

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church Des Moines, WA December 1, 2013

Isaiah 2:1-5

The Mountain of the Lord

1. **The Christmas Preparations**
2. **Eagerly Anticipating the Savior through Isaiah**
3. **The Mountain of the LORD**

Hymns: "Come To Us Emmanuel"
29 – 1 – 19 - 2

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

¹ This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem: ² In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. ³ Many peoples will come and say, "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." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. ⁴ He 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. ⁵ Come, O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the LORD.

Has it begun for you? Since it is already December 1st, I'd venture to say that if your preparation for Christmas hasn't begun yet, you're already behind! There sure are many preparations to make. Decorations, shopping, cooking and baking, travel, and parties. Perhaps all of that is why we are pushed to make our Christmas preparations earlier and earlier each and every year. It is a busy time of year, and the preparation certainly threatens to make Christmas into nothing but a giant checklist of "to-do's." that we want to get through as quick as possible.

That can certainly happen with our spiritual preparation for Christmas as well. As we sing the same songs year after year and hear the Message

that we already know so well, perhaps this season of Christmas preparation with its extra services and events feels like another "to-do" we just want to get through.

Yet, this month before Christmas, Advent is what we need. During Advent, we prepare spiritually for the coming of Christ. It is a time to reflect personally on why we need a Savior; to remember how God brought that Savior into the world; to remove all of the distractions that would keep us from eagerly anticipating the day our Savior came into the world. This preparation is important, because the Savior's birth, the Savior's life, the Savior's death, it means nothing for us if we do not see our deep need for it.

So, how to prepare? Dig deep into His Word to understand what God was doing. We can do that by going to the Old Testament.

Going to the Old Testament is an important part of our Advent preparation, but it can also be difficult. It requires a discerning eye as we look at prophecies that were spoken with direct fulfillments for the Old Testament people of Israel, but also distant fulfillments for all the people of God. A quick glance or casual perusal through the words of Old Testament prophecy can often leave a Christian with a murky understanding of what God was saying. Stylistically, its prophetic words stand in contrast to the New Testament Gospels, where the story of Jesus' birth, life, and death are laid out in clear narrative.

Through the Old Testament, though, we have a special view of Jesus' coming into this world. The story of Jesus was not just a moment in time that happened 2,000 years ago. The story of Jesus is as expansive as the history of the world. And the Old Testament allows us to see that through the many promises and pictures that God gave to his people. It can only serve to deepen our appreciation of God's grace, his love that has carried through every generation.

Think of it as a song. The New Testament is the melody, on its own it provides a clear and beautiful message. But then the Old Testament is the harmony, useless without the melody, but together only adds to the beauty of what we hear.

When Luther spoke of the Old Testament, he said this, "The chief and leading theme of all the prophets is their aim to keep the people in eager anticipation of the coming of Christ." That is what we are striving for as we prepare during this Advent season, that we might continue in eager anticipation for the coming of Christ!

So, let's begin our prep today, looking deep into the words of Isaiah to help us eagerly anticipate our Savior.

Our message begins with these words, ***"This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem."*** Isaiah starts by making clear that the message that he has for us did not originate in his own mind. It was a vision that he saw, a picture of what things would be like. This vision came from the God who plans, the God who carries out, the God who completes.

This vision was about Judah and Jerusalem. Whenever we see Judah and Jerusalem referenced by the prophets, it is a moment for us to stop and take note. Is the prophet talking about the immediate future, in which case he would be referring to the physical nation, the land and people of Old Testament Israel? Or, is the prophet talking about the long-term future, in which case he would be referring to the true people of God, the Church.

Quite often, the prophet is speaking to both and his words have both immediate and long-term truths and implications. In that way, Isaiah was sent to be a prophet to the country and king of Judah, but, more than that, he was also sent to be a prophet for the people of God of all time, which includes you and me. That is a truly remarkable thought for us to consider. As Isaiah the prophet wrote these words 3,600 years ago, he was writing words that concerned us, he was writing words for us, he was writing words about us. How truly awesome, that we have been a part of this plan of a Savior every step of the way!

Isaiah continues in verse two by giving this vision. It begins by setting the time frame, ***"In the last days."*** Once again, any mention of time by the prophets of the Old Testament should cause us to pause and investigate. For Isaiah and his contemporaries, everything about the coming Savior was in the distant future. They didn't view Christ's first coming on Christmas and Christ's second coming at the end of the world as separated events. They looked forward and knew that Christ was coming to defeat sin, death, and the devil according to God's promise. They also looked forward and knew that Christ would establish his eternal kingdom made up of those who believe in him as Savior. It was all just part of the "last days" that were up ahead.

However, our view of time is different. We live in the midst of the last days. We look back and see Christ's first coming. We look ahead and see Christ's second coming. For us, the "last days" do not

happen as one or in rapid succession, like the Old Testament people saw it.

Here is what I mean. Let's say that you are driving up I-5 toward Seattle. When you get to Boeing Field and look toward the city, the Space Needle appears to be right in downtown amongst the other skyscrapers. However, once you are in the city, you quickly realize that the Space Needle isn't all that close to downtown, there is a good distance between them.

That is the difference between being in the distant Old Testament and the immediate New Testament. Our place influences our perspective. And that is important to remember as we hear Isaiah pointing ahead to the day that ***"the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills."***

In Isaiah's day, mountains were significant. They were the places where kingdoms were established and also fortified. The kingdom of Israel was established when David conquered the mountain on which he would build the city of Jerusalem. For hundreds of years, that mountain served as the center of Israel's kingdom as home to the palace and also the Temple of the LORD. A short time after Isaiah lived, Jerusalem would be conquered and the people would be devastated.

So Isaiah's words here were a message of hope. Though the people's sins and disobedience would lead to trouble and destruction, eventually God would restore his temple on another mountain. And this mountain would be different. It would be chief among the mountains, it would be raised above the hills.

But that message from Isaiah was misunderstood by many. As the people of Israel heard Isaiah's words, they held to the belief that Christ would establish an earthly rule from an earthly mountain. They looked forward to the time when Israel would become the most powerful kingdom on the face of the earth. That hope became the downfall for much of the Jewish nation and their vision of an earthly king establishing an earthly kingdom is what caused them to reject Jesus when he came.

Here, our perspective is a blessing. As people in the New Testament, we are able to see that mountain as it is being established. When Jesus came, he was fighting to destroy spiritual enemies; he would die to win victory over the devil; he would rise and ascend to establish a kingdom that would last forever. It was the most important work that was ever done. Isaiah was pointing to that work as the highest point in the history of the world. Every

other mountain in human history (every religion, every kingdom, every philosophy, every achievement) would pale in comparison to what this coming Christ would achieve. It is also chief because it lasts forever. And though that is not universally acknowledged now, it will be clear to all nations when he comes at the 2nd coming.

Isaiah also proclaims a wonderful truth. In the Old Testament, God's Kingdom was the nation of Israel; God's people were the people of Israel. It was exclusive. That all nations of the earth would be a part of God's kingdom would've been difficult to envision for the people of Isaiah's time. Yet, God showed Isaiah that people of all nations would not just be a part of this kingdom, they would stream to it. This new kingdom would be a place of security for all nations. Any who want freedom from their sinful nature, the sinful world, and Satan himself can find safety on the Mountain of the Lord.

Unlike Isaiah and the people of his day who could only look and hope, we get to take part in the establishing of the mountain. It is our duty to bring others to the mountain to see what the LORD has done.

What we offer to people is described in verse 4, ***"The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He 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."*** What Isaiah describes in those words is peace.

For those who live on the mountain of the Lord, they have peace with God that flows into the rest of their lives. This peace is what Jesus promised to the members of his kingdom when he left after his 1st coming saying, ***"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). As we live in peace now, knowing that our relationship with God is restored, we also wait for Christ's 2nd coming, when we will have peace that cannot be disturbed by the trouble of this world.

As we close today, and as we begin our Advent preparation, may we marvel at the mountain of the Lord, established through the work done at Christ's 1st coming. May we give thanks for the peace that its establishment brings into our lives. May we work to prepare ourselves and others for the day when Christ will come again. And as we do that, let us join together with Isaiah in proclaiming, ***"Come, O house***

of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord." And in the light of God's Word, we get to see the Savior we eagerly anticipate.