

ADVENT 1: HOPE

Order of Worship

Countdown

Opening Sequence (Logo/Vision Statement)

Prelude and Theme Intro (What is hope/What gives you hope?)

Lighting the Advent Wreath/Prayer

Stephen and Marilyn Perry

We light the first candle of Advent.

We kindle it with hope.

We long for Jesus to come to our world,
to break through and reign with compassion, justice, and peace.

Let us pray:

Mighty God, creator of the world,
break through all that keeps us from you.

Fill us with hope,
and prepare us to provide hope to our community.

Shine on us, O God of hope;
Guide our path through gloom of night;
Bear within us Wisdom's glory;
Come to us, O Christ the Light.

Amen.

Hymn

Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus

Come thou long expected Jesus
Born to set thy people free
From our fears and sins release us
Let us find our rest in thee
Israel's strength and consolation
Hope of all the earth thou art
Dear desire of every nation
Joy of every longing heart

Born thy people to deliver
Born a child and yet a king
Born to reign in us forever
Now thy gracious kingdom bring
By thine own eternal Spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone
By thine all sufficient merit
Raise us to thy glorious throne

Offering/Prayer

Special Music

Hope is Dawning on the World

Larry Shackley; Lorenz Publishing Co 2020

ART by Alyssa Ross

Scripture Reading

Isaiah 2:2-5

In the days to come the mountain of the Lord's house will be the highest of the mountains. It will be lifted above the hills; peoples will stream to it. Many nations will go and say, "Come, let's go up to the Lord's mountain, to the house of Jacob's God so that he may teach us his ways and we may walk in God's paths."

Instruction will come from Zion; the Lord's word from Jerusalem. God will judge between the nations, and settle disputes of mighty nations.

Then they will beat their swords into iron plows and their spears into pruning tools.

Nation will not take up sword against nation; they will no longer learn how to make war.

Come, house of Jacob, let's walk by the Lord's light.

Hymn

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

O come O come Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee O Israel

Sermon

Shine On with Hope

Rev. Rachael Warner

Advent 1

Isaiah 2:2-5

The season of Advent has arrived, and we are doing our best to get into the spirit. We are trying to push past the trouble of this time. But perhaps we need not rush too much. Advent is meant to be a time of waiting, of preparing. A season of sitting in the dark, knowing that when the time is right the light will come and illuminate all that we've learned and been given in the quiet of the night.

This year, it feels a bit like we've been in an extended Advent that started way back in Lent. Waiting...and waiting...and waiting. For light. For a future with hope. The pain and struggle has been real for us as individuals, for our communities, for our relationships. And so, maybe we don't feel like waiting. Maybe we need a little Christmas right this very moment. Maybe, to keep our hope alive, this Advent will be more of a mashup.

Have you decorated for Christmas? We put up two small trees in our living room this year (yes, they are already up), and I don't think it is a coincidence that we all seem to be spending a little more time in that room than usual, soaking up the glow of the twinkling lights. Snuggling on the sofa to watch tv, work on math homework, pile books for sermon prep, build legos.

My daughter Stella and I spent a whole day this weekend watching Lifetime Christmas movies which, as you know, all have the same basic plot. Yes, judge us. We understand. I'd give you a spoiler alert before I talk about the movies, but if you've seen one, you've seen them all - and they aren't exactly known for their surprise twist endings.

They start with some frustration or loss right around the holiday season - a main character who is lost, struggling, grieving, or lonely. Then a new relationship is introduced - a new neighbor, new boss, new customer, new mechanic at the local shop. The next ingredient: a glimmer of hope. A letter discovered in an old box of forgotten keepsakes, a child working to bring two characters closer together, an ornament that has extra sparkling glitter. Hope builds and builds, and then there's the drop. Something goes wrong and our characters have a falling out, disappoint each other, or get stuck in a miscommunication loop. Everything is falling apart, and it looks grim. Sometimes there's an element of urgency introduced - a holiday project deadline, a collections agency, or even the occasional health scare. Someone or something threatens to squash hope, peace, joy, and love forever.

And then, the magic element. Like I said, there are no real surprises here. Always, every time, a little holiday magic intervenes at just the right moment! A coincidental bumping into each other in the town square, an all-nighter to meet the deadline, a community that rallies together to save the day, an unexpected blizzard trapping our main characters together for hours, or my favorite: the surprise new character suddenly appears with words of wisdom for the main character. And then snow - the romantic kind with the big flakes right at the end, when all is right with the world once again.

The details change, sure, but the arc of the stories are the same.

A fear, a loss, or a threat to stability -> a new or rekindled relationship that is unlikely or inconvenient -> the relationship grows awkwardly -> something interrupts the hopefulness that has been building...the threat returns or a new threat is introduced -> magic -> snow. And kissing. They pretty much all end with kissing.

The tone of these movies is so different from the rest of popular entertainment these days. There are no surprise endings, very rarely any violence or rough language, no superheroes or giant alien robots. They are predictable, cheesy, over the top.

So why can't I stop watching them? What is it about them that draws us in?

Here's the thing. As I was watching movie after movie this weekend, and also doing some Advent worship prep at the same time, I couldn't help but notice the parallels.

Isn't the story of Advent a similar arc? I mean, maybe without all the perfect hair and makeup and definitely without the kissing at the end. Not convinced? Okay, hear me out.

Isaiah lays it out for us like this: a broken relationship between the people and God. Sadness and loss, struggle and fighting, greed and corruption. Then, a new relationship: a Messiah who comes from an unexpected place and is not the hero everyone dreamed of. Building a relationship, a sense of hope. Then a series of ups and downs, interruptions, challenges to the happy ending. And then, finally, hope appears. We know it is God's faithfulness, but sometimes it feels a little like magic, doesn't it? Like wonder and awe and the realization that there are no coincidences, only grace? The deep belief that, no matter how bad it gets, there is hope?

Cheesy movies give us a glimpse into a world where things work out in the end.

Do you know what's even better? The long arc of God's story - where the final scene is so much more fulfilling than snowflakes and kissing.

Amazingly, the final scene in God's story - in our story - was written thousands of years ago, even thousands of years before Jesus was born. It has been told and re-told, written and translated and interpreted hundreds and thousands of times. It is the ultimate example of an ending we already know and yet also wait and yearn for in suspense and with great anticipation. Today we read it in the words of the prophet Isaiah, from the part of this book that dates as far back as the eighth century BC. That's nearly three thousand years ago, and hundreds of years before Jesus would be born. God was already telling this story, inviting people into it, riding the ups and downs with human beings whose loyalty ran hot and cold over and over again.

And so, we begin Advent with Isaiah and with the challenge to shine on, as followers of Jesus, even in difficult times. What does it mean for us to shine on today when we feel more like the bleak midwinter than joy to the world?

Today we consider what it looks like for us to shine on with hope, and we read a passage from Isaiah most notably known for its declaration of peace. It's a famous and beautiful image of the day when the human weapons of war will be turned into the tools of peaceful life together in community. The day when humanity will no longer study how to battle and defeat one another, but instead how to work and live together for the common good. But this week is not the week when we focus on peace - it's the week when we focus on hope. Still, I asked Pastor Laura to read us this passage from Isaiah today. Because it is also a passage about hope. And because it reminds us how interconnected and interdependent these words are, that we space out one by one during the weeks of Advent: hope, peace, joy, love.

So for today, let's talk about how this opening of Isaiah, chapter 2 is a passage about hope. To get the full picture, you'll have to go back and read chapter one - that's your assignment for this

week. Sometime this week, read the first chapter of Isaiah and see if you hear these words that open chapter 2 differently than you heard them when Pastor Laura read them on their own earlier in today's service.

These two chapters are a setup for the entire arc of the book of Isaiah, and really one might argue, for the arc of the whole Bible. Perhaps even the arc of the human story. Human beings fail to uphold faithfulness to God, painful consequences and judgment ensue, God redeems. And so the cycle continues.

The hope of the new thing God is describing in chapter 2 can only be fully appreciated when we consider what comes before it. We struggle, we fumble, we fail. We sin, we wage war against our neighbors, we perpetuate injustice and inequity. Thank God today's reading isn't actually about us. Thank God our hope is not bound to us.

This passage is about God, not about us. Remember the last three weeks when, in Matthew's gospel we discovered that stories about bridesmaids and coins and sheep were actually about the kingdom of God? Guess what? So is this passage, hundreds of years earlier, from the prophet Isaiah. This is a passage about the reign of God. And here's the bottom line: there is no hope in the reign of human beings. In human systems and institutions of power, control, and authority, we end up again and again in the same place. Corruption, greed, selfishness, distance from God. We look for reasons to fight instead of ways to feed the hungry. We focus on how to win instead of how to humble ourselves.

This passage points us to a much more sustainable source of hope. The coming of God's reign or God's kingdom.

Isaiah tells of a day when the people from all nations will come, not by force or conquering, but by choice and with a hunger for God, to the mountain. In Isaiah's time, the mountain top was the setting for divine encounters. The way to God's presence is up. The vision of God's reign is peace and prosperity, not only for some but for all. Does such a vision seem likely, or even possible at the present moment? No. But here's what God seems to continue to believe about us - that we are worth inspiring. The image of God's redemption gives us something to hope for, and also something to live for, to live into. God gives us the gift of imagining what is coming - and it is far better than a romantic ending with snowflakes and kissing. Will we let God's vision motivate us to make a better world even here and now?

Noel Erskine says it this way: "The good news is that tomorrow will be different from yesterday, because the future is based on the promises of God, which are always new...Without God's promise as basis and ground of hope, the future is bound to be a repetition of the past. With that promise, there is a new point of departure, because the future is based on the faithfulness of God."

During the season of Advent, we lift our eyes to the mountain. We look up and look around, and dare to believe that God will still show up. We see the challenges of this present moment as our

most clear opportunity to show the world how children of light shine on in crisis, shine on in times of trouble, shine on in seasons of despair, shine on when hope is wavering. We do not shine on by our own power or our own goodness or our own force of will. We shine on with the light of God's faithfulness - a light that cannot be extinguished by any darkness.

Do these times feel hopeless?

Shine on, dear ones.

Kindle the flame of hope that God has placed within you.

Use it to light the way to a world where God's reign brings forth peace, joy, love, and justice.

Amen.

Hymn

I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light

I want to walk as a child of the light
I want to follow Jesus
God sent the stars to give light to the world
The star of my life is Jesus
In Him, there is no darkness at all
The night and the day are both alike
The Lamb is the light of the city of God
Shine in my heart, Lord Jesus

I want to see the brightness of God
I want to look at Jesus
Clear sun of righteousness, shine on my path
And show me the way to the Father
In Him, there is no darkness at all
The night and the day are both alike
The Lamb is the light of the city of God
Shine in my heart, Lord Jesus

I'm looking for the coming of Christ
I want to be with Jesus
When we have run with patience the race
We shall know the joy of Jesus
In Him, there is no darkness at all
The night and the day are both alike
The Lamb is the light of the city of God
Shine in my heart, Lord Jesus

Pastoral Prayer

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn

The King of Glory Comes

The King of glory comes
The nation rejoices
Open the gates before him
Lift up your voices
Who is the King of glory
How shall we call him
He is Emmanuel
The promised of ages

The King of glory comes
The nation rejoices
Open the gates before him
Lift up your voices
In all of Galilee
In city or village
He goes among his people
Curing their illness

The King of glory comes
The nation rejoices
Open the gates before him
Lift up your voices
Sing then of David's Son
Our Savior and brother
In all of Galilee was never another

The King of glory comes
The nation rejoices
Open the gates before him
Lift up your voices

Benediction

Postlude