

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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First Sunday in Advent, November 29, 2020

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 1, 58:1, 64, 68, 498:1.

Lessons: Isaiah 1:1-17, Romans 13:10-14, Matthew 24:37-44

Sermon Text: Isaiah 2:1-5.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltritt

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

The prophet Isaiah was not writing at a happy time for the descendants of Abraham, the ‘children of Israel’. The very first chapter, as you heard in our Old Testament lesson, made it plain that they were a **“sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption! They have forsaken the LORD; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him.”** Isaiah 1:4 (NIV)

But God hasn’t totally given up on them. He gives them promises and hope for the future. The words immediately after our Old Testament lesson read: **“Come now, let us reason together,’ says the LORD. ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land; but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.’ For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”** Isaiah 1:18-20 (NIV)

As we begin the Advent season preparing for Christmas,

“LET US WALK IN THE LIGHT OF THE LORD GOD”

1. What did this mean for people in Isaiah’s day?
2. What does this mean for us?

So are you getting ready for Christmas? (Pause)

Have you put up outside lights and decorations? Have you begun your inside decorations – a Christmas tree, lights, decorations, and other things to get ready for Christmas? Are you making your house bright and cheerful? You may have even seen some of your neighbors decorating their houses and yards.

So what do all those preparations really have to do with what Christmas is really about? (Pause)

Isaiah doesn’t say “let’s go look at the lights and decorations”. He says **“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.”** He says come, **“let us walk in the light of the LORD.”**

Pictures like **“the mountain of the Lord”** and **“the house of the God of Jacob”** and **“the mountain of the Lord’s temple”** must be understood spiritually. But many have misunderstood and looked at this literally, and have been tempted to make the words apply to the physical world.

Many – including some who think of themselves as “evangelical Christians” – think that Christians must literally go to the temple mount in Jerusalem – which is right now occupied by a Muslim holy place – and prepare it for Jesus to come so he can rule for 1000 years on earth.

The fulfillment of God’s Old Testament promises has become the most important and highest point of the world’s history. Isaiah’s words here are a restatement and repetition of God’s words to Abraham: **“all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”** Genesis 12:3 (NIV2011)

What did this mean for people in Isaiah’s day? They, of course, believed that they were living in the last days and God promised he would send his Messiah. Believers had confidence that the Messiah’s work would become the most important time in the history of Judah and Jerusalem. But it is greater than just something for them.

The Lord would draw people of all nations to come and learn of his love for sinners. God had promised in the book of Genesis, when Jacob gave blessings and promises to his children that the Savior, the Messiah, would come from the tribe of Judah. We read: ***“The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his.”*** Genesis 49:10 (NIV)

For the people of Judah and Jerusalem their religion and what they continued to learn about God was centered at the temple in Jerusalem. That was the place where God had made his presence known. We read in Scripture: ***“When Solomon had finished the temple of the LORD ... the LORD appeared to him at night and said: ‘I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a temple for sacrifices.’*** 2 Chronicles 7:11-12 (NIV2011) That temple in Jerusalem was a symbol of God's presence with his people and a reminder of his promises.

Without the promise of the Savior, God would not have called Israel out of Egypt, would not have given them a land of their own, and he would not have established a worship center for his people in Jerusalem at the temple.

Isaiah here tells about the great significance and importance of all those prophecies as they would be fulfilled in Jesus. The coming of people to the mountain of the Lord is God's calling, gathering, and enlightening the whole Christian Church on earth. People come to God because of the promises he fulfilled in Christ. They hear about the work of Jesus whenever they hear the true Gospel, the record of how God fulfilled his promises for the salvation of the world.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, that Gospel draws people of all nations to God. Isaiah wrote that they will stream to God's mountain. Once people hear and believe the Gospel, they invite others to learn of God's grace. This is a natural response to the Gospel.

Isaiah is looking forward to the time of the Messiah and beyond. He is also looking to the judgement of all nations on the last day.

What does this mean for us? We are living in ***“The last days”*** that Isaiah speaks of. We must look to ***“the mountain of the Lord's temple”*** because that is where our salvation was accomplished. It was on the holy mountain in Jerusalem, Mount Zion, that Jesus died. He literally died outside the city, but he was tried and convicted in the city on ***“the mountain of the Lord.”***

As God's beloved children – just like Judah and Jerusalem – we need to gather around the Word of the Lord and learn his ways. And we can learn his ways only through his Word. That happens when you personally search the scriptures and when you study and hear God's Word as it is taught faithfully.

You Christian parents have the responsibility to teach your children God's ways. But in order to teach something, you must first know it. And to know the ways of the Lord you must look into his Word and study it.

Just as in Isaiah's day God told him to admonish and encourage the people God had chosen and called out of the unbelieving world to come and learn – or relearn – and continue to keep learning – the ways of the Lord, so God also tells us the same thing.

One cannot walk the path of God without the power of the Gospel, and God promises that such power comes through hearing the Word of God.

Jerusalem – Mount Zion – was established figuratively ***“as chief among the mountains.”*** Notice that it says ***“many peoples will come.”*** That is more than just “many people” in general. It is not just many individuals, but it is people of many nations, many Gentile nations. We may think first of the people who came to faith in Jesus Christ on Pentecost, when 3000 souls accepted the message of Peter and the others who spoke in their own languages and were baptized.

It may be a surprise to you that the word “Gospel” is not found in the Old Testament. But we know that the truth of the Gospel is found throughout the Old Testament. It starts in Genesis 3 where we read ***“And I will put enmity between you [Satan] and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”*** Genesis 3:15 (NIV) and ends in the last verses of Malachi: ***“See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers”*** Malachi 4:5-6 (NIV)

If we look at only a narrow meaning of “law” and “Gospel”, we will be missing all the beautiful Gospel promises of the Savior and all he will do for sinful mankind as they are found in the Old Testament.

The word “Law” is often used, especially in the Old Testament, to mean the entirety of God’s message – both Law as we learn it from the Commandments – and the good news – the Gospel – of the coming Messiah. The word “Law” is often a synonym for the entire Word of God, especially as it is used in places in the Psalms. We quote just two examples. One also includes different words God uses for his Word, his “law”: ***“The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. the precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes.”*** Psalm 19:7-8 (NIV) Then there is the believer’s request of God: ***“Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.”*** Psalm 119:18 (NIV)

It is the Gospel that brings people together. You want peace? God ***“will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.”*** But what kind of peace will it be? That is not the kind of peace that any human can create here on earth. That is everlasting peace. That happens when one walks in the light of the Lord.

The kind of peace that Christ brings is peace with God. What will it cost? It will cost the Messiah his life as he dies as punishment for all the sins of all mankind.

Jesus told his disciples ***“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”*** John 14:27 (NIV)

We look at these words of Isaiah’s promise with the spiritual eyes of faith, not with the physical eyes of politics. The peace promised is peace with God based on Christ and his forgiveness. It affects what believers do. They live at peace with one another and the world around them as Christ tells us in the Sermon on the Mount: ***“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.”*** Matthew 5:9 (NIV) Peace with God changes human hearts. Believers then share that peace with anyone who will listen.

Isaiah saw a spiritual peace based on God’s love in Christ. Only when Christ returns will sinful human beings set aside their sinful natures, and then all hostility and conflict will cease. Believers focus on the real peace within and ahead, not on any human hopes or promises of political peace on earth among nations, peoples, and tribes.

So Isaiah says: ***“Come, O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the LORD.”*** The promises of God bring this response: walking in the light of the Lord. What this means is to know the light, to recognize it, and then to follow the path that light illuminates.

By faith in Jesus, we have been included in the ***“house of Jacob”*** – another name for the church, the invisible church, the Communion of Saints.

We too are encouraged to use the Word of God so that it might show us the path and give us power to walk as the Lord directs. That is the hope and the promise we have. Just as the Jews spread their religion of the true God wherever they went, so New Testament believers did this too, right up until now. We are to share the hope and the promise we have, too. May we always walk in the light of God’s paths, inviting others to come into the light of Jesus, too. Jesus Christ is the true light of Advent. Amen.