do have a short children's time on Christmas Eve, have them think about how Jesus' coming changes things. The Bible shows us that no one is the same after Jesus comes. Here is a baby who promises peace, not war; health, not sickness; food, not hunger. Our happiness in seeing Jesus come is to think about changes he can bring in our lives. What are some of those changes? (Rather than have them shout out Christmas presents they hope to get, maybe suggest a few things they may hope for: better health for a relative, a visit from a friend or family member.)

### ***Musical Suggestions***

It Came upon the Midnight Clear – NCH 131