

Last week, the church season we started, which we are in right now, is Advent. Before Advent we were in the Church's Ordinary Time, which is what the Church calls any part of the year which is not Advent, Lent, or the Christmas or Easter seasons. Since Advent means coming, during Advent we are preparing for the coming of Jesus. This Second Sunday of Advent involves lots of review. Last week we learned that to prepare we need to be prayerful, behave, and be ready because Jesus is coming. This is a very important message of Advent. As you'll see in today's gospel, the Church is not finished telling us this message.

In church during this Advent season, you can tell there are differences in the church these last two weeks compared to Ordinary time, for example, the vestments are purple. And there's that wreath in the front of the church, the Advent wreath. A wreath is a circle, with no beginning or end. Who do we know who has no beginning & no end? Of course, God has no beginning or end. And the wreath is made of evergreens. There's a word. *Ever-greens*. Their very name means that they are always green, never changing. God too is never changing. The wreath has candles which are supposed to make you think of light, specifically the light of the world. To us Christians, when we think of the light of the world, we think of Jesus. Each week we light one more candle. The lighting of only one more candle per week means we have to wait until all the candles are lit.

So then besides preparing during the season of Advent, we are also *waiting* for the coming of Jesus. Sometimes waiting can be long and hard. For *thousands* of years the Hebrews had to wait for the coming of the Savior, the Christ, the Redeemer. During all that time, the people had prophets to help them. Prophets were special people who heard the word of God and told it to the people. God sent prophets to remind the people of His promise that He would send a Redeemer to save us all from sin. The prophets would be there to urge the people to get ready for the coming of that Redeemer...

Which brings us to today's first reading from the prophet Isaiah. We hear a lot from the prophet Isaiah throughout Advent. He lived 700 years before Jesus in a time which was filled with wars and conflict for his people in their tiny kingdom. This week's reading has calming words from Isaiah to his anxious countrymen about a more peaceful time after the Messiah comes. How peaceful? Well, think of lions and leopards and wolves. What would happen to you if you went to a zoo and went into the lion's cage or the leopard's cage? Probably nothing good except you'd be on the local news tonight. Well, wait until you hear what Isaiah says about these animals after the Messiah comes.

A reading from the Book of Isaiah (**Isaiah 11:1-4, 5-6, 9**).

The Lord says this: Like a branch that sprouts from a stump, someone from David's family will someday be king. The Spirit of the Lord will take control of him and give him understanding and wisdom and insight. He will be powerful, and he will know and honor the Lord. His greatest joy will be to worship the Lord. He won't judge by appearances or listen to rumors. The poor and the helpless will be treated with fairness and with justice. Honesty and fairness will be his royal robes. Leopards and young goats, and wolves and lambs will lie down and rest in the same field. Calves and lions will eat together and be cared for by a child. Just as water fills the sea, the land will be filled with people who know and honor the Lord. The Word of the Lord.

In this reading, remember who Isaiah is speaking to, the troubled and war-weary Israelites. They need a break from all their conflict. They need a reason to hope. So here's Isaiah describing the interaction between all these animals. For instance, he says the wolf is friendly with the lamb instead of having him for dinner. The same with the leopard and the kid goat and the lion and the calf. In the world of the Messiah where there is peace, if these ferocious animals can be happy and peaceful, shouldn't we human beings be able to do the

same thing? Even today, with all sorts of acts of terror from misguided people, we need to hope for more of the world of peace and tranquility which Isaiah is describing.

Now let's turn our attention to our Psalm for today, Psalm #72.

Responsorial Psalm (**Psalm 72:1, 8, 17**).

Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace forever.

*Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace forever.*

Please help the king to be honest and fair just like you, our God. Let his kingdom reach from sea to sea, from the Euphrates River across all the earth.

*Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace forever.*

May the glory of the king shine brightly forever like the sun in the sky. Let him make nations prosper and learn to praise him.

*Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace forever.*

Isn't it amazing that the psalm has a similar theme? Who figures this stuff out? "Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace forever," and "...all the nations shall proclaim his happiness." The themes of peace and happiness in the world of the new King is pretty much just what Isaiah is talking about.

Today's second reading comes, like so many of our second readings come, from St. Paul, the apostle Jesus picked after He died, when He knocked him off his horse on his way to persecute Christians.

A reading from the second letter of St. Paul to the Romans (**Romans 15:4-6**).

Sisters & brothers: The Scriptures were written to teach and encourage us by giving us hope. God is the one who makes us patient and cheerful. I pray that He will help you live at peace with each other, as you follow Christ. Then all of you together will praise God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¶ The Word of the Lord.

There's Paul speaking about hope we can have when we read the Scriptures. There is hope that Jesus' world of peace is a better world than the one we have, a world with turmoil. Perhaps St. Paul read Isaiah's reading and today's psalm before he wrote today's letter? Actually, in the next few verses that follow today's reading in the Bible, Paul addresses the conflict between early Jewish Christians and non-Jewish Christians, saying that it is God's plan that everyone get along with each other in harmony, just like Isaiah's animals.

Next is the gospel preceded by the gospel acclamation.

*Alleluia, Alleluia. Alleluia, Alleluia.*

Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight His paths: all people shall see the salvation of God.

*Alleluia, Alleluia.*

A reading from the holy gospel according to St. Matthew (**Matthew 3:1-9, 11**).

John the Baptist started preaching in the desert of Judea. He said, "Turn back to God! The kingdom of heaven will soon be here." John was the one the prophet Isaiah was talking about, when he said, "In the desert someone is shouting, 'Get the road ready for the Lord! Make a straight path for him.'" John wore clothes made of camel's hair. He had a leather strap around his waist and ate grasshoppers and wild honey. From Jerusalem and all Judea and from the Jordan River Valley crowds of people

went to John. They told how sorry they were for their sins, and he baptized them in the river. Many Pharisees and Sadducees also came to be baptized. But John said to them: “You bunch of snakes! Who warned you to run from the coming judgment? Do something to show that you have really given up your sins. And don’t start telling yourselves that you belong to Abraham’s family. I tell you that God can turn these stones into children for Abraham. “I baptize you with water so that you will give up your sins. But someone more powerful is going to come, and I am not good enough even to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” The gospel of the Lord.

So, here’s John the Baptist, Jesus’ cousin, wearing camel’s hair and leather and eating honey-coated grasshoppers. (Mm-mm!) But it didn’t matter what he looked like or what he was eating, people from all over were coming to him to be baptized in the Jordan River. Matthew tells us that it was John of whom Isaiah spoke when he said, “A voice of one crying out in the desert, ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight His paths.’” What does, “Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight His paths,” mean? Well, from the First Sunday of Advent last week we learned how to prepare for Jesus’ coming: be prayerful and behave. And “make straight His paths” means cut out all those distractions. Get all that stuff out of the way. That’s why we don’t spend time with cell phones during Mass, for example. No distractions. Keep our focus on Jesus. John’s message is that we should change our lives to be ready for the coming of Jesus, the Messiah, and the kingdom of heaven. And why should we prepare for the kingdom of heaven? Because it is a place of happiness and hope, of peace and tranquility. Be prayerful, behave, and be ready, because Jesus is coming, and His kingdom is one of happiness and peace.

And that, girls and boys, is the lesson in today’s readings. Speak about it with your parents.

Second Sunday of Advent, 2022, Joseph Calderone