

He carries me on his shoulder.

Isaiah 9:2-7

In our focus on the Gospel lesson in Luke 2, we may pass too quickly over the Old Testament text: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder" (Isa 9:6).

The prophet Isaiah says that the child born to us is a Lord, and the government lies on his shoulder. Who can really understand this? To have a child who is a Lord who carries his government on his shoulder?

Recall paintings from the Middle Ages of Mary and child in which the child is holding a globe in his hand with a cross on top of it. And recall the modern gospel song: "He's got the whole world in his hands."

Isaiah wants it to be understood that this is a government altogether different from governments of this world. Already in the Old Testament there is a vision of two worlds.

In ancient times governors were gods. The emperor was god. And the people were often like slaves. There were Lords and vassals. The vassals eked out a living under the boot of the emperor-god. They lived in fear and poverty under the boot of their overlord.

In many countries today there is no separation of mosque and state. There are no private property rights. Many still live as vassals under feudal lords.

Even in Western countries we, the citizens, support the government on our backs, on our shoulders. The government uses us, taxes us, regulates us. As Churchill said: Democracy is the worst form of government except for all the rest.

Isaiah wants it to be understood that this child, this Lord, and his government are altogether different from that of this world.

The government is on HIS shoulders. In the Kingdom of Christ, the king himself bears us. It is unprecedented that Christ's people do not lie under his feet, but lie on his shoulders.

Recall the parable of the lost sheep (Luke 15:3-7): The shepherd goes after the sheep who is lost. "When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing" (Luke 15:5).

We know this image even if it is not something we see in our daily lives. We know, too, that when firemen rescue someone from a burning building, they are taught to carry the person across their shoulders.

This child will grow up to be the good shepherd who carries us on his shoulders. If you want to find the Christian church, you will find it where you see Christians resting upon Christ's shoulder. As Luther said, no one is a Christian unless he lies on Christ's shoulders just as a strayed, lost sheep is carried on its shepherd's shoulders to safety. (See *Sermons of Martin Luther: The House Postils*, Ed. Eugene F. A. Klug; Vol 3:224-28.)

Luther said that a Christian is a sinner carried on Christ's shoulders, that is, all his sins lie on Christ's shoulders.

Christ must carry us or we are lost. He had to suffer on the cross for us, and he must still constantly carry us and bear with us. We cannot and dare not try to carry him; he must carry us. As Isaiah 53:4 states: "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows."

In no way can we help him pay off our debt.

Some, however, do not want to be carried by Christ; instead they think they can carry Christ. In their thinking they believe that if they do enough good and are sincere enough, they can pay for their sins and appease God's anger.

But it doesn't work to carry Christ. If you try to do that, it will be a load too heavy to lift. Obviously you would be crushed by that load. It is too heavy a load for us even to help.

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined" (Isaiah 9:2).

"But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of woman, born under the law" (Gal 4:4).

Born under all the elements of the universe and all of its burdens, the burdens of this life – sin, death, and the law. We are born into a world of sin, evil, and death. And in us there is sin, evil, and death. Terrorism, fascism, deception, corruption of all kinds. Sometimes we lack wisdom. Sometimes we lack courage.

Christ speaks to the sinner in this manner: "You are conceived and born in sin, you have angered God by many sins and are condemned to death; but you are not to

suffer anguish on account of this, for your sins are forgiven. Simply lie across my shoulders, I will carry you before God."

And who is this who takes us away from sin and death; who carries us away from sin and over the abyss of death?

Isaiah 9:6: "His name is called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

Here the emphasis is on Prince of Peace, as lifted up in Isaiah 9:7: "... of the increase of his government and of peace shall be no end."

It is hard to talk about peace today because it is confused with social justice movements, peace movements, peace activists, and the belief that somehow a show of weakness will mollify aggressors.

We live in country of relative peace and neighborhoods of relative peace. We know it and value it, although we also take it for granted because we have property rights and the rule of law.

In John 14:27 Jesus says: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you."

The holy one became sin. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

"The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this" (Isaiah 9:7). The zeal of the Lord of hosts, meaning all the angels, will do this. ("And the surviving remnant of the house of Judah shall again take root downward and bear fruit upward; for out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and out of Mount Zion a band of survivors. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts shall do this!" Isa 37:31).

This is the biblical way of talking about God's determination, his promise. It means: What he purposes, he does. What he promises, he fulfills. "For all the promises of God find their 'Yes' in him. That is why we utter the Amen through him to the glory of God" (2 Corinthians 1:20).

"The Father has given them to me, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand" (John 10:29).

Isa 9:3: "They rejoice before thee as with joy at the harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil."

You will share in the harvest. You will be given the spoils of his victory. As it says in Luke 6:38: “. . . good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over – will be put into your lap.”

As you get back to your work-a-day world, remember Luther’s definition of Christian: A Christian is one who is carried on Christ’s shoulders just as a strayed and lost sheep is carried by its shepherd to safety.

In a few minutes we’ll sing: “Lo, How a Rose is Growing”, the final stanza of which goes like this:

Oh Savior, king of glory
Who triumphed o’er our foe
Bring us at length, we pray
To the bright courts of heaven
And into endless day.

Isaiah 11:6 states: “A little child shall lead them.” This child was born to carry you across the abyss of sin and death and to deliver you safely to the other side, to the bright courts of heaven and into endless day. Amen