

December 1, 2019
The First Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 2:1-5

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

¹ **THE WORD** that Isaiah son of Amoz **SAW** concerning Judah and **Jerusalem**.

² In days to come
the mountain of the Lord's house
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
and shall be raised above the hills;
all **the nations** shall stream to it.

³ Many peoples shall come and say,
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the house of the God of Jacob;
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may **walk** in his paths."
For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

⁴ He shall judge between **the nations**,
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;
they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.

⁵ O house of Jacob,
come, let us **walk**
in the light of the Lord!

Matthew 24:36-44

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

³⁶ "But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

³⁷ For as the days of **Noah** were, so will be the coming of **the Son of Man**. ³⁸ For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of **the Son of Man**. ⁴⁰ Then two will be in the field; one will be

The Book of Isaiah, together with Jeremiah are the two great prophets of the Bible. We all too often forget that the prophets write poetry, not just in rhyme but word poems that invite us to use our creative imagination to see the world through the eyes of God. Isaiah prophesied during the latter half of the 8th century BCE. His poetry describes a period of destruction (586 BCE) and exile and the return of the people from Babylon to the Promised Land (535 BCE). The vision we read today is also found nearly verbatim in Isaiah 25 and Micah 4. This vision, which was the foundational vision of God's promised future for the world, is commonly read during the season of Advent, in particular on this first Sunday of Advent, the first Sunday of the new Church Year. This new year begins in hope, looking not to escape to the future, but to welcome and recognize it in today's reality.

Jerusalem in Isaiah the city of Jerusalem is a vexing and unending problem. It's the locus of national pride, self-sufficiency and self-serving religion. That arrogant enterprise is massively critiqued and condemned by the prophet. The city isn't totally dismissed though. For Jerusalem has a crucial role to play in God's future

THE WORD that Isaiah son of Amoz **SAW**: notice the curious beginning, which invites us to read with creative imagination. This is a poem, something one hears but that the prophet sees. WE're invited and challenged to look through different eyes, the eyes of God to see what will be that is not yet. As the word-vision unfolds we see that it is dominated by sharp contrasts between what is and what will be, between today and the days to come, between the shabbiness of the destroyed Jerusalem (in Isaiah's day) and the glorious future that is imagined.

the nations ἔθνος /ethnos/ The word can vary in meaning ranging from all the Gentile (or non-Jewish) peoples, to both the Gentiles and the Jews, and here seems to be a synonym of "the whole inhabited world."

the mountain of the Lord: repeatedly God is glimpsed and experienced on mountaintops in the Bible. What other stories of experiencing the power of God on the mountaintop can you remember?

walk walking is commonly used as a metaphor in the Bible for living a life of faith – such as in Psalm 1:1 "Blessed are they who do not walk in the counsel of the ungodly." Faith is less an adherence to a set of beliefs

taken and one will be left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴² ΚΕΕΡ ΑWAKE therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³ But understand this: if *the owner of the house* had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have ΣTAYED ΑWAKE and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴ Therefore you also must be ready, for **the Son of Man** is coming at an unexpected hour.

QUESTIONS FOR THE PRACTICE OF EXAMEN & CONTEMPLATION

- **What word, phrase or image grabs your attention?**
- **Both scriptures cast a vision of God's preferred and promised future for the world. What does it resemble?**
- **How do you see or glimpse that future in today's world? How do we need it?**
- **These texts, chosen to reinforce the theme of the season of Advent, invite us to active hope, to resilience and endurance, to be awakened from the slumber into which the world lulls us, to be ready because God is one the move. How do you feel like you've been asleep, needing to be awoken? How do you struggle to live from and towards hope?**
- **What invitation to do you hear in this word about how to act, speak, be(come) or to live in our relationships?**

The Gospel of Matthew. The Jewish nature of Matthew's Gospel may suggest that it was written in the Holy Land, or Syrian Antioch. Since his Gospel was written in Greek, Matthew's readers were obviously Greek-speaking. They also seem to have been Jews. Many elements point to Jewish readership, yet the gospel maintains a universal outlook. It's believed to have been written in the 1st century, most likely in the Roman province of Syria, maybe in the city of Antioch where there was a large synagogue community at that time.

Matthew's main purpose is to prove to his Jewish readers that Jesus is their Messiah. He does this primarily by showing how Jesus in his life and ministry fulfilled the OT Scriptures.
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Noah | the owner of the house : these two principal characters of the text insist upon a contrast between the world as it is and the world as it will be, between seeing and imagining, between complicity and passivity and active preparation and expectant anticipation.

the Son of Man, This title comes from the book of Daniel, indicating that the parable is an apocalyptic writing – a scene filled with metaphor and symbol, that reveals that the present injustice is not a permanent way of life.. God's action will reverse it. This title is repeatedly attributed to Jesus of Nazareth in the gospel accounts, intentionally harkening back to this vision of Daniel.

[Then Daniel saw a vision] ¹³ "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. ¹⁴ And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."

The use of this title indicates to us that this is an apocalyptic text, using highly symbolic language to aim to say something that is beyond words.

This text is followed by three parables, the last of which (25:31-26) we read last week and leaves no doubt to what it means to live a life of readiness and watchfulness for the coming of God, the judgement of the last day.

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the image of separation as judgement is common in the gospel: wheat and chaff (Mt 3:12), weeds & wheat (Mt 13:24-30), fish (13:47-50), two men in a field, and two women grinding wheat (24:36-25:30). Here it seems less a question of avoiding or embracing judgement as much as being prepared and expectant of it.