



GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

December 3, 2017

Discussion Guide

CHRISTMAS IS GOOD NEWS

CONNECTING:

45 MINUTES

(THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE INTENDED TO PROVIDE YOUR GROUP WITH A WAY OF CONNECTING WITH ONE ANOTHER SO THAT YOU MIGHT PARTNER IN THE WORK GOD IS DOING IN YOUR LIVES.)

- IN WHAT WAYS DID GOD MOVE IN YOUR LIFE THIS WEEK? IN WHAT WAYS DID YOU RESPOND TO HIM?
- WHAT WAS YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE THIS WEEK? IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, DID YOU INVITE GOD INTO THIS CHALLENGE?
- HOW HONEST HAVE YOU BEEN WITH US? (GRACIOUSLY THANK GROUP MEMBERS FOR THEIR HONESTY IF THEY STATE THEY HAVE HELD BACK.)

GETTING STARTED:

10 MINUTES

- WHEN YOU THINK "CHRISTMAS," WHAT, IF ANYTHING, DO YOU FEEL? COULD YOU EXPLAIN?

DIVING INTO THE TEXT:

60 MINUTES

(THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE INTENDED TO PROVIDE YOUR GROUP WITH A SIMPLE ROAD MAP THROUGH THE TEXT. FEEL FREE TO USE THESE QUESTIONS IN WAYS THAT BEST FIT YOUR GROUP AND THE DYNAMICS OF YOUR OWN MEETING.)

- USING THE NOTES, TALK ABOUT THE BACKGROUND OF THE HYMN OF CELEBRATION FOUND IN ISAIAH 9.
- READ ISAIAH 9.1-7 ALOUD. PAUSE. READ THE TEXT ONCE MORE.
- WHAT GOOD NEWS IS BEING CELEBRATED IN THIS HYMN? SEEK TO FIND AS MANY ASPECTS OF THIS GOOD NEWS

AS POSSIBLE.

- CONSIDERING THE EXPERIENCE OF ISRAEL, IN WHAT WAYS MIGHT THIS HAVE BEEN GOOD NEWS WORTH CELEBRATING?
- CONSIDER, FOR A MOMENT, THAT IN SCRIPTURE, ISRAEL STANDS AS AN EXAMPLE OF HUMANITY. IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, MIGHT THEIR EXPERIENCE UNDER ASSYRIA AND THEIR ATTEMPTS TO FREE THEMSELVES BE LIKE OUR OWN EXPERIENCE OF LIFE.
- HOW MIGHT, THEIR GOOD NEWS, BE OUR GOOD NEWS?
- DO YOU FEEL THAT CHRISTIANS GRASP THIS GOOD NEWS AS THE CORE OF CHRISTMAS? WHY MIGHT THIS BE THE CASE?
- WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE TO MAKE THIS GOOD NEWS CENTRAL TO OUR CELEBRATION OF CHRISTMAS?
- CONSIDER TAKING SOME OF YOUR IDEAS ABOUT CELEBRATING CHRISTMAS AND DISCUSS HOW YOU MIGHT EXPERIMENT WITH THEM AS FAMILIES OR AS A GROUP.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

ADVENT

ADVENT IS A SEASON OF THE ECCLESIASTICAL YEAR DURING WHICH MANY CHRISTIANS PREPARE TO CELEBRATE THE BIRTH OF JESUS. HOWEVER, ORIGINALLY, ADVENT HAD LITTLE TO DO WITH THE BIRTH OF CHRIST. MANY SCHOLARS BELIEVE THAT ADVENT ORIGINATED SOMETIME IN THE FOURTH OR FIFTH CENTURY IN SPAIN AND GAUL (FRANCE) AS A TIME OF PREPARATION FOR THE BAPTISM OF NEW BELIEVERS WHICH TOOK PLACE DURING THE JANUARY FEAST OF EPIPHANY. DURING THIS PERIOD OF PREPARATION FOR BAPTISM INITIATES, THESE NEW BELIEVERS ENGAGED IN 40 DAYS OF FASTING

AND PENANCE. BY THE SIXTH CENTURY, THE LARGER LATIN CHURCH HAD TAKEN UP THE PRACTICE OF FASTING AND PENANCE DURING THESE 40 DAYS AND LINKED IT WITH THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST FROM WHICH WE GET THE TERM “ADVENT” OR ARRIVAL. DURING THIS TIME, THE CHURCH WAS ENCOURAGED TO CONSIDER THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST, A TIME AT WHICH HE WOULD JUDGE THE LIVING AND THE DEAD. IN LIGHT OF THIS REALITY, PENANCE AND FASTING WERE UNDERTAKEN AS A MEANS OF YEARLY RIGHTING ONE’S LIFE IN KEEPING WITH WHAT CHRIST WAS COMING TO ACCOMPLISH. IN SOME WAYS, ONE MIGHT SEE TIES BETWEEN THIS CHRISTIAN PRACTICE AND THE JEWISH PRACTICE OF CELEBRATING THE DAY OF ATONEMENT. BOTH INVOLVE THE KEEPING OF A RHYTHM OF REGULARLY REORIENTING ONE’S LIFE AROUND GOD, A LIFE WHICH MAY HAVE GONE ASTRAY, PULLED BY THE MANY FORCES OF THE WORLD.

IT WAS NOT UNTIL THE MIDDLE AGES THAT ADVENT BEGAN TO BE LINKED WITH THE BIRTH OF JESUS AND WAS SEEN AS A SEASON OF PREPARATION FOR THE SEASON OF CELEBRATING CHRIST’S BIRTH. HOWEVER, THIS SEASON NEVER LOST ITS TIE WITH THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST OR ITS CALL TO REALIGN ONE’S LIFE WITH GOD’S COMING JUDGMENT THROUGH PENANCE AND FASTING. IN MODERN TIMES, VIEWED AND CELEBRATED PROPERLY, ADVENT IS A WONDERFUL GIFT IN THE ECCLESIASTICAL CALENDAR. IN MANY WAYS, CHRISTMAS HAS BECOME A SEASON OF HYPED-UP ENTHUSIASM, BOTH WITHIN THE CHURCH AND WITHIN CULTURE. THIS SEASON OF CELEBRATION SEEMS TO BEGIN EARLIER AND EARLIER, AND WITH EACH PASSING YEAR THE FOCUS BECOMES MORE ON THE CELEBRATION OF FAMILY AND THE PRACTICE OF ACQUIRING THAN ABOUT THE BEGINNING OF THE REDEMPTIVE MOVEMENT OF GOD MADE POSSIBLE BY HIS COMING TO US AS IMMANUEL. CHRISTIANS WHO SENSE THIS EVER-GROWING DETACHMENT FROM THE ORIGINAL MOORINGS OF CHRISTMAS ATTEMPT TO RETURN THE CHRISTMAS SEASON TO ITS RIGHTFUL FOCUS, BUT MANY OF THESE ATTEMPTS HAVE BECOME MORE ABOUT TITLES—MERRY CHRISTMAS VERSUS HAPPY HOLIDAYS—THAN ABOUT A FOCUS ON THE REDEMPTIVE MOVEMENT OF GOD. THE FOCUS ON FAMILY AND THE CELEBRATION OF ACQUIRING REMAIN THE SAME REGARDLESS OF THE NAME BY WHICH THEY GO.

IN THIS WORLD AND SEASON OF NOISE, WE HAVE ADVENT. ADVENT REMINDS US OF WHERE GOD IS GOING. ADVENT REMINDS US THAT OUR WORLD IS OFF-CENTER AND GOD IS MOVING TO RIGHT THIS OFF-CENTEREDNESS, AND HIS MOVEMENT IS COMING TO A CLIMATIC CONCLUSION. ADVENT CALLS US TO REORIENT OUR LIVES SO THEY ARE IN KEEPING

WITH WHAT GOD IS DOING AND WILL ONE DAY FINISH DOING. IT IS BY THIS REORIENTATION THAT WE ARE THEN ABLE TO RIGHTLY CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS. WE CAN RIGHTLY RESPOND TO THE BEGINNING OF GOD’S MOVEMENT BECAUSE WE KNOW AND HAVE RESPONDED TO ITS END. BECAUSE IN ADVENT WE ACKNOWLEDGE THAT GOD IS MOVING TO RIGHT THIS WORLD AND WILL ONE DAY FINISH, CHRISTMAS CAN BE CELEBRATED AS THE BEGINNING OF THIS MOVEMENT. IN THIS LIGHT, CHRISTMAS CANNOT BE ABOUT CELEBRATING THE PRACTICE OF ACQUIRING. IT CANNOT BE THE CELEBRATION OF ANYTHING THIS WORLD VALUES, BUT IS ITSELF A CELEBRATION OF WHAT GOD VALUES AND IS MOVING TO RESTORE. TOGETHER CHRISTMAS AND ADVENT CAN BE A JOYOUS SEASON BECAUSE AS BOOKENDS OF THE REDEMPTIVE MOVEMENT OF GOD, THEY REMIND US THAT WE ARE NOW EXPERIENCING GOD’S REDEMPTIVE MOVEMENT AND CAN EXPERIENCE THE BLESSING OF JOINING GOD AS HE SEEKS TO ACCOMPLISH HIS KINGDOM PURPOSES.

THE TEXT

ISAIAH 9.1-7: *THE END OF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT*

THE HYMN OF CELEBRATION WHICH MAKES UP THE BULK OF ISAIAH 9.1-7, IS PART OF THE CONCLUSION OF A LARGER PROPHECY BY ISAIAH WHICH BEGINS IN ISAIAH 7. THIS PROPHECY FOCUSES ON THE RESISTANCE OF ISRAEL TO THE WAYS OF GOD AND THE COMING DESTRUCTION BROUGHT ABOUT BY ASSYRIA AS THEY EXPERIENCE OF GOD’S WRATH. IN THIS PROPHECY, ISAIAH REFLECTS ON THE SYRO-EPHRAMITE WAR (734-733 B.C.), DURING WHICH THE NORTHERN PARTS OF ISRAEL (SAMARIA) WERE CONQUERED BY ASSYRIA. THE ASSYRIAN ARMIES DEPOPULATED THIS AREA AND REPOPULATED IT WITH PEOPLES FROM OTHER CONQUERED REGIONS LEADING TO THIS AREA BEING REFERRED TO AS GALILEE OF THE NATIONS (ISAIAH 9.1). IT WOULD NEVER BE FULLY JEWISH AGAIN BUT ONLY PARTLY JEWISH. THEREFORE, THIS AREA WAS LOOKED DOWN UPON, PARTICULARLY BY THOSE WHO RETURNED TO JERUSALEM FROM THE BABYLONIAN EXILE, AS BEING LESS IMPORTANT AND FAVORED BY GOD.

THIS PARTICULAR HYMN OF CELEBRATION IS PRECEDED BY A REFLECTION OF THE DEFEAT AND DESTRUCTION BROUGHT ABOUT BY THE ASSYRIAN CONQUEST (ISAIAH 8.1-18) AND THE EFFORTS OF PEOPLE TO FREE THEMSELVES FROM THIS EXPERIENCE (ISAIAH 8.19-22). IT WAS A RESISTANCE TO GOD WHICH BROUGHT ABOUT THE DEVASTATING ATTACK OF ASSYRIA AND YET, PEOPLE REMAINED RESISTANT TO GOD’S WAYS, EVEN IN THEIR DEMISE. THEY CONTINUED TO RELY UPON THEMSELVES TO FIND A WAY FORWARD, EVEN TURNING TO NECROMANCY. HOWEVER, THE TRAJECTORY OF THIS SELF-RELIANCE ONLY TRENDED DOWNWARD TO GREATER DISTRESS AND CHAOS (DARKNESS). THIS WAS THE

CASE NOT JUST FOR THE INDIVIDUAL BUT FOR THE NATION OF ISRAEL AS A WHOLE.

HOWEVER, THE TRAJECTORY TURNS UPWARD, NOT THROUGH THE ACTIONS OF MAN BUT THROUGH THE ACTIONS OF GOD. CONSIDERING THE DOWNWARD TRAJECTORY TOWARD DESTRUCTION BROUGHT ABOUT BY THE REFUSAL OF PEOPLE TO TURN TO GOD EVEN IN THEIR DISTRESS, GOD MOVED. HE MOVED TO REVERSE THE CHAOS (GLOOM) AND BRING ORDER AND RESTORATION (LIGHT) TO THOSE WHO HAD EXPERIENCED THE DEVASTATION OF THE ASSYRIAN ARMIES. IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT ISAIAH SPEAKS IN THE PERFECT TENSE; THAT IS, HE SPEAKS AS IF GOD HAS ALREADY ACCOMPLISHED THAT TO WHICH ISAIAH IS REFERRING. HOWEVER, THIS IS NOT THE CASE. ISAIAH IS LOOKING TO THE FUTURE BUT DOES SO SPEAKING AS IF THE FUTURE HAS ALREADY BEEN ACCOMPLISHED. THIS IS A TYPICAL LITERARY DEVICE FOUND WITHIN THE HEBREW PROPHETS, A DEVICE WHICH REMINDS THE READER THAT WHAT THEY ARE HEARING HAS ALREADY BEEN DECIDED BY GOD AND THAT IT WILL CERTAINLY COME TO PASS.

BECAUSE OF THE GOOD NEWS THAT GOD HAS DECIDED TO RESTORE THE LIVES AND LAND OF RECALCITRANT ISRAEL, ISAIAH BREAKS INTO A HYMN OF CELEBRATION AS IT IS ONLY FITTING TO CELEBRATE THIS GRACIOUS AND MERCIFUL ACTION OF GOD. AS POETRY, THIS HYMN MAKES USE OF THE POETIC DEVICE OF PARALLELISM WHICH IS THE PRACTICE OF REPEATING A SPECIFIC IDEA OR THEME FOR THE PURPOSE OF INTENSIFYING THE POINT AND INVITING THE READER TO EXPERIENCE THE REALITY OF THE POINT BEING MADE.

THE HYMN BEGINS BY NOTING THAT PEOPLE WHO HAVE ONLY EXPERIENCED LIVES FILLED WITH DARKNESS (CHAOS) ARE NOW BLINKING IN THE WONDERFUL LIGHT (ORDER) OF GOD. THEIR WORLD HAS DRASTICALLY CHANGED FOR THE BETTER. THIS GIVES RISE TO CELEBRATION NOT UNLIKE THE CELEBRATION OF ABUNDANCE OR VICTORY BECAUSE THE CHANGING OF THEIR WORLD IS NOTHING OTHER THAN THE RELEASE FROM THE BONDAGE OF A VIOLENT OPPRESSOR. THE BITTER BOOT OF ASSYRIA IS NO LONGER ON ISRAEL'S NECK. RATHER, A NEW GOVERNMENT HAS TAKEN ASSYRIA'S PLACE WITH THE BIRTH OF A CHILD. THIS CHILD WILL OVERTHROW NOT JUST THE ASSYRIAN RULE, BUT ALL OTHER RULERS, TO TAKE UPON HIMSELF THE GOVERNING OF THE ENTIRE WORLD.

ISAIAH DESCRIBES THIS CHILD WITH FOUR THRONE TITLES WHICH DEFY COMMON EXPERIENCE. UNLIKE OTHER RULERS, THIS CHILD WILL HAVE WISDOM WHICH IS NOT OF THIS WORLD (WONDERFUL). HE WILL HAVE THE STRENGTH OF GOD. HE WILL RELATE TO PEOPLE AS A CONSTANT FATHER, AND HE WILL NOT DO SO WITH VIOLENCE. HE SEEKS TO INSTILL PEACE

(WHOLENESS). HIS KINGDOM WILL BE THE GREATEST OF ALL KINGDOMS AND WILL GROW AND OVERTAKE ALL OTHER KINGDOMS ESTABLISHING A REIGN OF ABSOLUTE JUSTICE AND UPRIGHTNESS FOR ISRAEL AND THE WHOLE WORLD. THIS IS WHAT GOD HAS DECIDED TO DO, AND IT IS GOOD AND CELEBRATION-WORTHY.

STANDING ON ITS OWN, THIS PROPHECY SPEAKS OF A WONDERFUL MOVEMENT OF GOD TO RIGHT THE LIVES AND EXPERIENCE OF PEOPLE, A MOVEMENT WHICH RISES FROM THE COMPASSIONATE HEART OF GOD. HOWEVER, ISAIAH IS SPEAKING ABOUT MORE THAN A RESTORED ISRAEL. HE IS SPEAKING OF A RESTORED HUMANITY, A HUMANITY RESTORED BY A CHILD WHO IS GOD WITH US (IMMANUEL). WE CANNOT LOSE SIGHT THAT THIS PROPHECY IS DOMINATED BY THE PROMISE OF GOD WITH US (ISAIAH 7.14). GOD HAS CHOSEN TO COME TO ISRAEL EVEN THOUGH ISRAEL HAS CHOSEN NOT TO COME TO HIM. BUT HUMANITY IS ISRAEL, AND GOD'S COMING IS A COMING TO ALL. HIS COMING IS MEANT TO RESTORE THE LIVES OF THOSE WHOM HE VISITS AND THE CREATION WHICH HE ENTERS. HIS COMING IS NOT UNLIKE A REVOLUTION WHICH OVERTHROWS ALL SYSTEMS AND FORMS OF POWER SO THAT HE MIGHT HAVE FULL REIGN OVER THE ENTIRETY OF CREATION TO ACCOMPLISH HIS PURPOSES. EARLY CHRISTIANS SAW THIS PROPHECY AS POINTING TO CHRIST, GOD WITH US WHO HAD COME TO RIGHT HUMANITY AND THE WORLD.

IN ADVENT, WE ARE REMINDED OF WHERE THIS BEGINNING WILL END, THE CULMINATION OF GOD ASSUMING ALL POWER OVER A KINGDOM OF COMPLETE JUSTICE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS. IN THE PROPHECY OF ISAIAH, WE ARE REMINDED WHERE IT BEGINS, WITH JESUS. IN ADVENT, WE ARE REMINDED THAT GOD IS NOT YET FINISHED AND WE ARE TO CRY OUT FOR GOD TO FINISH HIS WORK (ISAIAH 64.1-9). IN ISAIAH, WE ARE REMINDED THAT WE ARE ALREADY EXPERIENCING THIS WORK BECAUSE GOD HAS ALREADY BEGUN HIS WORK IN CHRIST.

REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

CHRISTMAS. I MUST SAY, CHRISTMAS IS ONE OF MY LEAST FAVORITE TIMES OF THE YEAR. CAN I SAY THAT? WELL, I JUST DID. I THINK IT IS ONE OF MY LEAST FAVORITE TIMES BECAUSE OF WHAT IT DOES TO ME. CHRISTMAS LEAVES ME FEELING DRAINED AND WIPED OUT. SOMETHING ABOUT THAT IS JUST WRONG. DEEP DOWN WE KNOW CHRISTMAS IS A TIME OF CELEBRATION AND JOY, BUT IF THAT IS THE CASE, WHY IS IT THAT THE APPROACHING SEASON LEAVES ME LOOKING FOR A PLACE TO HIDE? I AM NOT THE ONLY ONE WHO FEELS SOMETHING HAS GONE WRONG WITH CHRISTMAS. MANY BELIEVERS RECOGNIZE THIS AND ARE PRESENTLY TRYING TO "FIX" CHRISTMAS BY ENGAGING IN A WAR WITH CULTURE TO PUT "CHRIST" BACK IN CHRISTMAS. THEY GET RUFFLED WHEN PEOPLE SAY, "HAPPY HOLIDAYS" AND NOT

"MERRY CHRISTMAS" AND WHEN TOWNS TAKE DOWN NATIVITY SCENES. I GET THEIR POINT. CHRISTMAS DOES INVOLVE JESUS, BUT CHRISTMAS IS A CHRISTIAN CELEBRATION NOT A CULTURAL CELEBRATION. IF CULTURE WISHES TO CELEBRATE WHEN WE DO, I AM FINE WITH THAT. IF THEY WANT TO CELEBRATE THE BONDS OF FAMILY AND FRIENDSHIP WITH THE GIVING OF GIFTS AND GATHERING IN HOMES, I AM ALL FOR THAT. I DON'T SEE HOW FORCING THEM TO SAY "MERRY CHRISTMAS" IS GOING TO FIX OUR PROBLEM AND IT IS OUR PROBLEM BECAUSE IT IS OUR CELEBRATION.

SO, WHAT HAS GONE WRONG WITH CHRISTMAS? I THINK WHAT HAS GONE WRONG IS WE HAVE FORGOTTEN WHAT CHRISTMAS IS ALL ABOUT. WE ARE SO INFLUENCED—UNWITTINGLY SO!—BY OUR CULTURAL CELEBRATION OF FAMILY AND BY OUR WAR TO HAVE THE NAME "CHRISTMAS" LEGITIMIZED WE HAVE LOST SIGHT OF THE REAL POINT. THE REAL POINT OF CHRISTMAS IS NOT THAT IT IS JESUS' BIRTHDAY. THE REAL POINT OF CHRISTMAS IS THAT WE HAVE THE BEGINNING OF THE GOSPEL, THE COMING REIGN OF GOD'S KINGDOM (MARK 1.14-15). CHRISTMAS IS ABOUT GOD TAKING THE FIRST STEPS TO PUT THIS WORLD AND OUR LIVES IN ORDER, AND WHAT GREAT STEPS THEY WERE. BUT I LOSE SIGHT OF THIS IN ALL THE NOISE AND IN THE BRIGHTNESS OF THE FLASHING LIGHTS OF THE SEASON. I LOSE SIGHT THAT GOD MOVED TO REESTABLISH HIS REIGN, THAT CHRISTMAS BEGAN THE GREATEST REVOLUTION THIS WORLD HAS EVER SEEN. I FORGET THAT CHRISTMAS IS NOTHING OTHER THAN THE FIRST GRACE NOTES OF THE GOSPEL. THIS IS WHERE ADVENT BECOMES A GIFT TO ME.

FOR SOMEONE WHO GREW UP BAPTIST, ADVENT WAS ALWAYS ONE OF THOSE THINGS I HEARD ABOUT BUT DIDN'T UNDERSTAND. ADVENT IS A SEASON OF SLOWING AND REMEMBERING WHERE IT IS ALL GOING, THE CLIMATIC DAY OF JESUS' RETURN WHEN GOD FINISHES HIS WORLD-WIDE REVOLUTION. IT IS THE DAY WHEN GOD SAYS, "IT IS ALL MINE AGAIN!" ADVENT INVITES ME TO TURN ASIDE FROM THE NOISE AND THE LIGHTS TO REMEMBER AND REALIGN MY HEART AND LIFE, TO GO WITH GOD. IN SO DOING, I FIND CHRISTMAS. I LIKE TO SAY, I FIX CHRISTMAS. REALLY, ADVENT FIXES CHRISTMAS. WHEN I REMEMBER AND REALIGN WITH WHERE GOD IS GOING, I AM PREPARED TO SEE AND RESPOND TO HOW IT BEGAN. I CAN SEE WITH FRESH EYES THE MARVELOUS ACTION OF GOD TO COME AND BEGIN HIS WORK TO RIGHT THIS WORLD. I CAN SEE AND I CAN REJOICE. NOT ONLY CAN I REJOICE, BUT NOW I HAVE A MESSAGE ABOUT CHRISTMAS MY CULTURE NEEDS AND DESIRES, A MESSAGE OF HOPE THAT IT IS THE END OF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT, AND THAT FEELS JUST FINE.

REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

FOR SOME PEOPLE CHRISTMAS IS THE MOST WONDERFUL TIME OF THE YEAR. FOR OTHER PEOPLE, CHRISTMAS IS THE DARKEST OF SEASONS, BETTER LEFT UNMENTIONED AND UNCELEBRATED. FOR EVERYONE, CHRISTMAS IS A BIG BALL OF STRESS. IF THE TRAFFIC AND CROWDS AT THE MALL DON'T KILL YOU, THE CREDIT CARD BILLS, VISITS FROM ESTRANGED FAMILY MEMBERS, AND ENDLESS VARIATIONS OF "SANTA BABY" SURELY WILL. CHRISTMAS ISN'T SUPPOSED TO BE LIKE THIS, AND WE KNOW IT. WE ARE JUST NOT SURE WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT. SOME PEOPLE THINK THE ANSWER LIES IN GETTING OUR CULTURE TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT CHRISTMAS IS ABOUT JESUS, BUT I AM NOT SURE THIS IS GOING TO FIX ANYTHING. WHEN WE STEP BACK, CHRISTMAS IS ABOUT THE GOSPEL. CHRISTMAS IS THE GOSPEL, THE FIRST GRACE NOTES OF A MIGHTY MOVEMENT OF GOD TO BRING ABOUT THE FULLNESS OF HIS KINGDOM ON EARTH. IT IS HARD TO READ THE PROPHECIES OF ISAIAH AND THE OTHER PROPHETS WHICH FORETELL OF CHRIST'S BIRTH ANY OTHER WAY. THAT GOD WOULD COME TO ESTABLISH HIS REIGN IS NOT ABOUT PEOPLE SAYING "MERRY CHRISTMAS," BUT RATHER ABOUT A REVOLUTIONARY ACT TO RIGHT HUMANITY AND OUR WORLD. IT IS THE END OF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT, AND THIS IS GOOD NEWS BECAUSE THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT IS ANYTHING BUT FINE. GOOD NEWS GIVES US HOPE AND FILLS US WITH JOY, BUT IT IS HARD FOR US TO HEAR THIS GOOD NEWS IN THE CACOPHONY OF NOISE THAT HAS BECOME CHRISTMAS. THIS IS WHY ADVENT IS A GIFT. IN ADVENT, WE TUNE OUT THE NOISE AND REMEMBER WHERE IT IS ALL GOING. GOD IS GOING TO FINISH AT SOME POINT AND HE WILL HAVE EVERYTHING. WHEN WE REMEMBER WHERE IT IS GOING AND ALIGN OUR LIVES WITH GOD'S OWN WE CAN SEE HOW IT ALL BEGAN WITH FRESH EYES. WE CAN HEAR THE GOOD NEWS OF CHRISTMAS AND FEEL THE JOY AND HOPE IT BRINGS BECAUSE CHRISTMAS IS THE END OF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT.



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