

Advent:

Once again we have arrived at the season of Advent. Advent is a season of anticipation and preparation. The season of Advent includes the 4 Sundays before Christmas. It concludes with the Christmas celebration on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day. The season of Advent remembers that **Jesus came to save His people from their sins**. As the angel told Joseph, the husband of Mary, her child was to be named Jesus, which means Savior. We know that that salvation was accomplished through His death on the Cross. So Advent is a season for introspection, self-reflection and repentance. **Advent also remembers that Jesus came into the world**. And we remember that we must **invite Jesus to come into our lives**. We must turn from sin and determine to follow Him. Our hearts are filled with Joy when we experience his forgiveness and grace. **But Advent also reminds us of Jesus' 2nd coming at the end of this age**. He is coming to deliver God's people and usher them into God's presence where we will spend eternity. Advent is a season when we remember that we are not doomed to live in a broken, dark, evil world forever. There is something better.

The Advent Wreath

The Advent Wreath captures the themes of 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.

Reading: Psalm 2:1-12

Prayer –

God, we are living in difficult days. Many of us are anxious. Anxious about a Virus that just can't seem to be brought under control. We are anxious about an economy where prices are rising, where many are struggling to get by. We are anxious about our safety as violence and attacks on individuals can't be brought under control even with stronger laws. We are anxious about attacks by terrorists – both foreign and domestic. We are anxious about the political divisiveness that exists that threaten the survival of our democracy. We long for a day when we will feel safe and free from anxiety and fear. We long for a day of Shalom – peace and prosperity for all. Fill our hearts with **Hope** so that we can hang on and persevere through these days. Thank you for the coming of Jesus, the fulfillment of hope.

Message Christmas Hope from Isaiah

Babies can arrive as a surprise, not planned or expected. Or some babies arrive greatly anticipated. **Perhaps no baby has been born more anticipated than Jesus**. Jesus' birth was not a "moment in time" event. His birth was foretold from the very beginning of human history. In the garden of Eden following the transgression of Adam and Eve, God announced that a child would come as a descendent of Eve and would crush the head of the wicked serpent who had infected God's creation and the race of humans with sin. The promise of a Deliverer was repeated often throughout the Old Testament Scriptures. One writer who wrote extensively about a coming Messiah was the prophet, Isaiah. The Common Lectionary includes Scripture readings for every day of the year. In the Advent season, there are several selections from Isaiah that are suggested for reading and study. In these Sundays of Advent as we move toward the Christmas holiday, I have decided that we would look at some of Isaiah's writings. Isaiah's prophecies help us to understand the significance of the Messiah – who He is, what is His mission.

Scripture Isaiah 2:1-5

As we listen to this passage we hear about a day that is coming where life will be a lot different than it is right now.

Who is Isaiah? Isaiah was a prophet of the Lord. Many people understand that a Prophet is someone who can predict the future. Prophets were not exclusively men or women who only predicted the future. They were God's spokesperson. **They represented God to the people of God**. The story of Isaiah's calling is found in

chapter 6. God asks “**Who will go to announce my word? Who will I send?**” and Isaiah volunteers with this response: “**Here am I, send me!**” It was his passion to tell the people of God about God and call them back to Him. He considered it a privilege to represent God to the people of Israel. Isaiah is identified as the son of Amoz.

Isaiah served as a prophet during an ugly time for the people of Israel. Israel was the nation that God had rescued from slavery in Egypt. He formed a covenant with them. He promised to care for them, provide for them, protect them. The people in turn agreed to serve God by obeying all the commands that He gave them. At the time of Isaiah, the people of God were divided into two nations – Israel and Judah. The northern kingdom of Israel had abandoned God. They embraced sin. As a punishment for their sinfulness, God allowed them to fall into the hands of the evil kingdom of Assyria. Assyria captured them, and carried the people off into captivity. The southern Kingdom of Judah was somewhat better, but they too were becoming increasingly unfaithful to God. **The people of God were certainly not living up to their calling to be holy and righteous.** In addition to the internal moral and spiritual failures of the people, the people of God were being oppressed by the great powers of Assyria and Babylon. Isaiah was disappointed over the way things had turned out for God’s people.

But God revealed to Isaiah that **this was not the way it would always be.** There was another day, a better day coming. Isaiah records that vision here in chapter 2. In a day in the future, life will be different. Isaiah writes of the Last Days. We don’t know for sure exactly what time frame God was referring to. Often the expression Last Days refers to the Days of Messiah’s reign. **The last days refer to the time when God’s purposes will be fulfilled.** The last days were **ushered in at the birth of the Messiah Jesus.** And it will be through the influence of Jesus the Messiah that these last days will be revealed.

What does Isaiah see in this future? The mountain of the Lord’s Temple refers to the **spiritual kingdom of Israel.** The nations of the world will recognize that Israel is in fact God’s people, and they choose to become aligned with Israel. **The nations will recognize that the teaching of God’s kingdom will lead them into pathways of righteousness.** We see during the ministry of Jesus that His words were the words of God.

²⁹All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus’ words, acknowledged that God’s way was right,

So this new day of revelation comes with Jesus.

Not only will this new day be a day where people are **learning the path of righteousness through the Teaching of the Lord,** this new age will be a **day of peace on the earth (Vs. 4).** As the Kingdom of God is established **he will resolve conflicts among the nations.** He will settle disputes. In these days that we are living in, there are so many conflicts between nations. Wars and Rumors of wars. But there is a time coming when peace between nations will be a way of life. It is notable that **the peace that is established will not be a temporary reprieve.** Sometimes in times of war, temporary truces are agreed upon – holidays. But when the truce is ended, the warring parties take up their arms again. But in the time of Messiah’s reign, weapons of wars will be beaten into farming implements. They will no longer be needed. The coming of the new age, the age of Messiah will be a time of Peace.

The passage ends with the invitation “**Let us walk in the Light of the Lord.**” That is the hope of Christmas – that one day God’s rule and reign will be eternally established. People will walk in the knowledge of the Lord. They will walk in the pathway of righteousness. They will live in Peace. **Do not be discouraged** as we are surrounded by hopelessness. God has a plan to bring about a better day. Walk in the Light of the Lord. As we hold on to that Hope may our hearts be encouraged and at peace.

Blessing: May Almighty God, by whose Providence our Savior Jesus Christ came among us in great humility, sanctify you with the light of His blessing and set you free from all sin. Amen.