

## The Reverend Marjo Anderson

Advent 1  
Isaiah 9:2-7

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Salem, Bridgeport

### “A Child Is Given – but Why a Child???”

*“For unto us a child is given!”*

Through the prophet Isaiah, God promises humanity a Savior.  
But why do we need one?

Well, obviously, because we live in a world broken in countless ways -  
by a pandemic that, despite all our advances in science and healthcare,  
has killed over 1 million people,  
by systemic racism that causes black people to feel like their lives don't matter,  
by economic disparity so vast  
that 16% of the world's population uses 80% of the world's resources,  
by changes in our environment  
that in just the last 40 years have tripled the number of natural disasters that happen each year,  
and, perhaps most troubling of all,  
by increasing secularization and the decline of faith in the living God.

When we think of these things,  
we can't help but feel that we are a people who walk in darkness.

Given the great capacity of our human brains –  
brains that have put humans on the moon & sent spaceships 13 billion miles into interstellar space –  
you might think we should be able to solve our problems ourselves!  
And yet, we just can't seem to do it.

We think of ourselves as rational beings,  
but while we have the capacity for rational thought, that doesn't make us rational beings.  
As Saint Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans,  
*“I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate...  
I can will what is right, but I cannot do it.  
For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do...  
Wretched human being that I am! Who will rescue me...?” [Romans 7.15-24]*

The problem is that, despite our capacity for rational thought,  
we humans don't make decisions based on thought, but on emotion.

So, since that's the case, here's a question for you: what is the most prevalent human emotion?  
I was trying to remember the 4 basic human emotions & I had 3 but couldn't remember the 4<sup>th</sup>,  
so of course I googled it.

I came across a whole bunch of interesting sites –  
the 12 basic emotions, the 10 basic, the 7, the 6, the 4, the 2....  
And when you get down to the top 2, what are you left with? Any guesses?

Fear and love.

John Lennon put it well when he said, “The two basic motivating forces are fear and love.

When we are afraid, we pull back from life.

When we are in love, we open to all that life has to offer with passion, excitement, and acceptance.”

The two most basic emotions are fear and love,  
and sadly, the most prevalent one is fear.

And since emotions are stronger than thoughts, fear overrides our rational selves.

That's why intellectual arguments rarely persuade us.

That's why information and education are insufficient.

Minds can only be changed when the heart is transformed.

Even when we are unaware of it, fear controls most of our lives.

Instead of living in trust and hope,

we can't let go of the hurts of the past

or stop conjuring up pictures of the bad things that might happen.

And so "fear shades all competing notions with its shadow."

[ <http://screamfree.com/whats-more-powerful-than-fear/> ]

But even though fear is the most prevalent emotion, it is not the strongest.

There is an antidote – and that, as I'm sure you know, is love.

As the first letter of John states, "Perfect love casts out fear". [1 John 4.18]

Which is what brings me to today's text: "*For unto us a child is given!*"

Why did God promise a savior in the form of a child?

When you think about it,

God could have sent a full grown human being down out of the sky to save humanity.

God could have sent a creature from another planet to save humanity.

But instead, God promised a baby.

Why? Because neither a full grown human being nor an extraterrestrial creature

would have had the capacity to open hearts to love the way the birth of a child could.

When, after 30 hours of labor, the midwife put my first-born into my arms,

I was so overcome by love that it changed my life

because for the first time, I realized how much my parents must love me.

And then I realized how much more God must love me.

God could have sent a full grown human being down out of the sky to save humanity.

God could have sent a creature from another planet to save humanity.

But neither of us those would have opened hearts to love

the way a baby born to a young girl in a stable in Bethlehem could do.

That baby opened hearts to love. And the potential within that child gave hope.

We, like all humanity, are people who walk in darkness,

a darkness created by the shadow that fear casts over our lives.

But into that darkness, God sends a child –

a child of hope, a child of promise, a child who can open our hearts

to the one thing that can bring light to our darkness by overcoming every fear:

the love of God made known in Christ Jesus by the power of the Spirit.

*"For unto us a child is given!*

"My prayer for each and every one of you is that this child will open your heart

to the amazing, overwhelming, all embracing love God has for you. **Amen**