

Isaiah 2:1-5

This is the message that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

²This will take place in the latter days:
The mountain of the LORD's house will be established
as the chief of the mountains.
It will be raised above the hills,
and all nations will stream to it like a river.
³Many peoples will come and say,
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob.
Then he will instruct us about his ways,
and we will walk in his paths."
For from Zion the law will go out,
and the LORD's word will go out from Jerusalem.
⁴He will judge between the nations,
and he will mediate for many peoples.
Then they will beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into blades for trimming vines.
Nation will not lift up sword against nation,
nor will they learn war anymore.
⁵O house of Jacob, come,
and let us walk in the light of the LORD.

The Mountain of the Lord

I.

Everything just keeps getting better in the world, doesn't it? Of course, now and then there are a few potholes and roadblocks and switchbacks.

This year has brought with it plenty of changes that have set us back a bit, but would any of us *really* want to go back to some previous year? I don't think any of us would want to go back to the last huge pandemic—the flu of 1918. There were more than twice the number of deaths in the US as there have been with this current pandemic with about 1/3 the population. In spite of circumstances that seem dire, none of us would want to go back to *that*.

All kinds of things are better now. While we might pine for the good ol' days, our memories might be faulty. The cars of the 1950's might look kind of cool, but they got horrible fuel mileage and few, if any, safety features; they needed to be tinkered with and tuned up on a regular basis, too; you couldn't really depend on them after they got past about 50 or 60,000 miles, either. Certainly we don't want the computers or phones of a few years ago, or the snail-slow internet speeds that went along with them.

A look back makes us certain that things keep plowing ahead. Things are constantly getting better.

II.

If that's the case, why do we need Advent? Why do we need to prepare our hearts yet again to celebrate the coming of Jesus into the world? If new is better, why are we looking back into the past? Why are the Advent and Christmas seasons so special?

Well...maybe not everything new is better.

So many scientific endeavors of are pushing toward a “greener” lifestyle; it’s an attempt to live in harmony with nature. But the epitome of life in harmony with nature is in the past. Certainly some advocates of a greener lifestyle speak of going to the more so-called “natural” lifestyles of centuries ago. But the epitome of a perfect world was the Garden of Eden. Even the *creatures* of nature lived in perfect harmony with one another. Adam and Eve were living completely, totally in harmony with the natural world as God had created it.

It was sin that messed it all up. Sin brought death. The world is full of death. The world *lives* on death. Larger creatures eat smaller creatures, only to be eaten by creatures that are larger still. Some creatures make their living on the creatures that happen to die naturally—bugs that break down plant or animal matter, or carrion birds that come to feast on what remains at the side of the road.

Death is brutal. Death is ugly. The face of the world is pockmarked with graves. There isn’t enough perfume in the world to cover the stench of death that wafts through the air.

But who wants to think about such things? We spend our hours and days deluding ourselves about such things; we pretend it isn’t so. We pretend to act from pure motives, but we are self-serving, or perhaps a mixture of good motives and bad. We pretend honesty, but twist our stories, exaggerate our innocence, and claim that *other* people are the ones with the false motives. We begin to believe the lies, since we have repeated them so often. Our ears perk up when gossip is whispered into them. Our adulterous hearts enjoy the perversions of human sexuality in the world.

There’s really no point in denying it. Sin is there. Sin permeates our world. As scary as it is, you might as well admit it—you have sinned. And sin brings death. As much as we might think the world is progressing, there’s no hope of getting back to Eden.

III.

God is kind of backwards. He takes things the way they *are*—days of evil and a world filled with sin—and makes them the way things *should be* by transforming them into what *was*.

That’s what our Advent season of the Church Year is all about. Jesus shifts things into reverse. He makes what is old and broken new. Just last week we reflected on what Paul taught: “For since death came by a man, the resurrection of the dead also is going to come by a man. ²²For as in Adam they all die, so also in Christ they all will be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:21-22, EHV). Jesus is the Second Adam, come to make *you* like the first man, only better. He comes to create a heavenly Jerusalem for you, a Jerusalem that is like the Garden of Eden, only better. He is the Sacrifice to end all sacrifices, like the Passover lamb, only better.

“This will take place in the latter days: The mountain of the LORD’s house will be established as the chief of the mountains. It will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it like a river” (Isaiah 2:2, EHV).

Isaiah points ahead to Jesus. The mountain of the Lord’s house will be jacked up so high it will make the Rocky Mountains seem like foothills. Even Mount Everest will pale in comparison. But God is a backwards God. Mere gravity has no pull on what God has set into motion; rivers of nations stream *uphill* to this heaven-scraping peak.

“They will beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into blades for trimming vines. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, nor will they learn war anymore” (Isaiah 2:4, EHV). Up there on God’s holy mountain, swords that were designed to plow open flesh

are hammered into plowshares to open the earth for seed and food and life. Warriors become farmers. Spears are changed into pruning shears. Everything is going backwards. Not just back to nature, back to perfection.

It is for you, the dead, that Jesus lived his life. Advent is his present to you. It is wrapped in the living colors of his skin and flesh and bones and blood. He willingly comes running to those who can't even crawl to him. He comes to you and puts everything bad about you into reverse: from guilt to forgiveness, from lies to truth, from death and shame to life in his name.

He's a backwards God. He's ready, willing, and able to take you back—back to a place you've never been before—back to a place of perfection and innocence.

In fact, he's already accomplished it. It's a done deal, a deal done for you.

“This will take place in the latter days: The mountain of the LORD's house will be established as the chief of the mountains” (Isaiah 2:2, EHV). This peak that reaches to the heavens is the place where God is found. It is a mountain called Zion—the city of the living God. It is the mountain named the Church. When the Creator is lifted up to hang bleeding and dying between heaven and earth, there he lifted up this one holy Christian and apostolic Church, as we call it in the Creed—this mountain. A new and better Zion was formed from the raw materials of his flesh and blood. By his living, bleeding, rising, and ascending, he crafted the high hill where sin and death are no more.

IV.

You are a citizen of this Zion. This mountain is your home. Adam and Eve were kicked out of Paradise, but *you* are pulled back in by the new Adam. You are pulled back up to the Eden that has now become one with Zion—up to the Mountain of the Lord.

There on that high mountain is Christ Jesus. And there *you* are, too.

Near the place called Zion in the Bible was the temple where God lived among his people. On this new Zion there is no temple of wood and stone, but a temple of skin and bones and blood. The evangelist John wrote: “The Word became flesh and dwelled among us” (John 1:14, EHV). Our temple is not a building, but a baby, held in the arms of the Virgin Mary.

Into that temple you have entered. All the nations flow up to this mountain, Isaiah told us, carried there on the river of salvation. Through the waters of baptism you flowed into his flesh. In the body of the Son of God you are cleansed.

Here is not ugliness, but beauty. The stain of your sin vanishes; you are pure and holy in the eyes of the Father.

Everything just keeps getting better in the world. Not so much. Until the last trumpet sounds, the stains of sin will continue in this world. Bombs will explode, bullets will penetrate. True and complete peace will remain unattainable.

But there is a peace not of this world—the peace of Zion. There is a reconciliation between God and mankind. There is a peace that passes all human understanding. God's wrath is doused by the blood of the Holy One.

Paradise is regained. We who lived in the lowlands of darkness and death ascend the Mountain of the Lord to walk in the light of the Lord. Sin is traded in for righteousness. Guilt is replaced by peace in our hearts. Mortality is swallowed up by immortality. For all this Jesus came. All this he did because he wanted *you*. Welcome to the Mountain of the Lord. Amen.