

### **What God Wants You to See after this Advent Season!**

***“This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem: 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. 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. 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. Come, O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the LORD.”***

I want you to answer a simple question. What do you want from your church this Advent season? Or, let me put it to you like this. What are you hoping you would look like as you drive home after the Christmas Day worship service? You will experience four Sunday Advent services, three midweek Wednesday Advent services, a Children’s Christmas Eve service and a Christmas Day service. Do you see all these seven services having an effect on you? Or do you see yourself the same as you are today? Does it matter to you?

Or would you like to see yourself more at peace with God and with each other? Would you like to see yourself fighting temptation with renewed energy, more into reading and meditating on God’s Word, more willing to share it, generally happier and full of hope? Let’s go back to our Old Testament reading where God tells us what he sees and wants. It is our prayer that we want the same things.

#### *I. What does God see?*

What did Isaiah see? As he looked over his nation and his church, he was very sad. Sure, he saw people coming to church and making sacrifices, but they were like zombies merely going through the motions. Their hearts were far from the Lord, concentrating rather on how much more money they can make or the comfortable life they were living. Many of his pastors, the priests, behaved the same. And his leaders, the kings, were terrible. Pagan kings would have been better; at least pagan kings would outlaw all religion. But Israel’s kings were worse because they constantly turned God’s people away to idols.

Then God allowed Isaiah to see a bit into the future. In the chapter before our text, God prophesied: ***“But rebels and sinners will both be broken, and those who forsake the LORD will perish. You will be ashamed ... you will be disgraced ... The mighty man will become tinder and his work a spark; both will burn together, and no one to quench the fire.”*** How sad. God’s just anger is coming soon. Isaiah’s church, his beloved temple, will be destroyed. All the cities will be destroyed. Israel as a nation will cease to exist.

That is what Isaiah saw, but God showed him something else. ***“This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem: 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.”*** “The last days” refer to the day Jesus Christ came at Christmas and when he returns on the Last Day. God sees something magnificent in those days. He sees his temple and the mountain on which it is built towering higher than any other mountain. In Jerusalem, the temple was built on Zion. It is hardly a mountain; we would call it a hill. And there were so many more mountains and hills taller than it. But God sees a time when his temple will be rebuilt and its mountain taller than anything else.

How can it be taller? It will not be measured in feet, but in importance. ***“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.”*** This is a picture of God’s Church, the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints. God is simply using the picture of the temple as a picture of his Church. Just as God’s people traveled great distances to worship at his temple, many peoples from all nations will flock to God’s Church. This doesn’t mean people will travel to Jerusalem to visit that Church. The Temple, its mountain and Jerusalem are merely a picture of this Church. As Jesus promised, wherever two or three are gathered in his name around that Word, he will be with us. That is how the Bible defines “church.” God’s Church is people gathering around God’s Word in Jerusalem or Arlington or Greenland, in a nave building like ours or in someone’s living room. This is what makes God’s Church higher than any other mountain or more important than any other nation: his Word will go out and people will come into his Holy, Invisible Church.

And what else does God see? ***“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.”*** On the corner of the United Nations building in New York, they inscribed a part of this verse: ***“They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.”*** Organizations like the United Nations were formed because countries are constantly warring against each other. Will we achieve lasting peace on earth? I am convinced we will not. As long as the devil roams this world and as long as humans are born in the sinful image of man, we will naturally be inclined to all sorts of sin which lead to war.

But God does offer peace, a perfect peace. We see it in part as we ask God to teach us his ways like forgiveness and unselfish love that submits to others. But in heaven, there will be no instruments of war, no need for treaties, no need for armies.

That is what God sees. But what do you see? If you don't see this, then first we have to look at ourselves. And maybe you and I don't want to do that because we know what we will see. Paul nailed it in our epistle reading when he warned about Christ coming to judge the world at any time. He told us, ***"Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather clothes yourselves in the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature."*** We don't usually see the clothing of Christ. We still see the dirty rags of this world. We see ourselves gratifying the desires of the sinful nature. We see it when we actually think it is a good idea for a young couple to live together before marriage. We see in those who have more fun at an out of control party than singing "Hark the Glad Sound! The Savior Comes!" in church. We see jealousy, but then we unleash it as we covet and belittle others who have what we want. And we see it like the days of Noah as we are so busy enjoying work, marriage, life in general, that we don't stream to hear God's Word or to ask God to teach us His ways.

"Wake up," Jesus calls in our gospel reading. "Wake up," we heard Paul warn in our epistle reading. Let's see ourselves for who we are: sinners. And don't be afraid to call yourself one. It is true. But that is not all we see. Over the next few weeks you will see God for who he is. You will see him, Jesus, conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary. You will see him living the life you were suppose to live. You will see him in a few months lifted up on the tree of the cross. He will not only beg God to forgive those crucifying him, he will promise a despicable thief dying next to him paradise that very same day and promises you the same. You will see him dying your death under God's anger. You will see his open tomb and his promise, "Because I live, you too shall live forever." You don't see God thundering at you saying, "Look at what you did." You will see Jesus look say, "Look at what I did!"

## *II. See what God sees.*

Now we begin to see what God sees. We begin to see his Church higher than anything else in this world. And we begin to see ourselves as part of it as these excerpts from 1 Peter promise, how we are, ***"... no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household ... a holy temple ..."*** how we ***"... have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God ... THROUGH JESUS CHRIST."***

Prophecy in the Bible comes in two parts: now and then. We see all of this then, when Christ returns and we enjoy the perfection of God's holy heaven. But we can even see glimpses of it now. We see it in the father who comes home after a very frustrating day with more bills in the mail and a car that needs repair, and yet he sits down with his wife and children and prays and expresses confidence that God will take care of them. We see it in the nursing home, in that lady who struggles with health and memory, who is all but forgotten, yet she remembers Jesus' promise that he is with her always and says, "I am blessed." We see in things like our WELS connection videos and how some Communists in Vietnam who at one time tried to kill us in a war, but they are our brothers and sisters in Christ. We see peace as Christians beg God to teach them his ways and treat their wives, children, husbands, neighbors, fellow employees, themselves as God treats them. We see it when we no longer use our mouths as instruments of war to belittle or gossip, but as instruments of peace as we say, "I forgive you. I will remember this no more." We see Christ descending, graves opening, angels gathering, and the Church ascending.

So, I ask again, what do you want to see as you drive home after the service on Christmas Day morning? See what God sees. Amen.