

Isaiah 64:1-9  
“Waiting with Prayer”  
Advent Midweek 1

December 2, 2020  
First Lutheran Church, Glencoe, Minn.  
Pastor Peter Adelsen

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

**[Intro]**

***“Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at your presence – as when the fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil – to make your name known to your adversaries, and that the nations might tremble at your presence! When you did awesome things that we did not look for, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence”*** (Isaiah 64:1-3).

Three days ago, we gathered here in God’s presence – in person, on Facebook, or on cable – on the First Sunday in Advent. Again, with the season of Advent, we begin a new Church Year. At the same time, we prepare for the celebration of the holy incarnation – the coming of Christ on that first Christmas Day.

In today’s Gospel lesson, we heard the account of our Lord’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem. This is a traditional reading for the beginning of the Church Year, as well as on Palm Sunday. For us, we stand between our Lord’s first coming and wait for His second coming on the Last Day. We wait and live by faith, not by sight. Our faith is nourished and made certain as we remember our Lord Jesus, who entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday in order to remove our unrighteousness through His atoning death and resurrection.

The faithful who came before us in the days of the prophet Isaiah also lived by faith as they waited for the Messiah. Their faithfulness is praised in the Book of Hebrews: ***“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen”*** (Hebrews 11:1). ***“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son”*** (Hebrews 1:1-2a). The words of God spoken to the Lord’s Church through the prophets are also spoken to us. They speak to us about the Son of God; indeed, the words they speak are the words of Christ, Himself.

***[We Pray as We Await Our Lord and Live by Faith]***

In our Old Testament lesson, the prophet Isaiah gives us an inspired prayer. It is a prayer of great comfort expressing the longings of God's people during the disastrous years when the Babylonian armies conquered Israel. They destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple, and those who were not slaughtered in the siege were taken away in chains to Babylon. But this prayer is not limited to those dark days. It is also the prayer of the Church for all times whenever the Church is surrounded by God's enemies and when all appears hopeless. It is also our prayer. So, with Isaiah, we pray as we await our Lord and live by faith.

The God who created the world by the power of His spoken Word has not left us on our own. In difficult times, it may seem God has forgotten us. For many of us, we are living in difficult times as the COVID-19 virus has affected many of us and our loved ones. For others, we may be facing cancer, loneliness, depression, financial pressures, and added stress brought on by this pandemic.

Again, God has not forgotten us. Instead, He uses all hardships to bring us closer to Him. Sometimes these hardships seem like they are so difficult as we may fail to see the positives that God has brought forth in our lives, but continue to trust in Jesus for He will get us through every calamity. So, in faith we pray and wait and continue to pray.

We pray Isaiah's Advent prayer, "***Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down***" (Isaiah 64:1a) and rescue us from our enemies. This is a prayer of longing for God's presence among us.

Our prayer is that God would save us from our enemies, but also that all people, including us, would repent and call upon the name of the Lord for forgiveness.

Isaiah's prayer then shifts its focus from Israel's enemies to the enemy within all of us – our sinful nature – in verses five and six. He prays: "***You meet him who joyfully works righteousness, those who remember you in your ways. Behold, you were angry, and we sinned; in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved? We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.***"

You see, due of our sinful nature, we are naturally inclined to turn away from God and not follow His will. So, without the ability to fear and love God, we are spiritually blind and dead. With an endless desire to sin, we are enemies of God and deserve eternal damnation, since we cannot free ourselves. We are all like ***“a polluted garment”*** in need of salvation.

Israel’s prayer is our prayer. ***“Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down”*** (Isaiah 64:1). Now, this unexpected has happened. At the birth of Jesus, the heavens were literally opened. The glory of the Lord ripped open the heavens in the presence of the shepherds. The shepherds did not melt away like molten rock, but were told by the angel, ***“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord”*** (Luke 2:10-11).

The manner that God came down was wonderfully unexpected in that He came down clothed in the flesh of a humble baby boy. Through the miracle of the incarnation, this Child, true God and true man, came to bring salvation and peace to all people. He came to save us from our sins, so that whoever would believe in Him would be given forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation! Of this the Lord’s heavenly host sang, ***“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased”*** (Luke 2:14).

When the Church gathers in the Lord’s presence at the Divine Service, we sing the Gloria in Excelsis, a hymn of praise that first came forth when the skies over Bethlehem were torn open.

However, during this season of Advent, the Church does not sing the Gloria. We wait until Christmas Day. So, we wait, with the Old Testament Church. It is true that we live after the birth of Christ, but now we wait for Christ’s return.

Israel’s prayer is our prayer. ***“Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at your presence”*** (Isaiah 64:1). Now, did God answer Isaiah’s prayer? Yes. But the full answer of this prayer took place many years later when Jesus, the very Son of God, gave up His spirit as He hung nailed upon the cross. At that moment, the heavens again opened, and the mountains quaked. Through His death, by faith in Christ, our sins are forgiven. And, through His bodily resurrection, we know our faith is not in vain.

*[God Sustains Us as We Wait in Prayer]*

This evening, God continues to sustain us through His Word and Sacrament. As we wait in prayer, He sustains our weak faith as He strengthens it through hearing the very words of our Lord that endure forever. We hear of God the Father's love through the sending of His only begotten Son Jesus Christ to live a perfect life on our behalf, suffer and die for on behalf, and rise to life on our behalf. We hear how all our prayers to God are heard and that His will is always done.

While we wait in prayer, Christ also draws us to Himself in the Lord's Supper as He strengthens our weak faith and forgives our sins. Through Christ's very body and very blood, we receive the benefits of Christ's sure promise of where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.

So, this day, and every day, we, like the Israelites then await His coming, as we await Christ's second coming and pray: ***"Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down."*** Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

✠ SOLI DEO GLORIA ✠