

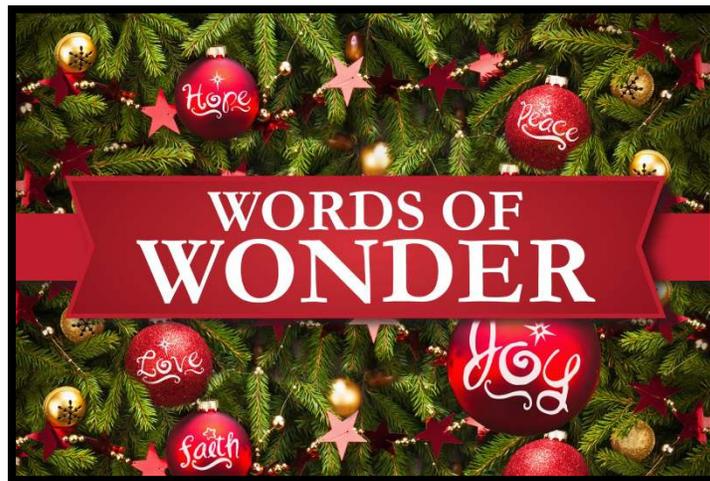
Words of Wonder

Christmas 2015

Written By

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Various well-worn words help us understand the spiritual message and meaning of the Christmas story. You know them because they appear all over the place this time of year. Words like peace, hope, and love are emblazoned on everything from special colorful plates you showcase on your kitchen counter to shiny ornaments you hang on your green, brightly lit tree. We see them, we might even read them, but do we pause to consider the rich, ancient theology behind them? Familiarity ... and late night shopping ... does naturally cause us to give these ever present words a quick glance; however, we'd do well to slow down for just a moment and wrap our hearts and minds around these pivotal concepts because in so doing we will not only lift our spirits, we will prepare ourselves to really enjoy Christmas of 2015.

Where do we start? I'd say we dive right into the nice noun called **Joy**. It appears on the lips of the angel who appeared to the shepherds tending sheep near Bethlehem when Jesus was born.

⁸ In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; ¹¹ for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ

the Lord.¹² “This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”¹³ And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.”

Could you imagine being there with these men?

As I've said before, these were no ordinary shepherds. Far from it. In this region, shepherds raised sheep for sacrifice at the Temple in Jerusalem. Typically, they guarded, both on the ground and in a narrow stone tower called a *Migdal Eder*, flocks destined for sacrifice in the Temple.¹ All year long, in the heat of the summer or in the rainy, cold of February they made sure the sheep remained safe and secure for the moment they would become the sacrifices for the sins of the people. The angel's appearance to these men, then, couldn't have been more theologically important for he allowed them to see his heavenly dimension to point them to the sacrificial Lamb of all lambs, Jesus (John 1:29, 36; Revelation 5:6; 7:17; 22:1, 3).

In a moment, a quiet, starry, probably somewhat boring and mundane evening became the exciting epicenter of the intersection between God's abode and man's, between brilliant light and complete darkness.² As the light engulfed them like a well-trained spotlight, they were naturally frozen by fear. Wouldn't you have been? Instantly, however, the angel comforted and directed them to the message of all messages.

... for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people;¹¹ for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

That transitional conjunction, *for* (γα . ρ), gave the reason why they shouldn't fear: He came to give them the best news in the world, news full and overflowing with great joy, news regarding the *final* appearance of the long-awaited Messiah. Really, what could top this revelation? Nothing. What angelic insight could make you more excited as Roman troops occupied your homeland and ruled you with an iron, ruthless, fierce fist?

Just how did the angel describe this joyous news to the shepherds? Since man's fall in the Garden, he'd been anxiously and patiently waiting for thousands of years for this precise moment to introduce the prophesied One (Genesis 3:15) with three titles which appear only here together in the entire Bible: *Savior*, *Christ*, and *Lord*. The first word, *Savior*, is applicable to the God of the Old Testament who knew how to powerfully deliver His people from bondage and trouble (Exodus 15:2; Psalm 18:47; Isaiah 43:11; 43:3; 45:15; 49:26; 62:11). We can't miss in this title the deity of Jesus who also would become our Savior (Philippians 3:20; 2 Peter 1:1, 11). The title, *Christ*, clearly identified Jesus as the Messiah, the Anointed One, of the prophets, the

¹ Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, book 2, From the Manger in Bethlehem to the Baptism in Jordan, (Grand Rapids: Erdman's Publishing, 1981), 186-187.

² Bock, Darrell L. *Luke: 1:1–9:50*, vol. 1, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1994), 214. With the messenger came the bright presence of the Lord's glory surrounding the shepherds. Δόξα (*doxa*) refers to the קְבוֹד (*kābōd*) of God, the bright Shekinah glory, God's majestic presence (Exod. 16:10; Ps. 63:2 [63:3 MT]; Isa. 40:5; Ezek. 1; Kittel, *TDNT* 2:247; also Luke 2:14). Such glory will appear again at key points in Luke–Acts in association with Jesus (Luke 9:30–31; Acts 7:55). Such a bright light in the midst of the evening would have been an impressive sight; Luke intends the reader to visualize the contrast.

one who would come and erect his kingdom of peace (Psalm 2:2; Isaiah 7:14; 9:6; 11:2; Jeremiah 23:5; 30:9; Ezekiel 34:23; Micah 5:2;). Clearly, Matthew develops this concept in his first chapter by tying Jesus' genealogy to David. His name as *Lord* (*Kurios*, *ku, r i o j*) naturally equates Him with his name of Jehovah from the Old Testament (*Kurios* = Jehovah, Genesis 2:4, 8, 15, 16, 18, 22). This clear Trinitarian emphasis, coupled with the divine import of these amazing, lofty names couldn't help but leave the shepherds with the mind-numbing thought that God had, indeed, come to earth as Isaiah and Micah prophesied (Isaiah 7:14; Micah 5:2). Talk about joyous news!

And to think the shepherds received this flash of divine insight on what was to them just another dull, seemingly unimportant evening of tending sheep. Perhaps you can gain some much needed insight from this during our Christmas season. As you go through the mundane motions of your life, expect God to grab your attention, to disclose Himself to you in a powerful, moving, memorable fashion, resulting in you seeing and remembering just who Jesus was and is and why His birth is the essence of all joy. Perhaps this will be the Christmas you will come to terms with Jesus as your Savior, your Christ, and your Lord. What a joyous moment that would be!

Joy is a motif tied not just to this one revelatory event in the life of Jesus. No. From a biblical perspective, there was much to be excited and happy about with this unique birth. Two passages from Isaiah, which Jesus later applied directly to Himself, are bathed with words of messianic joy. No doubt, the shepherds would have known of these hopeful texts. Combined these texts give us the answers to the all-important Christmas question:

Why Should We Be Have Joy About Christ's Birth?

Two reasons readily surface from Isaiah's inspired pen.

Joy Because Of The Coronation (Isaiah 9:1-8)

To begin with I direct you to the immediate context.

At a time of national gloom, when Assyria, under the ruthless and bloodthirsty leadership of Tiglath-Pileser III was ready to invade Israel from the northern tribal regions (viz., Zebulun and Naphtali), when God would punish His people for willfully departing from His laws (Isaiah 8:5-10), and for consulting mediums and wizards instead of Him (Isaiah 8:19), He gave them eschatological hope ... not just of a return to the land one day, but the coming of the Messianic king of all kings. We see this joyous, comforting truth articulated in a three-fold fashion.

One, God gave them *illumination* in Isaiah 9, 1 through 3.

¹ But there will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make it glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. ² The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them.

In the future, the very tribes who took the brunt of the invader would be elevated in God's kingdom. Their elevation would commence with the coming of a great divine, spiritual light. Jesus rightfully applied these words directly to Himself as He purposefully conducted His ministry in this very region:

¹² Now when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee; ¹³ and leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. ¹⁴ This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: ¹⁵ “THE LAND OF ZEBULUN AND THE LAND OF NAPHTALI, BY THE WAY OF THE SEA, BEYOND THE JORDAN, GALILEE OF THE GENTILES— ¹⁶ “THE PEOPLE WHO WERE SITTING IN DARKNESS SAW A GREAT LIGHT, AND THOSE WHO WERE SITTING IN THE LAND AND SHADOW OF DEATH, UPON THEM A LIGHT DAWNED.” ¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to preach and say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 4).

Obviously, Jesus started His ministry in the very region prophesied. In the tribal area known for deep, dark sin followed by the judgment of God, God would come and bring spiritual illumination to their lives, and, indeed He did. His teaching was unlike any teaching they had ever experienced (Matthew 7:29; 13:54), and His miracles validated that He was none other than God in the flesh. Who else could give a paralyzed man legs (Matthew 9:1-8)? Who else could give a blind man new eyes (Matthew 9:27-31)? Both of these things, His teaching and His miracles opened the spiritually blind eyes of countless people from this region known for spiritual blindness and darkness. What could be more joyous than learning to see spiritually for the first time?

Makes me want to stop and ask you a personal question: Have you, by faith, permitted Jesus to bring spiritual light to your spiritually dark soul? The moment you walk toward Him in faith is the moment you embrace and are filled with joy unspeakable.

Two, God spoke of *degradation* in Isaiah 9, verses 3 through 5.

³ You shall multiply the nation, you shall increase their gladness; they will be glad in Your presence as with the gladness of harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. ⁴ For You shall break the yoke of their burden and the staff on their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, as at the battle of Midian. ⁵ For every boot of the booted warrior in the battle tumult, and cloak rolled in blood, will be for burning, fuel for the fire.

True, some of this occurred when God delivered Judah from the Assyrians (Isaiah 37); however, in light of the messianic nature of the ensuing verses it is quite clear God promised a future day when Israel's enemies would be vanquished. It would be a time when they would celebrate as people do when a war is won, or when an adversary's oppressive yoke of slavery is broken ... finally, when an oppressor's rod used to inflict pain on slaves is shattered, when the adversary's military equipment is once and for all thrown into the fire, never to be used again (Joshua 11:6, 9; Isaiah 2:4; Ezekiel 39:9).

Christ's first coming brought the demise of the ultimate Adversary, Satan, coupled with sin and death (2 Corinthians 5:19; Ephesians 1:3, 7; Romans 6:14; 1 Peter 2:21, 24). Isaiah's words, as used by Christ, speak specifically of the time when Israel will know total peace because all of their foes will be vanquished by the Messiah. Hamas will be gone. Hezbollah will be gone. The angry Shiites in Iran will be gone. The greedy communists will be gone. Isis will be obliterated. And all implements of war from the ever-present AK-47 to the suicide vest will become implements of farming. How ironic. How amazing. For those of us who live under the threat of war this Christmas, who are called to be vigilant (whatever that means) because of the

terroristic plans of our anti-Semitic, anti-Christian, anti-American foes, we, like Israel, look forward to the day of degradation brought by the Babe from Bethlehem.

Three, God promised *coronation* in Isaiah 9, verses 6 through 7. Let's dig in by focusing on verse 6.

⁶ For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

The opening conjunctive, *for* (dl, y<â-yKi ... reading from left to right the first word, for (yK), followed by the noun, a child (dl, y), is most emphatic in the Hebrew text), tells us why godless, God-hating armies will be reduced to ash. It's all because a baby of all babies will be born. His very names speak of His unusual, divine nature:

- *Wonderful Counselor*: translated, His counsel, as a leader will be off the charts, amazing, perfect, airtight, completely sound, and distinguished. Interestingly enough, the Hebrew (`# [eAy al, P, û) employs the name, *pele*, intrinsically tied to God's wonderful, awe-inspiring, and miraculous actions in freeing Israel from Egyptian bondage (Psalm 78:12). Israel ... and the world for that matter ... awaits the Second Coming of this King. In a day and age filled with politicians and rulers who do anything but lead with wisdom, He will lead those He has illumined and saved in a new empire which is Davidic in nature, as prophesied (2 Samuel 7; Psalm 89).
- *Mighty God*: This means just what it says, *El Gibbor* (rABÊGI laeä), or 'warrior God.'³ He will be powerful, capable of fulfilling His will to govern effectively over the empire to end all empires, because He is none other than God. So much for those cults who believe Jesus is anything but God. Ostensibly, this prophecy leaves absolutely no room for ISIS being the final

³ S. R. Driver and Charles A Briggs, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew-Aramaic Lexicon*, ed. Francis Brown (Lafayette, Indiana: Associated Publishers and Authors, INC, 1981), 150. גָּבוֹר ¹⁵⁹ **adj. strong, mighty** (cf. Arabic جَبَّارٌ (*jabbārun*) *one who magnifies himself, behaves proudly, a tyrant, who is bold, audacious*)—Gn 10:9 + 58 times; גָּבַר Gn 10:8 + 2 times; גְּבוּרָם 1 S 17:51; pl. גְּבוּרִים Je 46:9 + 27 times; גְּבוּרִים Jos 10:2 + 21 times; cstr. גְּבוּרֵי 1 Ch 11:27 + 29 times; גְּבוּרֵי 1 Ch 9:26 + 4 times; sf. גְּבוּרִיָּה Ho 10:13 + (var. sfs. 11 times);— **1. adj.** גְּבוּרֵי בְּהֵמָה *mightiest among beasts* Pr 30:30; אִישׁ גְּבוּר 1 S 14:52; גְּבוּר בְּאֶרֶץ ψ 112:2; גְּבוּר צֵדִק *mighty in hunting* Gn 10:9 (J); מֶלֶךְ גְּבוּר Dn 11:3; אֵל גְּבוּר the Messiah Is 9:5; attribute of God especially as fighting for his people ψ 24:8⁰ Dt 10:17 Ne 9:32 Is 10:21 Je 32:18 (cf. Arabic الْجَبَّارُ (*l-jabbā'ru*)). **2. n.m.** *strong, valiant man* Jos 10:2 (E) Gn 6:4; 10:8 (J) Ju 5:13, 23 1 S 2:4 + 16 times 1 K 1:8, 10 2 K 24:16 1 Ch 1:10 + 11 times Ezr 7:28 Jb 16:14 ψ 19:6; 33:16; 45:4; 52:3; 78:65; 89:20; 120:4; 127:4 Pr 16:32; 21:22 Ct 3:7⁰; 4:4 Ec 9:11 Is 3:2; 13:3; 21:17; 42:13; 49:24; 25 Je 5:16 + 17 times Ez 32:12 + 5 times Ho 10:13 Jo 2:7; 4:9, 10, 11 Am 2:14, 16 Ob 9 Na 2:4 Zp 1:14; 3:17 Zc 9:13; 10:5, 7; cf. phrases חֵיל גְּבוּר *mighty man of valour* Ju 6:12; 11:1 1 S 9:1; 16:18 1 K 11:28 2 K 5:1 (חֵיל מְצָרֵעַ) so ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἡν λειπρός, cf. also Klo's dub. emend.), 1 Ch 12:28; 28:1 2 Ch 13:3; 17:16, 17; 25:6; 32:21; חֵיל גְּבוּר Ru 2:1; גְּבוּרֵי הַחֵיל Jos 1:14 (D) 6:2; 10:7 (JE) 2 K 15:20; 24:14; חֵיל אִישׁ גְּבוּרֵי הַחֵיל Jos 8:3; חֵיל גְּבוּרֵי 1 Ch 5:24 + 14 times Ne 11:14; חֵיל גְּבוּרֵי חֵילִים 1 Ch 7:5, 7, 11, 40; חֵיל גְּבוּרֵי חֵילִים 1 Ch 11:26; חֵיל גְּבוּרֵי חֵיל 103:20; חֵיל גְּבוּרֵי מִלְחָמָה 2 Ch 13:3; חֵיל גְּבוּרֵי חֵילִים 1 Ch 9:26; חֵיל גְּבוּרֵי חֵילִים Ne 3:16; חֵיל גְּבוּרֵי חֵילִים 2 S 10:7 1 Ch 19:8; חֵיל גְּבוּרֵי חֵילִים 1 Ch 11:10; חֵיל גְּבוּרֵי חֵילִים לְשׂוֹת 1 Ch 11:10; חֵיל גְּבוּרֵי חֵילִים לְשׂוֹת Is 5:22.

world power. Is that not joyous news? Indeed. The Messiah would be the quintessential soldier of all soldiers, capable of defeating any and all foes. Again, what could be more joyous than the reality of peace brought to earth one day by Jesus? The shepherds surely contemplated this thought in light of the Roman occupational forces.

- *Eternal Father*: This unusual name can be translated as an adjective (eternal) and a noun (father), which would make it somewhat theologically confusing as referencing Jesus. It can also be translated as a genitive phrase, viz., father of eternity, or, pragmatically, the God beyond time and space. Once more, this is an apt title of Jesus (John 8:58; 17:5). He wasn't just a great prophet, as some religions attest. Consider the Koranic teaching concerning Christ: *O People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion: nor say of Allah aught but the truth. Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) a Messenger of Allah, and His Word, which He bestowed on Mary, and a Spirit proceeding from Him: so believe in Allah and His Messengers. Say not "Trinity": desist: It will be better for you: for Allah is One God: Glory be to Him: (Far Exalted is He) above having a son. To Him belong all things in the heavens and on earth. And enough is Allah as a Disposer of affairs* (Qur'an 4:171). Comparing Christianity and Islam's interpretations regarding the person of the Messiah is not just splitting hairs. They are completely divergent, antithetical theological viewpoints on who God is and how sinful man can, and should, approach Him. I think I'll go with the Scriptures which teach the complete divinity of the Messiah as it is intrinsically linked with eternity, a concept directly related to God alone.
- *Prince of Peace*. His name in Hebrew is easy on the ears, Shar Shalom (~ א ל) v ' - r f ;). Because He possesses all the divine traits just listed He can, and will, bring true, lasting peace. His peace is primarily spiritual, restoring a sinner to God at the moment of faith.
 - "Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).
 - "... and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven" (Colossians 1).

The soul knows true joy when it finds this peace through a faith relationship with the Savior, Messiah, and Lord ... Jesus. Do you have that peace yet? He waits for you to place your faith in His redemptive work on Calvary. Secondly, the Messiah's peace speaks of the peace of His Davidic Empire. When He has completed His plan for mankind, when He has judged the world and the Devil, He will establish His government which will be known for total, perfect peace (Ezekiel 34 and 37 are a good case in point).

There will be ...

- no more terrorist attacks on innocent people in the name of religion
- no more IEDs
- nor more refugees fleeing war

- no more monies spent on developing bigger and better weapons to kill people
- no more security and spy services
- no more supposed lone wolves who attack the innocent
- no more TSA flight checks
- no more cameras needed to watch for trouble-makers
- no more police forces
- no more border guards
- no more drug lords
- no more drug cartels, yes, no more of anything and anyone who'd dare interrupt societal peace.

Who is the One who brings it to earth? Jesus. When will He bring it? When He appears at the end of time (Revelation 19). In His first coming He wore a crown of thorns to give us spiritual peace. In His second coming He will wear a diadem to usher in true, lasting utopian peace. Will you be there? Will you be with Him?

Isaiah, even at a time of great national calamity, exudes the joy of what God has in store for those who are part of His Empire:

⁷ There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.

God alone will bring perpetual and global peace. It will not be voted in, regardless of which country you are from. And it will not be established by any other religion, no matter how committed and passionate the people are. It will only come to earth through the divine Messiah who will establish it by means of His inexorable, unflinching, loving will.

All of this begs for another question: When this coronation day comes, when the Prince of Peace arrives for the last time, will you be with Him? The Shepherds will be there. I hope you'll be standing alongside them.

A second reason for joy for the Christmas season is showcased in another chapter Isaiah. Chapter 35 introduces us to this additional concept:

Joy Because Of The Transformation (Isaiah 35:1-10)

The angel spoke specifically about great joy because he, like the shepherds, knew from prophecies like Isaiah 35 what the birth of the Messiah means and what it promises those who worship Him. Once more, Jesus equated this great messianic chapter directly to Himself. It occurred when John the Baptist sent some of his disciples to clarify the person of Jesus while he languished in prison for his faith in God. We'll pick up the conversation in Luke 7, verse 20:

²⁰ When the men came to Him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to You, to ask, 'Are You the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?'" ²¹ At that very time He cured many people of diseases and afflictions and evil spirits; and He gave sight to many who were blind. ²² And He answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you have seen and heard: the BLIND

RECEIVE SIGHT, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM. ²³ “Blessed is he who does not take offense at Me.”

Jesus quoted directly from Isaiah 35 and applied it unabashedly to Himself.

⁵ Then the eyes of the blind will be opened and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. ⁶ Then the lame will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute will shout for joy. For waters will break forth in the wilderness and streams in the Arabah (Isaiah 35).

This chapter told saints, like John, how to identify the true Messiah. He would bring radical physical change to those plagued by disease. He would give eyesight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, new legs to the lame, and speech to the dumb (Isaiah 35:5-6). Jesus did those very things repeatedly (Blind healed, Matthew 12:22; John 9:1ff; deaf healed, Mark 7:32, 37; Lame enabled to walk, Matthew 15:30-31, 21:14; Dumb equipped to speak, Luke 1:64; Mark 7:33). These were undeniable proofs that Jesus was, in fact, the divine Messiah, for He fulfilled these divine tasks effortlessly and perpetually.

The point of these miracles shouldn't be missed either. They give us the argument from the lesser to the greater, and it goes like this: Since Jesus could heal the physical distortion's caused by sin, He could heal the inner distortions of sin like spiritual blindness, lameness, deafness and so forth (Luke 6:39; 2 Corinthians 3:14-15; Ephesians 4:18-19; 1 Timothy 4:2). Believe me, there is no greater joy than the moment He gives you new eyes to see and truly understand life, new ears to hear your Creator and learn life-giving truth from Him, new legs to go where He wants you to go not where you desire to go, and a new mouth which can speak things which honor Him and bring peace and encouragement to those around you. This is what a faith relationship does. It radically changes you from the inside out. What a gift this Christmas to yourself. What a gift from the Messiah, Jesus, to those who step out in faith to follow Him. He came, lived, died, and rose again to give you the prospects of this transformation. Will you seize it by faith in the facts of His person and work?

As you might expect, there is so much more to be gleaned from the 35th chapter of Isaiah's wonderful prophecy about the Messiah. Surrounding His ability to radically transform the deformed and diseased at His coming are a number of verses describing changes to this old earth as well. Of course, we await the realization of these words:

¹ The wilderness and the desert will be glad, and the Arabah will rejoice and blossom; like the crocus ² It will blossom profusely and rejoice with rejoicing and shout of joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They will see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God.

Here the prophet speaks of the desert domain of southern Israel going toward the Sinai and Egypt. Believe me, currently it is no garden spot. Look hard at the shots I took here in 2006 and see if you can spot a tree or



a flower. Just one. Go ahead. Give it a go. All you're going to find are rocks, sand and more rocks and sand ... to infinity. There is nothing out here but barren, tackle desert. However, it is in this foreboding location that the prophet, speaking for God, declares how the Messiah will bring profuse flora and fauna to this region. In fact, the cedar forests of Lebanon and the flower adorned hills of Carmel (which means "garden land") will be given to this wasteland in that day. No longer will they be a desert but a garden much like Eden. Can you imagine standing here when the Messiah returns and watching flowers just start popping up all over the hillsides, so think you can't see the dry dirt? Can you imagine seeing massive, green cedars sprouting up out of the ground to form thick, lush forests? Such is what will occur when the creation is freed from the dominion and contagion of sin by the Messiah's power.

All of this is why Isaiah stops and offers these words:

³ Encourage the exhausted, and strengthen the feeble. ⁴ Say to those with anxious heart, "Take courage, fear not. Behold, your God will come *with* vengeance; the recompense of God will come, but He will save you."

If you feel like throwing in the towel, if you are just dog-tired of all the evil around you, if you just feel like you've been abandoned by God in a sea of evil, if you just can't bear to think what type of world you will leave your grandchildren, then stop and focus on the future work of the Messiah. Just as surely as He healed people He will heal the land ... all of it, returning it back to what He intended it to look like. A time of refreshment, eternal in nature, is coming ... so hold on.

Returning to the theme of radical earthly transformation, mark Isaiah's words well:

⁷ The scorched land will become a pool and the thirsty ground springs of water; in the haunt of jackals, its resting place, grass becomes reeds and rushes.

During my last trip to Israel, my guide, Asher, tried to convince me that the greenery of this desert region brought about by Israel was a testimony of ancient prophesied like Isaiah's being fulfilled. He pointed to the evidence alongside the road:



I smiled, but nicely disagreed. When the Messiah comes, not only will this dirt be covered with a carpet of color along with those rocky, purplish mountains in Jordan, but water will be gushing out the once parched ground, forming pools and setting the stage for GRASS. Amen. Seriously, Israel presently has three sources of water: the Sea of Galilee, mountain aquifers south and north of Jerusalem, and a massive aquifer on the coast north and south of Tel Aviv. Mark this well. There is no aquifer in the Dead Sea region. How, then, will water break out of the ground here? Simple. The Messiah, who is the water of life, will do it by His raw, unrestricted, unlimited power! Since He can turn water into wine and walk on water, I don't think making water appear in the deserts of the world will be any real problem. All of this, of course, speaks of His desire to bless us with radical, eye-pleasing earthly transformation when He comes back. I tell you what, those who see this will be jumping up and down with joy!

And to think that His birth set all of this potential in motion.

What's even more astonishing is He will personally build a highway to end all highways.

⁸ A highway will be there, a roadway, and it will be called the Highway of Holiness. The unclean will not travel on it, but it will be for him who walks that way, and fools will not wander on it. ⁹ No lion will be there, nor will any vicious beast go up on it; these will not be found there. But the redeemed will walk there, ¹⁰ And the ransomed of the LORD will return And come with joyful shouting to Zion, With everlasting joy upon their heads. They will find gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

Where will it be? It will cut through this Edenic land. Where will it be going? It's termination point will be Zion or Jerusalem where the Messiah will rule and reign (Isaiah 2). Who will be on this road? Only those who, like the shepherds, chose to worship Him as Savior, Messiah, and Lord. Will you be on that road? Will you find true joy this Christmas?

English novelist Arthur Evelyn St. John Waugh, who is better known by his pen name Evelyn Waugh (1903–66), was a capable journalist and book reviewer in his day. He's probably best known for *Brideshead Revisited*, *The Sacred & Profane Memories of Captain Charles Ryder* (1945). Yes, he had a fine, sharp mind and was quite gifted in putting his analytical thoughts to print. Yet, he knew his life wasn't complete. All that changed in 1930 when he was 27 years old.

What happened? Arthur trusted Jesus Christ, the Babe of Bethlehem, as his Lord and Savior. At that precise moment of faith, he went from being spiritually blind to having new spiritual eyes, from being spiritually deaf to possessing new ears in tune with the voice of God. His conversion, to say the least, radically changed his entire life.

Writing to a friend about his conversion, you'll see how joy entered his life as spiritual life completely transformed him:

Conversion is like stepping across the chimney piece out of a Looking-Glass world, where everything is an absurd caricature, into the real world God made; and then begins the delicious process of exploring it limitlessly.

Prior to faith, Evelyn was blind, though he thought he could see. After conversion, well, now he had new eyes to truly understand why God created him in the first place. Can't you just sense the joy in his words? That's what Christmas is all about. It's about the Savior who wants to be your king, and who wants to transform your life. Make this Christmas the year when you let Him do just that.