

**Advent:**

Advent draws our attention back to our soul. We are lifted out of our routines of just going about our daily tasks. We are forced to remember that what happens in our material and physical existence is not all there is to life. As we think about God, and Jesus coming into the world; As we hear the stories of the birth of Jesus and we hear about God intervening into the lives of ordinary people, we realize that He longs to intervene in our lives.

**The Advent Wreath**

The Advent Wreath captures the themes of this season - Preparation and Joy. As we light the candles of the Advent wreath our anticipation builds and grows until we arrive at our remembrance of the birth of Jesus on Christmas Day. The 4 Candles traditionally represent 4 themes of the Advent Season – Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love.

The third candle on the Advent signals a Change. It is a different color, a brighter color, representing joy. There was much joy in the Birth stories recorded in the gospels. Zechariah and Elizabeth experiencing joy at the birth of their son John. And Mary's joy when she learned that she is chosen to be the mother of Jesus.

**Reading: Luke 1:46 - 56**

Today, we light the third candle, the candle of Joy.

**Prayer** – Dear God, Sometimes joy is hard to come by. Over the past 2 years there has been much sadness. Many families are grieving the loss of loved ones. Some are experiencing loss of Job and financial challenges. During this pandemic, many people have lost friends – not to the virus but to differences of opinions – about social distancing, about avoiding going out in public, about whether to wear a mask or not, about whether to get a vaccine or not. That has been painful and disappointing. Lord we need to have Joy restored. Help us Lord to focus on the right things, the important things, the eternal things. Help us to focus on what you have done to rescue and redeem us. And so fill our hearts, our friendships, our homes with joy once again. Amen.

**Scripture 35:1-10**

**Message:** Christmas Hope from Isaiah, Part 3

**Sometimes it is hard to Trust God.** For some of us, we have made Proverbs 3:5-6 our “Life Verse”. **“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight.”** That verse may make us feel good, but it is hard to do. When we have experienced disappointment, over prayers that were not answered in the way we thought they should, it is hard to trust. When we are experiencing obstacles in our life, it is hard to trust. When we are overwhelmed by a situation that we just do not see any way out of, it is hard to trust. **Sometimes it is hard to trust God.** Isaiah is preaching to a nation of people who were having a hard time trusting God. The nation of Judah was under attack. Their brother kingdom to the north – Israel – was planning an invasion. The nation of Assyria was threatening. Assyria was the powerhouse in the middle east during the days of Isaiah's ministry. They were a wicked and evil nation. They were brutally violent. No compassion for the poorer nations. There was no rational reason for Judah to hope to escape the wrath and might power of these two enemies. Isaiah is writing to encourage his people not to give in to their fear, but to trust God. Isaiah begins by painting a picture for them of God's power to deliver. In chapter 34, Isaiah writes about God's coming judgment of the nations that were oppressing His people. Following God's judgment He would begin to restore the land (**vs. 1-2**) As the people of Judah would be delivered from their enemies, God would bring life to the desert and wilderness that were parched and dry. They will see the glory of God manifested in the creation. As we have been looking at these prophetic words from Isaiah, he has referred several times to God's desire to restore creation that has been marred by sin. This is a promise that has seen several fulfillments. It would have seen fulfillment in the time of Isaiah and the people of Judah were delivered from the threats of their enemies. Many believe that these promises are fulfilled in the present day nation of Israel. Wilderness and wastelands are

turned into production farms. And it will see fulfillment in the days of Messiah, when God removes the curse of sin from the creation.

SO TRUST. If the people are going to see physical evidence of God's deliverance and restoration, Isaiah now presents his challenge. **You can trust God. Vs. 3 – Strengthen the feeble hands and buckling knees.** Feeble hands and weak knees are images of weakness and fear. Some people become almost paralyzed with fear. But when we are under attack and being oppressed by the enemy is no time for retreat and fear.

**Vs. 4 – Be strong and do not fear.** As Isaiah encourages his people to not be afraid, he presents two promises. **“God will come, He will come with vengeance with divine retribution, He will come to save you.”** The first promise is that God will bring vengeance – NOT on those who are being fearful, but on those who are the oppressors. God will judge Judah's enemies and defeat them. He will remove the source of their fear. Assyria and Israel will be brought to judgment. The second promise from Isaiah is **He will come to Save You.** God will not abandon His people.

Vs. 5-7 – As God's deliverance comes, God's people will see miraculous signs. The blind will see, the deaf will hear, the crippled will leap for joy, the Mute will Shout for Joy! These Acts of mercy and healing are all signs of the age of Messiah. In Luke 7:18-23, we have this story of John sending some of his disciples to ask Jesus if He is the One (Messiah) or if they should wait for someone else. Listen to Jesus' response:

<sup>20</sup> **When the men came to Jesus, they said, “John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?’”**

<sup>21</sup> **At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind.** <sup>22</sup> **So he replied to the messengers, “Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy<sup>[a]</sup> are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.**

**A Way of Holiness:** Finally as Isaiah's vision concludes he sees that one day in the future – in the time of Messiah – a Highway will be constructed, a Holy Highway for God's people to travel on into His presence. **Only the redeemed will walk there and whose the Lord has rescued will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them.** On the night that Jesus was eating his final Passover with His friends, he said this: **I am THE WAY, the truth and the Life. NO ONE COMES TO THE FATHER EXCEPT THROUGH ME.** Jesus is the fulfillment of this promise to lead us into the Father's presence to spend eternity with Him.

Sometimes it is Hard to Trust God. The people that Isaiah is writing to were having a difficult time trusting God. But Isaiah assures them that God will remove the obstacles, defeat our enemies and deliver us. **“He will come and Save!”**

I want to conclude our time together today by asking if you have put your trust in Jesus to be your Savior? Jesus has come into the world to bring us back into right relationship with God. But we must take the step to believe and trust Him. You can do that right now.

### Closing Prayer

**Blessing:** *May you who rejoice in the first Advent of our Redeemer, at his second Advent be rewarded with unending life. Amen.*

**Song – He Will Come and Save**