

## JUSTICE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

**DEVOTIONAL READING:** Isaiah 9:1-7

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** Isaiah 9:1-7

### ISAIAH 9:2-7

- <sup>2</sup> The people walking in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
on those living in the land of deep darkness  
a light has dawned.**
- <sup>3</sup> You have enlarged the nation  
and increased their joy;  
they rejoice before you  
as people rejoice at the harvest,  
as warriors rejoice  
when dividing the plunder.**
- <sup>4</sup> For as in the day of Midian's defeat,  
you have shattered  
the yoke that burdens them,  
the bar across their shoulders,  
the rod of their oppressor.**
- <sup>5</sup> Every warrior's boot used in battle  
and every garment rolled in blood  
will be destined for burning,  
will be fuel for the fire.**
- <sup>6</sup> For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given,  
and the government will be on his shoulders.**



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**And he will be called**

**Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.**

**7 Of the greatness of his government and peace  
there will be no end.**

**He will reign on David's throne  
and over his kingdom,  
establishing and upholding it  
with justice and righteousness  
from that time on and forever.**

**The zeal of the LORD Almighty  
will accomplish this.**

## KEY TEXT

*Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.—Isaiah 9:7*

## JUSTICE, LAW, HISTORY

### Unit 1: God Requires Justice

#### LESSONS 1–4

### LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Describe the historical background to Isaiah's prophetic ministry.
2. Explain the importance of [Isaiah 9](#) in the New Testament.
3. Write a reminder of how anticipating Jesus' coming should contribute to his or her joy daily.

### LESSON OUTLINE

#### Introduction

- A. Utter Darkness
- B. Lesson Context

#### I. The Great Reversal (Isaiah 9:2–5)

- A. Light to Shine (v. 2)
- B. Joy to Erupt (v. 3)

#### *Gathered at the Table*

#### C. Historical Analogy (vv. 4–5)

#### II. The Promised Child (Isaiah 9:6–7)

- A. His Names (v. 6)  
*What's in a Name?*
- B. His Government (v. 7)

#### Conclusion

- A. A Dark State
- B. Prayer

## C. Thought to Remember

### HOW TO SAY IT

Ahaz	Ay-haz.
Hezekiah	Hez-ih- <i>kye</i> -uh.
Manasseh	Muh- <i>nass</i> -uh.
shalom ( <i>Hebrew</i> )	shah- <i>lome</i> .

## Introduction

### A. Utter Darkness

For a year I taught at a Christian high school in Oklahoma where there were rocky hills with caves. One Sunday afternoon one of my fellow teachers took me and some students to go spelunking. We entered the four-foot-tall opening. Within a few yards we reached a rock outcropping with a key-shaped opening, requiring us to scoot along on our bellies. Only a narrow slit in the rock allowed the right leg to reach the ground to power forward, while the left leg trailed behind. After a few feet the cave opened up some, and we walked hunched over for what seemed quite a distance. We eventually reached a larger chamber in which we could all stand. Then my friend had everyone turn off their flashlights. We were far enough into the cave that there was absolutely no light coming in from the outside. That was the darkest physical darkness I have ever been in! Had I been lost in that cave with no light, I am sure panic would soon set in.

In the beginning God created physical light ([Genesis 1:3–5](#)). And then, at just the right time, Jesus arrived in the world as our spiritual light ([John 1:1–5](#)). Isaiah prophesied his coming centuries in advance, offering hope to all who would believe.

### B. Lesson Context

Isaiah lived and prophesied in the eighth century BC, with access to the royal court in Judah (see [2 Kings 19:1–20:19](#); [Isaiah 37–39](#)). Some students suggest that the book of Isaiah includes part of the official court records during his service to various kings (see [2 Chronicles 26:22](#); [32:32](#)). His ministry spanned the reigns of four kings (see [Isaiah 1:1](#); this indicates a date range of approximately 740–680 BC). Isaiah was perhaps martyred in the early years of a fifth king, the wicked Manasseh (compare [Hebrews 11:37](#)).

[Isaiah 9:2–7](#), today's text, must be understood in the larger context of [Isaiah 7–12](#). This



section is often called The Book of Immanuel because of its focus on the promised blessing of God's presence; "God with us" is the meaning of the word *Immanuel* ([Isaiah 7:14](#); [8:8–10](#); [Matthew 1:23](#)). The immediate need for that divine presence was a war that saw Syria and the northern kingdom of Israel in an alliance against Judah, the southern kingdom of divided Israel ([Isaiah 7:1](#)).

In reaction, the prophet Isaiah brought a message of hope to Judah's ungodly King Ahaz. The young and inexperienced king ([2 Kings 16:2](#)) was frightened, along with all of Judah, by the political winds ([Isaiah 7:2](#)). The prophet encouraged Ahaz to trust the Lord in this matter. Isaiah even offered Ahaz a sign from the Lord ([7:11](#)).

For some reason, Ahaz refused to ask for a sign ([Isaiah 7:12](#)). Perhaps he already had in mind an alliance with the Assyrians ([2 Kings 16:7](#)). But the Lord gave the "house of David" (represented by Ahaz) a sign anyway: a child to be known as Immanuel ([Isaiah 7:13–14](#)). Before this child could reach an age of accountability, the two threats in the north would be destroyed ([7:7–9](#), [15](#)). Since Ahaz had refused to ask for a sign, the sign that was nevertheless provided therefore remained a "distant" prophecy for a remnant of God's people, not to be fulfilled until Immanuel truly would come in ultimate victory.

The importance of the prophet Isaiah is seen in the fact that he is mentioned by name over 20 times in the New Testament—more than all other prophets combined.

## I. The Great Reversal

([ISAIAH 9:2–5](#))

### A. Light to Shine (v. 2)

**2. The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.**

The prophetic word was so certain that Isaiah spoke of the prophecy as having already been fulfilled. *The people* had continued to walk (that is, live) as if in the darkest part of the night (compare [Isaiah 5:30](#); [8:22](#)). These were the Lord's own people, whose ways the Lord had instructed Isaiah not to adopt ([8:11](#)). They apparently had no desire to walk in the light (compare [John 3:19–20](#)). They preferred *the land of deep darkness* of mind and spirit, bereft of God's presence (compare [Psalm 23:4](#)).

Yet it is on people who seem to prefer darkness that *a great light* comes. They *have seen* (personal experience) this light and *on those ... a light has dawned* (objective fact). Light is a figure of speech for God himself or for his divine presence (see [Isaiah 60:1–3](#); [2 Corinthians 4:6](#); [1 John 1:5](#); [Revelation 21:23](#); [22:5](#)).

Matthew quoted [Isaiah 9:2](#) to refer to Jesus ([Matthew 4:16](#)). Jesus' ministry was like a great

light bursting on an unworthy people. Yet in spite of Jesus' great miracles and authoritative teachings, most chose not to walk in the light. As a result, Jesus condemned them (see [Matthew 11:21–24](#)). In other words, they should have known better.

#### *What Do You Think?*

What personal experiences of spiritual darkness would be most valuable to pass along to others as warnings?

#### *Digging Deeper*

How and when will you do so?

## B. Joy to Erupt (v. 3)

### 3a. You have enlarged the nation

The nation of Israel would be *enlarged* many times over in terms of both population and boundaries (see [Isaiah 26:15](#); [54:1–3](#)). Following Jesus' ministry, this expansion was caused by the great influx of Gentiles into the kingdom of God, not of David, in fulfillment of the first promise of God to Abraham ([Genesis 12:3](#)).

And it did not happen overnight. The fulfillment of this verse was neither in national Judah nor in the northern kingdom of divided Israel. Judah was weak compared to the world powers and was never a powerful nation after Assyria consolidated control over the region. Even after the return from Babylonian exile in the sixth century BC, times were very difficult. The multiplying of the nation must refer to a spiritual reality.

### 3b. and increased their joy;

This verse contains an uncertainty in the Hebrew, and not all translations are alike. The problem is that the Hebrew word for *to it* or *to them*, which here is translated *their*, sounds exactly like the Hebrew word for *not* (a homonym). It would be easy for a copyist of Hebrew to write *not* when another person actually is saying *to it/them* (or vice versa) during verbal dictation. This uncertainty between *not* and *to it/them* occurs over a dozen times in the Hebrew Old Testament. If *to it* was the original intent, then the idea is what we see here in the translation of the *New International Version*. Thus the enlarging of the nation is cause for the increase in *joy*.

The *King James Version*, by contrast, has “and not increased the joy” in the first line. The result is a rapid shift from the positive “you have enlarged the nation” of verse 3a to the negative “not increased the joy.” One explanation of this shift proposes that the prophet at first is foreseeing the people dwelling in darkness; then the light dawns ([Isaiah 9:2](#)), and nation is multiplied ([9:3a](#)). But that is followed by a time of difficulty (lack of joy).

### 3c. they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when

## dividing the plunder.

To the situation just noted, Isaiah compared the future joy from the light to two of the greatest occasions for joy in the ancient world: *harvest* time ([Exodus 23:16](#); [Deuteronomy 16:13–15](#)) and the victorious end of war, indicated by *dividing the plunder* thereof ([Numbers 31:25–47](#); [1 Samuel 30:16](#); etc.). Both events are considered gifts from God (see [Deuteronomy 28:2–8](#)). The outcomes of harvest and war were matters of life and death. No wonder Isaiah used these as comparisons for the forthcoming joy when the light would arrive!

### *What Do You Think?*

How will you ensure that what most causes joy for God is also what most causes joy for you?

### *Digging Deeper*

What Scripture text most challenges you to do so? Why?

## GATHERED AT THE TABLE

On college game days, my team was ready. We had analyzed the previous Saturday’s game, gone over scouting reports, and practiced daily. We knew our game plan, and we were mentally and physically ready to execute it.

Saturday mornings were spent together in the equipment locker room. We saw ourselves as a great army preparing for battle as we strapped on our gear, donned our colors, and applied war paint to our faces. On game days the earth shook with the energy of our hard work.

The victorious outcome outweighed the fact that afterward we could barely walk for the bruises and cuts that tattooed our bodies. Even so, we sat around a banquet table, cheering and laughing and loving one another. We rejoiced in the “harvest” as we emotionally shared the “spoils.”

God’s promise is of a joy infinitely greater. The joy Israel would experience is like a victorious team gathered around a banquet table. What hard work are you doing now in anticipation of the joy God will lay out before his people? For a hint along these lines, see [1 Corinthians 3:8–15](#).

—W. L.

## C. Historical Analogy (vv. 4–5)

**4. For as in the day of Midian’s defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor.**

The analogy in view is freedom from foreign domination. *The day of Midian’s defeat* refers

to Gideon’s defeat of the Midianites, over 400 years in the past at this point ([Judges 6–8](#)). Gideon’s actions triggered knowledge that his victory could only have been an act of God ([7:2–14](#)). No one expected victory in Gideon’s day, and no one would expect it in Jesus’ day. Skeptics said things like “How can the Messiah come from Galilee?” ([John 7:41](#)) and “Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee” ([7:52](#)). The people who made this statement were wrong: Jonah was from Galilee ([2 Kings 14:25](#)).

Some students see echoes of the exodus from Egypt in the use of such words as *yoke* and *bar* ([Leviticus 26:13](#)), *shoulders* ([Psalm 81:6](#)), and *oppressor* (“slave drivers” in [Exodus 5:6, 10, 14](#)). The exodus events were of divine origin, as will be the birth of a special child ([Isaiah 9:6](#), below).

The imagery is of a disenfranchised, subjugated people. This would be the status of the Jews under Roman rule in the time of Jesus. Regarding *burdens* and the nature of oppression, see also [Isaiah 10:27; 14:25; 49:26; 60:14](#). But Jesus came to grant deliverance from bondage to a different, more oppressive master: sin ([Galatians 5:1](#); etc.).

#### *What Do You Think?*

What modern metaphor could you use to compare and contrast the yoke of [Galatians 5:1](#) with the yoke of [Matthew 11:29–30](#)?

#### *Digging Deeper*

How might your choice of metaphor change, based on various contexts? Give examples.

### **5a. Every warrior’s boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood**

*Every warrior’s boot [and] garment rolled in blood* represents the dead and wounded. Imagine thousands of soldiers engaged in hand-to-hand combat with weapons such as spears, swords, and cudgels. The suffering and gore would be immense.

### **5b. will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire.**

The end of warfare is another reason for great rejoicing. Once the people are liberated ([Isaiah 9:4](#), above), a spreading peace will allow the *burning* of the blood-stained garments of the previous statement. There will be no more need for these. This outcome matches what the prophet foresees in [Isaiah 2:4](#) (compare [Psalm 46:9](#); [Zechariah 9:10](#)).

## **II. The Promised Child**

([ISAIAH 9:6–7](#))

### **A. His Names (v. 6)**

### **6a. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his**



shoulders.

The ultimate reason for joy is the birth of an extraordinary *child*. He is *given* to us by God. This is not said of other births, although this child was to have been a sign to Ahaz—a sign he refused (see [Lesson Context](#))!

Some identify the child as Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz. But this does not match the chronology of Hezekiah's birth. And, more importantly, no mere human king is in view, but rather an end-times figure, the Messiah. Furthermore, neither Hezekiah nor anyone else from Isaiah's time accomplished what is in this passage.

[Isaiah 7:14](#) requires us to conclude that this child is to be the coming Immanuel ("God with us"). The role of this *son* is to administer *the government*. The greatest promise of God is not merely the end of a short-term crisis. Rather, God promises to send a King who will surpass what his people have seen in their rulers. As with [Psalm 89](#), the language here about the birth of a son reminds us of the promises to the patriarchs and to David of sons through whom God would bring promised blessings (example: [2 Samuel 7:11–16](#)). The Son will bear the burden of responsibility for the rule and dominion over the Lord's people (see [Matthew 28:18](#)). When his shoulder bears the rule of government, it frees the people from the violence they had endured ([Isaiah 9:4](#), above).

#### **6b. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor,**

Names are significant throughout Isaiah's ministry and in his confrontation with kings, especially Ahaz ([Isaiah 7:3](#); [8:1–3](#); etc.). The set of names we see starting here reminds us of "throne names" used for newly crowned kings. These names give the nature and character of this child and his perfect rule. Egyptian coronation liturgies exhibited such names to encourage qualities desired in the newly crowned monarch (compare and contrast [2 Kings 24:17](#)).

Four paired descriptions mark him as extraordinary. First is *Wonderful Counselor*. We have weakened the meaning of *wonderful* in the English language. Today this word means something like "really, really good." When one experiences the wonderful in this sense, one knows that this is a miraculous work of God Almighty (example: [Isaiah 29:14](#)).

To combine this with the function of counselor means that Isaiah foresaw someone who knows all the questions and has all the answers. This can be only God himself (compare [Isaiah 25:1](#)). Solomon, David's son, also was given great wisdom that could be explained only supernaturally (see [1 Kings 3](#)). This child perhaps is presented as the "new Solomon," who gives supernatural counsel to his subjects (see [Isaiah 11:2](#)). Even so, the child is to be greater than Solomon ([Luke 11:31](#)). The child's wise, supernatural counsel will be the exact opposite of that of the supposedly wise counselors of [Isaiah 19:11](#).

#### **6c. Mighty God,**

The next prophetic designation amplifies the previous. The descriptive word *Mighty* is drawn from the world of war heroes (compare [Genesis 10:8](#)). We might liken this to our term

*invincible*, the one who cannot be defeated. The coming child will not be bested by any army, human or otherwise, in the reign of his universal government (see [Isaiah 42:13](#)). *Mighty God* is used also in [Isaiah 10:21](#) to refer to the Lord. Here the name ascribes deity to the child (see [John 1:1](#)). [Revelation 1:8](#) refers to Jesus as “the Almighty” and may be drawing on this name.

#### **6d. Everlasting Father,**

This exact title is found only here in the Old Testament. Indeed, the Old Testament rarely uses the term *Father* to refer to God (examples: [Psalm 68:5](#); [89:26](#); [Malachi 2:10](#)). It remains for Jesus to teach humans that God is our Father in a universal, loving, and holy way. This title emphasizes the Father’s eternal nature and/or his control over eternity and time itself. The concept of eternity was difficult to grasp in Isaiah’s day and remains so for us. The eternality of God, however, is a characteristic that sets him apart in a decisive way (see [Isaiah 57:15](#)). This too seems to ascribe divinity to the child: born into time, he transcends time. The child will bring about conditions in the new government that will fulfill the role of the divine fatherhood of God (see [Psalm 103:13](#); [Isaiah 63:16](#)).

#### **6e. Prince of Peace.**

War characterizes earthly kingdoms. The only son of David we know of who did not go to war was Solomon, yet Solomon established his reign with bloodshed ([1 Kings 2:25, 46](#)). Solomon’s name means “peace,” but the promised child will be the ultimate *Prince of Peace*. This is not *prince* in the sense of a king-in-waiting. Rather, it is *prince* in the sense of ruler of a people, a virtual synonym with “king” or “monarch.” He brings peace between God and humanity by way of reconciliation and redemption (see [John 14:27](#); [Romans 5:1–11](#)).

#### *What Do You Think?*

Which description in this verse will most motivate your service to Christ this week? Why?

#### *Digging Deeper*

Which description most motivates you to further study of its significance?

### **WHAT’S IN A NAME?**

My parents spent a lot of time reading baby-naming books, trying to find my name. The book they chose gave characteristics of names instead of definitions. *When you hear this name, who do you see, and what are they like?* Each name had character and a legacy.

They settled on Wyatt, after Wyatt Earp, one of the most famous gunslinging lawmen of the Old West. And he was a cowboy through and through. The name evokes a tough, adventurous man who sat a horse well, rode next to herds of thundering buffalo, and slept with a saddle for a pillow beneath a quilt of starlight. I’ve carried in my name the hope to grow into a man who earns it. I want people to hear my name and glimpse something true about me.

The names God gave his Messiah are like this. He *is* what his names suggest. How will you celebrate the man behind the names?

—W. L.

## B. His Government (v. 7)

**7. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.**

The promise to Abraham in [Genesis 12:3](#) became, at Sinai, the purpose of Israel's existence ([Exodus 19:5–6](#)). The broader redemptive work through David is found in a promise that his dynasty will never *end* (compare [2 Samuel 7:16](#)). But the coming child would be in a different category from any earthly monarch. His reign is characterized in five ways that no normal human ruler can ever measure up to.

First, his reign is to be endlessly increasing, as opposed to the rise and fall of empires throughout history. Second, it is to be endlessly peaceful, never at war or preparing for war. It advances because of its *peace*, not in spite of it. Third, it is to be tied to the most beloved ruler of Israel, King David. Fourth, it is to be established on true *justice and righteousness*, not on brute strength and aggression. Fifth, its existence and increase are guaranteed by *the zeal of the Lord*. This is to be a primary matter for the all-powerful God of Israel. Such zeal cannot be thwarted by anyone or anything.

Jesus' dominion will be characterized by peace, not war. His agenda will be reconciliation and *shalom*. His *kingdom* is established not just as an end to war, but as positive harmony and goodwill—the kind of peace that Israel had not known. His *government* and peace expand forever because people from all nations will be at peace with God ([Zechariah 14:9, 16–17](#); [Romans 11:25–32](#); [Ephesians 2:11–17](#)). The angel Gabriel quoted from this passage when he announced to Mary that she would bear a son, Jesus ([Luke 1:32–33](#)).

### *What Do You Think?*

What is the single most important action you can take this week to bring your priorities and zeal in line with God's?

### *Digging Deeper*

How might Satan distract you from this task?

## Conclusion

## A. A Dark State

There's hide-and-seek, and then there's Hide-and-Seek: Dark Edition. Imagine a warm house on a cold winter night, all the lights off. Two parents go searching for their whispering and shushing children. Their hiding places would be laughable in daylight, but in the dark they are effectively invisible behind a pillow or wrapped in a curtain. Perhaps the mother can sense her child's presence, but it's not until he jumps out or giggles that she can place him. Darkness certainly adds drama to hide-and-seek.



Visual for [Lesson 3](#). Allow one minute for silent reflection on Jesus' titles and fulfillment of their meanings before concluding the class with prayer.

The people living before Jesus lived in a state of darkness. Spiritually, they walked around with hands outstretched, hoping not to run into something dangerous. Fear and anxiety lurked in that state of unpredictability and loss in a deadly game of hiding from God, trying to keep sins in darkness.

We no longer live in the darkness, hands outstretched, hoping to avoid danger. We live in



the light of Jesus' sacrifice, which has illuminated our paths! What then will you do? Will you continue to live as though you have not seen the light? Will you leave little children in the dark, never trying to find them? The game only ends in victory when the light comes on and everyone is safe in God's home.

### B. Prayer

Father, we thank you for your care for all the world. May we be worthy ambassadors of the kingdom of the Messiah. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

Jesus the King is like no other!

## INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

*Enhance your lesson with NIV<sup>®</sup> Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at [www.standardlesson.com](http://www.standardlesson.com) or in the back of the NIV<sup>®</sup> Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).*

### Into the Lesson

Form pairs of students and ask them to share with each other the deepest physical darkness they ever experienced. Allow one minute of sharing before announcing time to switch so the second partner has time to share. After two minutes of conversation, ask a few volunteers to share their *partner's* experience, and then discuss briefly: "Why is complete darkness something we fear?"

Ask the pairs next to consider silently their darkest spiritual experience. (Be sensitive to what you know of your class members when considering whether this is an appropriate question for their particular experiences.) Do not allow this activity to last longer than one minute. After that minute, tell students that today's text points to the greatest darkness of all.

### Into the Word

Using today's Lesson Context, briefly explain the historical context for today's passage from Isaiah. Follow with a reading of the lesson text aloud.

Form the class into three groups: **Signs of Victory Group**, **Literal Meaning Group**, and **Spiritual Implication Group**. Point the groups to [Isaiah 9:2–7](#) and ask them to list what

belongs under their group name. Expect that there will be some overlap in answers. Allow time for discussion; be prepared to resolve disagreements.

*Option.* Play a recording of “Unto Us” from *The Messiah*, which you can find online. While students listen, have them mark the phrases from [Isaiah 9:2–7](#) that are lyrics in the song. This can be accomplished in their Bibles or on copies of today’s printed text (you provide). Ask volunteers to tell what they’ve highlighted.

Discuss what parts of Isaiah’s prophecy would be most difficult to understand *if* the class did not have knowledge of Jesus. What parts would be most encouraging in that case?

Ask class members to form new groups as follows: **Wonderful Counselor Group; Mighty God Group; Everlasting Father Group; Prince of Peace Group**. Each group is to write a job description for Jesus to show him fulfilling their assigned group’s title: After five minutes, call for conclusions in whole-class discussion.

*Option.* For deeper discussion, follow the above by distributing copies of the “Looking at the Light” exercise from the activity page, which you can download, to be completed as indicated.

## Into Life

Put class members back into their groups above to discuss how Jesus offers light that our culture needs today through the specific attribute assigned to that group. If your learners need examples, these are possibilities:

- **Wonderful Counselor Group:** guidance for how we plan our lives.
- **Mighty God Group:** for recognizing that we’re not in control.
- **Everlasting Father Group:** for realizing that this world is not the end.
- **Prince of Peace Group:** for encouragement to live with contentment in an age of discontent.

After five minutes, ask class members to share from their ideas. Then ask which title for Jesus brings the most hope personally and why.

*Option.* Distribute copies of the “No Santa” exercise from the activity page. Have students work individually for one minute before comparing their cards with others in ensuing whole-class discussion. For each sentiment, ask the class, “Why is this message so important for our world today?”

Close with a prayer of thanks for Jesus, whose rule is a reason to celebrate not only at Christmas but always for those who have submitted to him as Lord.