

ADVENT 2: PEACE

Order of Worship

Countdown

Opening Sequence (Logo/Vision Statement)

Prelude and Theme Intro (What is peace?/How are you a peacemaker?)

Angels We Have Heard on High by Smith

Lighting the Advent Wreath/Prayer

We light the second candle of Advent.

We kindle it with peace.

We seek God's comfort in times of conflict.

We long for Jesus to transform our hearts and our world.

Let us pray:

Saving God, heal us with your peace.

Heal your land and your people.

Prepare us to be changed by your peace

Teach us to be tender and just, as you are. Amen.

Shine on us, O God of peace;

Guide our path through gloom of night;

Bear within us Wisdom's glory;

Come to us, O Christ the Light.

Amen.

Hymn

Hail to the Lord's Anointed

Hail to the Lord's Anointed
Great David's greater Son
Hail in the time appointed
His reign on earth begun
He comes to break oppression
To set the captive free
To take away transgression
And rule in equity

To Him shall prayer unceasing
And daily vows ascend
His kingdom still increasing
A kingdom without end
The tide of time shall never
His covenant remove
His name shall stand forever
That name to us is love

Offering/Prayer

Special Music

The Birthday of a King

arr. Deis, Men's Quartet

Scripture Reading

Isaiah 11:1-9

A shoot will grow up from the stump of Jesse; a branch will sprout from his roots.
The Lord's spirit will rest upon him, a spirit of wisdom and understanding,
a spirit of planning and strength, a spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord.
He will delight in fearing the Lord.
He won't judge by appearances, nor decide by hearsay.
He will judge the needy with righteousness,
and decide with equity for those who suffer in the land.
He will strike the violent with the rod of his mouth;
by the breath of his lips he will kill the wicked.
Righteousness will be the belt around his hips, and faithfulness the belt around his waist.
The wolf will live with the lamb,
and the leopard will lie down with the young goat;
the calf and the young lion will feed together,
and a little child will lead them.
The cow and the bear will graze.
Their young will lie down together, and a lion will eat straw like an ox.
A nursing child will play over the snake's hole; toddlers will reach right over the serpent's den.
They won't harm or destroy anywhere on my holy mountain.
The earth will surely be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, just as the water covers the sea.

Hymn

Arise, Shine

Arise shine
For your light has come
And the glory of the Lord
Has risen upon you

Sermon

Shine On with Peace

Today is the second Sunday in Advent, and together we have lit the candle of peace. If only it were that simple, right? The fact that making peace isn't quite that simple is a reminder to us that while we are called to be peacemakers in our world, we cannot bring about real, lasting peace outside of God's presence ushering us into...

...you guessed it. The kingdom of God.

Based on our reading today from Isaiah, chapter 11, some call this the peaceable kingdom. The image we receive this week from the prophet depicts the reign of God as a time when all of creation will live in peace together.

It's a lovely image, and also perhaps a difficult one to take seriously. Over this year of pandemic, we've struggled to keep the peace in our own home, and let's not even get into the tone of our public discourse this year. We all know it has not been peaceful.

What is the point, I wonder, in reading and studying a passage of Scripture that is so far removed from our present reality? What relevance could Isaiah's unlikely vision have to offer us. It's too far out there, too pie in the sky. It's nice for a painting, but not for the complex realities of our time.

At least it seems that way, until we consider what was happening when this word came to Isaiah in the first place - when the Assyrian armies were marching on Israel, who had been essentially handed over to be conquered by an overly ambitious king with misplaced allegiances. Hmm.

This prophecy comes to a world where greed and a hunger for power have eclipsed decency and integrity, where the poor have been trampled upon and corruption is how the game is played. This is not a naive vision of sentimentalized peace where we all just get along and act sweetly to one another and pretend everything is fine. This is a call to action to those who would live in the reign of God. This is a call to striving for those who still believe that a Messiah is coming. This is a call to those who yearn, deep in their bellies, for peace that is not complete until the poor have been vindicated and the oppressed restored to equity.

Isaiah tells us that the Prince of Peace will come.

Isaiah also tells us that some things will have to go. We don't get to have peace and keep our greed. We don't get to have peace and keep our cravings for power. We don't get to have peace and be in control. We don't get to have peace and behave as predators.

We began reading at chapter 11, where the beautiful image of a coming Messiah is described as a shoot that shall come out of the stump of Jesse. A shoot - a new, young branch growing up out of...a stump. But where did that stump come from? We read this text often at this time of year, yet another beautifully poetic passage foretelling the coming of the Messiah, who will make God's kingdom a reality on earth.

We read these beautiful passages in the season of Advent because we believe that the prophet is pointing to Jesus. We bask in the warmth of the images of God's reign, of peace and prosperity and justice for all people.

But Isaiah is not all sweetly snuggling with lambs and taming of predators.

So where did that stump come from?

Well, back in chapters 9 and 10, Isaiah describes God's judgement first upon Israel and then upon the Assyrians with the image of cutting down trees. It seems possible that this specific

stump, the stump of Jesse, might refer to what has been left when exile cuts off the monarchy in Israel. Fred Gaiser of Luther Seminary describes it this way:

“David’s family tree looked bleak in the eighth century—a mere stump of its former glory—under attack by the Assyrian hordes that would take captive much of the northern kingdom and turn the southern kingdom into a vassal state.”

All hope is lost for the people of Israel. Their former glory, their God-anointed leadership, their dream of mutual relationship with God cut off.

And yet, here in the ruins - a stump. So much has been lost. So much has changed.
And yet, here in the ruins - God promises a Messiah will come.

God will bring new life to these ruins, graft a new family tree to this old stump.
And there will, one day, when all is said and done, be peace.

It’s tempting to sit in the second half of the reading, isn’t it? Wolf and lamb, leopard and kid, calf and lion. All together, resting and peaceful, safe enough for even a child to live among them? But how do we get there?

In the earlier verses of chapter 11, Isaiah describes the Messiah who is coming - one who will be wise and understanding, mighty and filled with knowledge, God-fearing intuitive. And there is a clear progression of events that leads to the peaceable kingdom. One that might be hard to accept if you, like me, prefer sunshine and rainbows and no fighting.

The messiah will usher in the peaceable kingdom, the reign of God, by raising up those who have been held down.

The messiah will usher in the reign of God’s peace by making judgments that create equity.

And the messiah will usher in the reign of God’s peace by destroying wickedness.

Peace that does not reconcile poverty, that does not contend with inequity, that does not break down injustice - is not peace (not God’s peace).

God’s peace is not superficial. It doesn’t even seem to be very polite. This is transformation, and it is going to be painful. To live in God’s reign of peace means to release all our instincts for power and control, personal gain and survival of the fittest. In God’s peaceable kingdom, there is enough for everyone. When we finally realize this, we can give up our predatory ways and seek the survival and thriving of all. We do not need to live in our attack-or-be-attacked world any longer. And the preyed upon will no longer need to hide in fear, but will be empowered to live fully in community.

Now, you might be getting a bit offended if you think I’m calling you a predator - I’d be offended about that. And you might be offended if you think I’m calling you prey. So let me be clear. I’m

not calling you either one. In fact, I'd like to suggest a prayer practice for you this week. An Advent meditation on peace, deep peace, hard-earned peace, destroying wickedness peace.

Try this week reading Isaiah 11:6-9 out loud once a day. And then sit quietly each day and meditate on these two questions: In what areas of my life do I feel like a predator, prone to aggression or surviving at someone else's expense? In what areas of my life do I feel like prey, vulnerable to attack, defenseless, or afraid?

The coming of God's peaceable kingdom will require us all to be changed, transformed, and maybe even cut off so that something new can grow. Where we are predators, we will have to learn vulnerability and reliance on others. And where we are prey, we will be empowered and uplifted.

For today, as for all the Advents of my life and of yours, we wait.
We wait and long and hope and pray for the Messiah to come.
We dream of the day when Jesus will, once and for all, usher in God's reign.

What I think is the best news of all is that, unlike Isaiah, we have seen Jesus.
We know him.
And so, we do not have to wait idly.
Our transformation has already begun.

I love what scholar Stacey Simpson Duke writes in her commentary on this passage:
"Isaiah is clear that we are not the ones who usher in a new era; it is God who brings it forth. Some would therefore say that Isaiah's call is a call not to action but to hope; but hope, in the end, is action, with the power to overturn old assumptions and sad cynicism, to give us new eyes and to heal our warring hearts."

In just a few minutes, we will move into a time of Communion together - in this virtual gathering of worship. As we center our hearts, I offer you this prayer I wrote this week, an Advent prayer for Seekers of Peace:

Holy God, make me a seeker of peace.
I know, that is a heavy ask.
Such a transformation would take a miracle.
Can these frustrated, angry tears
become the water that nourishes compassion within me?
Can the craving that claws at my chest,
urging me always to argue every last point with every last person
until my logic and rhetoric and clever wit have destroyed them
become a sincere desire for meaningful conversations
where I learn from how others have seen and heard and felt and tasted
this world I thought I understood so well?
Can I yet learn to embody your living example

of fierce vulnerability, unwavering commitment to justice,
and unwillingness to settle for oppression
without hardening my heart against others?
It feels daunting - no - impossible.
And yet, here you are, born into such a world, inviting me
to seek peace born of justice with you.
Give me the strength to say yes to your peace
when it would be so much easier to choose mine.
Amen.

Hymn

The Canticle of the Turning

Hannah Braasch and Brittany Wedlund

My soul cries out with a joyful shout
That the God of my heart is great
And my spirit sings of the wondrous things
That you bring to the ones who wait

You fixed your sight on your servant's plight
And my weakness you did not spurn
So from east to west shall my name be blest
Could the world be about to turn

My heart shall sing of the day you bring
Let the fires of your justice burn
Wipe away all tears for the dawn draws near
And the world is about to turn

Though I am small, my God, my all,
You work great things in me
And your mercy will last from the depths
Of the past to the end of the age to be

Your very name puts the proud to shame
And to those who would for you yearn
You will show your might, put the strong to flight
For the world is about to turn

My heart shall sing of the day you bring
Let the fires of your justice burn
Wipe away all tears for the dawn draws near
And the world is about to turn

From the halls of power to the fortress tower
Not a stone will be left on stone
Let the king beware for your
Justice tears every tyrant from his throne

The hungry poor shall weep no more
For the food they can never earn
There are tables spread, every mouth be fed
For the world is about to turn

My heart shall sing of the day you bring
Let the fires of your justice burn
Wipe away all tears for the dawn draws near
And the world is about to turn

Though the nations rage from age to age
We remember who holds us fast
God's mercy must deliver us
From the conqueror's crushing grasp

This saving word that our forebears heard
Is the promise which holds us bound
'Til the spear and rod can be crushed by God
Who is turning the world around

My heart shall sing of the day you bring
Let the fires of your justice burn
Wipe away all tears for the dawn draws near
And the world is about to turn

Pastoral Prayer

The Lord's Prayer

Special Music

Look at That Star

(prepare your Communion)

Look at that star shine in the night
Look at that star shine in the night
Look at that star shine in the night
Showing the way to Bethlehem

Look at that star shine in the night

Look at that star shine in the night
Look at that star shine in the night
Showing the way to Bethlehem

Mary and Joseph saw that star
Went on a journey, traveled afar
Showing the way to a stable bare
Mary gave birth to a baby there

Look at that star shine in the night
Look at that star shine in the night
Look at that star shine in the night
Showing the way to Bethlehem

Mary had a little baby boy
Filled the world with hope and joy
Heavenly angels dressed in light
Sang for joy that holy night

Look at that star shine in the night
Look at that star shine in the night
Look at that star shine in the night
Showing the way to Bethlehem

Look at that star in the eastern sky
Look at that star and wonder why
Baby came down from heaven on high
Showing the way to glory

Look at that star
Look at that star
Showing the way

Look at that star shine in the night
Look at that star shine in the night
Look at that star shine in the night
Showing the way to Bethlehem

Communion at Home

May you know that the God of comfort is with you.

And may you see the God of hope with you.

Open wide our anxious hearts!

We open them to God's peace.

Let us give thanks and share our joy.

In this space and time, we offer God our love and praise.

The dawn of hope rests on the horizon

And beams of love reach our doubting hearts.

We celebrate the newness of this season-

Waiting to see how the Christ will appear in our world.

Even in our despair, a glimmer of hope reaches into our twilight

Beckoning us to breathe and wait...

Our story tells us that the Christ child whose birth we anticipate

Will one day sit at tables with strangers and friends,

Building relationships filled with love and grace.

We see this as he fed the multitude,

Turned water into wine,

And ate with dear ones the night before his death.

He took the bread, blessed it, and broke it.

Eat in remembrance of me, he said.

He took the cup, and in his blessing

Reminded them that when they sipped from the fruit of the vine

To drink in remembrance of him.

Jesus. The Christ. Emmanuel – God with us.

Light of the World. The Word of Life.

No matter how we know him

Or what name we call him,

He is our hope, our peace, our joy, and our love.

May the Spirit bless us and these elements as we commune to remember him.

Let us pray:

For the nourishment of spirit, mind, and body,

For hope that we begin to see,

And for comfort from the Prince of Peace,

We share our gratitude, Gracious God.

Encourage us in these shortened days.

**Through the long nights of this season,
May your hope carry us until dawn arrives again.**

Amen.

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Hymn

O Come, All Ye Faithful

O come all ye faithful
Joyful and triumphant
O come ye
O come ye to Bethlehem
Come and behold Him
Born the King of angels

O come let us adore Him
O come let us adore Him
O come let us adore Him
Christ the Lord

Sing choirs of angels
Sing in exultation

Sing all ye citizens
Of heaven above
Glory to God
All glory in the highest

Benediction

Postlude