

Sunday 19th December 2021
Isaiah 9:6-7
Rev.Scott Burton
Brightons Parish Church

Well, well done to our young people, boys and girls, to the helpers. That really helped pull that together. It's difficult especially amidst all the circumstances that we feel to pull that off. So, well done! Why don't we give them another round of applause.

Boys and girls, thank-you for helping us remember and live the Christmas story again to remember this wonderful present that God gave to the world at Christmas. And, today I've brought along my own present to help us think about this Christmas story a little bit. While I get it out, yeah. Well I'll get it out. You don't seem very excited about this Christmas present, but having all this effort to wrap it up, a bow and everything, while I get the present out right.

Right, I think I probably need two volunteers. Just two volunteers. Readers, two of our narrators, you can come up and give me a wee hand. Right, go for it quick make a choice.

Right, there you go. Let's take this apart. So, start with the ribbon. Let's go for it, don't be too shy. I'm sure you're not like this on Christmas day are you. Pull an end each there you go, right nice knot you know, I'm a Scout and all that, so it's always a bit tricky right you don't need to. Come on don't be shy about it. There we go. Hey, that's a bit better. Right, fire away. I'm sure you know how to do this. I'm not expecting to recycle it it's recycled paper, so it's all good for the plane, Right, let's open up, let's see, we'll go in here, come on, get it out. What have we got? What have we got? A pine cone! Anything else in there? Tissue paper, pine cone and tissue paper. That's it? Oh well, thanks for your help. You can have your seat again. Not very exciting. No, there is something I need in here, which was too small, probably, to see. There was also a seed.

What would you think if you got this for Christmas? Would you be excited? Would you not be excited? Like, a nice muddy pine cone and a little seed. You'll not be excited about that.

Now, what does a seed grow into do you think? What do you think this seed grows into? What do you think? A tree, that's right. This particular one would be an apple tree because I got an apple yesterday. So, if it grew it might grow into an apple tree. Now it would be amazing if this was a sequoia seed because sequoias are some of the biggest trees in the world, and Neil's going to put up a wee picture here just now. There is an adult standing next to a sequoia tree and just to try and help you get your heads around one of the biggest trees I need another two volunteers. So, can I have another two volunteers, Matilda near the end, and Fiona right, so Fiona can you come stand here. Come on, run over here. You need to be quick.

There is a tree called General Sherman and he's that wide that's how wide General Sherman is. He's 36 and a half feet wide, he is 300 feet high, which is probably about six times the height of this ceiling. That is how big General Sherman is and he grew from a seed probably about the same size as that, to that size of tree. Thank-you to our two volunteers, you can have a seat now. Thank-you, thank-you, well done, thank-you.

That is how big General Sherman is from a little seed like that. It might look really small but it contained so much promise, so much potential,

But God gave us an even more amazing Christmas present. What was God's amazing Christmas present to us? Samuel, exactly Jesus. Jesus, as we were reading in Isaiah, as Isla read that story, that's one of the many prophecies that was told about Jesus, that He came to fulfill and He came to fulfill them because He was a very special person. He was God in human form and so, He had some very special titles.

Well, we'll see if the adults have learned their lines from the last three weeks. Do you think they can remember the three special titles about Jesus? Do you think they can get it in the right order? Well, we'll see. So, title number one? Wonderful Counselor - there we go, you got a prompt there. See if we can do it together, second one? - Mighty God there we go. Third one? Everlasting Father. And this week's one is the Prince of Peace. Can we say that together - Prince of Peace - that's right. But, what is peace? What is peace, boys and girls? Any of our young people? What is peace? What does that mean? It's a strange word isn't it. What is peace?

Yes, you're getting peace but what do you mean by getting peace, What does that – Alexander? Nobody's fighting, definitely. And when there's peace no one's fighting.

Does it mean anything else? What does peace mean? All alone, it's nice and quiet. Look at me nice and peaceful. Anything else that it means? You want to add something? No.

We might feel quiet or peaceful, calm on the inside and it might mean we're also getting on with people but those are all just little bits of what peace means. Because in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, the word for peace is the Hebrew 'Shalom'. Can we say that together boys and girls? Shalom. It's a much richer, fuller word and, I think we find it hard to get our heads around Shalom because it just affects so much of life. It's not only not fighting and it's not only having quiet around us, and inside us. It is being free of all fear, all worry, no gloom, of everything being right both mentally physically, emotionally, spiritually, that everything in society is good and perfect, and functions as it should. It is everything like it was before sin entered the world. So perfect is the Shalom that God speaks about in the Old Testament and Jesus came as a baby at Christmas to bring us into that peace, to bring us into Shalom and many people, sadly, think that Jesus is unimportant, that He's, because He's a babe, it's just He's so insignificant but actually, just like this seed, the promise that Jesus comes to fulfill has so much potential, it is beyond what we can get our heads around and He does that, He fulfills that, because He is the Prince of Peace.

But, you know, it takes a long time for this little seed or something like it to grow into the big General Sherman. How many years do you think it took for General Sherman to get that big? Anybody want to go for a hundred years? Anybody going for 100 years? Yeah, 100 years. Anybody want to go for more than 100 years? How many years are we going to go for? Shout out. What do you what Simon? 300. Anybody want to go higher than

300, I get more than 300? John? A thousand. Anybody going for more than a thousand? How many years? Maybe not as much as a trillion admittedly, not as much as a trillion. Anybody want to go for less than a trillion but more than a thousand? Anybody? Girls, two thousand years. Anybody want to go for more than two thousand years? Hope? Oh, a thousand as well. Anybody want to go for something different? Last one Alexander. Two thousand, three thousand years is how long we estimate General Sherman has been growing, three thousand years. And just like it takes a little seed a long time to grow into a great big tree and fulfill its potential and promise, the same is true with Jesus.

You know, some of us especially this Christmas again, when Christmas has been affected so negatively and limited because of Omicron, we might be thinking 'Jesus, why are you taking so long, 2000 years? Come on. Why are you taking so long? Why is it taking so long to bring us into Your peace? And well, Jesus does have His reasons. He does have His reasons. But our passage reminds us that He is the Prince of Peace. He is the Prince of Peace. It means He has the government; He has the ability; He has the means to bring us into that peace. He has all power and wisdom and love. He will fulfill that promise one day. He will return to bring us fully into that peace. And so, with all the changes we are experiencing this Christmas once again, with the fear and the worry we might be experiencing this Christmas, the call, the invitation this Advent, is to put our hope in Jesus the Prince of Peace, true peace, Shalom and one day He will bring us into that. Don't put your hope in institutions, the church or the NHS or government. Don't put it in an ideology. Don't put it anywhere else. Put your hope, your ultimate hope in that babe that came at Christmas, who grew to be a man and died upon a cross, to secure that peace. He paid a king's ransom, His own life, to secure that promise and make sure that it will come about one day.

Friends, can we be a people of hope this Christmas? Who hope in Jesus the Prince of Peace and make that known? Embody that to neighbor, friend, family this year? I pray that we might be such a people because He is that Prince.

Boys and girls, before we finish our service, let's pray together one more time. Let's pray.

Father God, thank-you for Christmas and for the gift of Your Son who came as a baby. He is the Prince of Peace and through Him we have hope of a better day. Help us to trust in Jesus, to have hope because of Him, even in the waiting, and may we share that hope with all we meet this Advent season. We ask it in Jesus name. Amen, amen.

We're going to conclude with our final song.