

THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF WEST TEXAS

## *Prepare the Way*

### An Advent study on the Prophecies of Isaiah

*Advent, 2016, Week Four*

*He will be called . . . Prince of Peace.*

*By Bishop Gary Lillibridge*

#### **The reading for Advent 4**

#### **Isaiah 7:10-16**

<sup>10</sup> Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, saying, <sup>11</sup> Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven. <sup>12</sup> But Ahaz said, I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test. <sup>13</sup> Then Isaiah said: “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? <sup>14</sup> Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. <sup>15</sup> He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. <sup>16</sup> For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted.

This week I want to look at how Isaiah’s preaching might speak directly to us as we prepare to welcome the Prince of Peace through the celebration of Christmas and then follow Christ’s command to be peacemakers ourselves.

We are almost to Christmas. You can’t go very many places this week without seeing and hearing the so-called “sounds of Christmas” – whether religious or secular in their contexts; in the depictions of manger scenes or of Santa and reindeer; or of Advent candles in church and home or Christmas lights in your neighborhood. Christmas music dominates playlists this week, and words about holiday/holy day are everywhere. Speaking of words and images about Christmas, here are some of Isaiah’s words and images when he talks about it:

***“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace”*** (9.6-7).

From the reading of Isaiah during the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent: ***“Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel”*** (which means, ‘God is with us’ 7.14).

***“And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord” (11.2).***

Hear some of the words again – *Prince of Peace; God with us; spirit of counsel; spirit of wisdom; spirit of understanding; spirit of knowledge of the Lord.* Wow. Lots to think about it in Isaiah’s images.

Here’s another from the latter part of the book of Isaiah: ***“if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday. And the Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your desire with good things, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters fail not. And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach...”*** (58.11-12)

This year, I encourage you to make all of these words more than words. I am committed to make an ongoing and conscious effort to integrate Isaiah’s words and hopes, and moreover Jesus’ words and hopes, more and more into my life’s spiritual DNA. I am firmly convinced that pouring one’s self out for others will indeed make one’s bones strong and give God the opportunity - the opening - to use such an offering so that we may more effectively participate in the reconciling work of Christ and become, in the words of Isaiah, a “repairer of the breach.”

Our country, and it seems the whole planet, is moving farther away from realizing the importance of each person helping to repair whatever breaches are out there. And you don’t have to look very far to find some. Sometimes, not any farther than one’s own family. Sometimes in your workplace. Certainly in the current political climate. Breaches with our neighbors, which includes everybody I can think of. The person next door, the clerk at the store, the homeless on our streets, those with power and authority, those with little or no power or authority, all who are marginalized in our society. Jesus, when explaining the parable of the Good Samaritan, asks the lawyer who questioned him, *Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers? He said, ‘The one who showed mercy on him.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Go and do likewise’ (Luke 10.25-37).* In other words, show mercy, repair breaches, build bridges not walls.

For reflection:

1. Repairing breaches results in bringing about a new order in the world, a new order in one’s life. For example, can you imagine what the world would be like, or more especially what your life would be like, if the words of Isaiah 11.9 were fulfilled: ***“They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.”*** What changes would have to take place in the world? In your life? Well, do your part and humanity will be better for it; God will be glorified because of it.

2. In what ways will you strive to be a repairer of a breach in 2017? In what ways can you consciously bring a spirit of counsel, a spirit of wisdom, a spirit of understanding, a spirit of the knowledge of the Lord in your life and in the lives of those who cross your path on a daily basis?

This is important, because any lasting “world peace” is dependent upon people’s personal sense of being at peace. It is also dependent on our commitment to the hard work of peacemaking (Matthew 5.9) if we are going to truly follow the “Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9.7). Otherwise, our words are not able to become “more than words.”

3. When you practice repairing breaches, you will not only be building up the human race, you will also be building, in the words of the Collect of the Day for the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent, “*a mansion*” prepared for Jesus himself. As you participate in constructing your mansion, I am confident that you will come to a new and refreshed understanding of the meaning of the words, “*Immanuel*” (God with you). You also will come to a new appreciation of what Isaiah means when he uses words such as wisdom, understanding, and knowledge of the Lord.

Finally, then, it has been a pleasure to reflect with you on the preaching of the prophet Isaiah during these four weeks of Advent. As I mentioned in week one, the name Isaiah means, “Yahweh is salvation,” which is similar in Hebrew meaning to the names Joshua, Hosea, Elisha, and, of course, Jesus. In what ways over the course of these four weeks have you come to understand Isaiah’s faith and trust in God as his salvation? What about your faith and trust in God?

I also mentioned that the life and ministry of the biblical prophets can be understood in two dimensions – looking toward the future as well as interpreting the present time. In simple terms, a combination of dreaming/envisioning and realism. In your life, how do you (1) anticipate the future and, (2) interpret the present time? Do you find yourself more of a dreamer or more of a realist? How does your faith inform your thinking on these matters?

Isaiah was a contemporary of prophets such as Hosea and Micah. In your reflections this Advent and in your preparation for Christmas, how might you more fully live into Micah’s words, “*to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God*” (Micah 6.8)?