

**Sermon for Morning Prayer
The Second Sunday in Advent**

Lessons:

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the fifty-second Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.¹

“Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city: for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean. Shake thyself from the dust; arise, and sit down, O Jerusalem: loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion. For thus saith the Lord, Ye have sold yourselves for nought; and ye shall be redeemed without money. For thus saith the Lord God, My people went down aforetime into Egypt to sojourn there; and the Assyrian oppressed them without cause. Now therefore, what have I here, saith the Lord, that my people is taken away for nought? they that rule over them make them to howl, saith the Lord; and my name continually every day is blasphemed. Therefore my people shall know my name: therefore they shall know in that day that I am he that doth speak: behold, it is I.

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth! Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion.

“Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-sixth Verse of the first Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Luke.

“... And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee [**GAL-ih-lee**], named Nazareth [**NAZ-uh-reth**], To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary. And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible. And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her. And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda [**JOO-duh**]; And entered into the house of Zacharias [**ZACK-are-eye-uss**], and saluted Elisabeth. And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to

Among the many gifts He gave us by doing so is the wonderful gift of reconciliation with our Creator and Father, with whom and with whom alone is true peace, peace of mind and peace of spirit.

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¹ *Psalms and Lessons for the Church Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER x (PECUSA 1928).

² Isaiah 52:7 (KJV).

³ St. Luke 1:32-33 (KJV).

⁴ *Ibid.* 1:76-79 (KJV) (emphasis supplied).

⁵ *Ibid.*

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me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord. And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation. He hath shewed [SHOWD] strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away. He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever. And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the First Lesson: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!”²

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Argument:

This is the season of Advent, or of “the Coming”, in which we prepare ourselves for our celebration of Christ’s initial Coming in the great Mystery we call the Incarnation.

For most of two thousand years, during this season the Church has assigned for public reading the prophecies of Isaiah because it was his mission, above all the other prophets of the Old Testament, to foretell the Coming of the Anointed One. And the Hebrew word for the Anointed One is *Meshiach* [Meh-SHY-ahk], from which, through the Greek, we get our word *Messiah* [Meh-SIGH-ah]. All these words, however, simply mean “the Anointed One”.

To express the strength of his understanding that some extraordinary good is on its way, Isaiah uses the lovely image of a messenger or herald speeding across the hills, bearing with him wonderful news, such as of the birth of a new heir to a throne or of the restoration of peace after a long and bloody war. All his readers could easily understand how important such a message is and how welcome it will be to those to whom it is sent.

Of course, in this case, that prophecy is the announcement of the imminent birth of the heir to a Kingdom, for as the Angel Gabriel told the Blessed Virgin Mary: “He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.”³

However, it is also the announcement of the imminent restoration of peace: the Peace of God which was broken by our first parents when they committed the original sin of placing the gratification of their own transitory desires and pleasures above the eternal happiness of perfect obedience to God’s desires. As we shall read next week, when the Holy Spirit opened the mouth of the temple priest Zacharias [ZACK-are-eye-uss], so that Zacharias [ZACK-are-eye-uss] could foretell the career of his newborn son, he said:

“And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to pre-

pare his ways; To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, *to guide our feet into the way of peace.*”⁴

That is good news, indeed, good news of such an overwhelming nature that we all should rejoice at its coming. We know who that messenger was to be, he was John the Baptist,⁵ and his Good News was so striking, so earth-shaking, so life-changing that we simply call it “The Good News”. For that is what the old English word *god-spell* means: it means “good news”.

One of the prime reasons we are given this season of Advent as a time of meditation, reflection, and preparation is so we can explore in depth the many ramifications of this unique Good News, the news that God has come to earth, not just come in human form but has come by becoming Himself truly and completely human, taking upon Himself a human nature and a human body. We could spend a lifetime considering the implications of this incredible act of self-giving – in fact, as Christians we are charged to spend a lifetime doing just that – and we would still not have exhausted its possibilities.

Conclusion:

We have already said that one of the principal benefits of which this Good News tells us is that of the restoration of peace: restoration of peace between man and God, and therefore restoration of peace within ourselves.

It was a man and a woman trying to become as God that first opened the rift between us; it took God actually becoming man to heal that rift.