

Second Sunday of Advent
December 6, 2020

Faith
Bethlehem's Candle

Scripture Reading:

Isaiah 40:1-11

¹ Comfort, comfort my people,
says your God.

² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and proclaim to her
that her hard service has been completed,
that her sin has been paid for,
that she has received from the Lord's hand
double for all her sins.

³ A voice of one calling:
"In the wilderness prepare
the way for the Lord;
make straight in the desert
a highway for our God.

⁴ Every valley shall be raised up,
every mountain and hill made low;
the rough ground shall become level,
the rugged places a plain.

⁵ And the glory of the Lord will be revealed,
and all people will see it together.
For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

⁶ A voice says, "Cry out."

And I said, "What shall I cry?"
"All people are like grass,
and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field.

⁷ The grass withers and the flowers fall,
because the breath of the Lord blows on them.
Surely the people are grass.

⁸ The grass withers and the flowers fall,
but the word of our God endures forever."

⁹ You who bring good news to Zion,
go up on a high mountain.

You who bring good news to Jerusalem,

lift up your voice with a shout,
lift it up, do not be afraid;
say to the towns of Judah,
"Here is your God!"

¹⁰ See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power,
and he rules with a mighty arm.

See, his reward is with him,
and his recompense accompanies him.

¹¹ He tends his flock like a shepherd:

He gathers the lambs in his arms
and carries them close to his heart;
he gently leads those that have young.

Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13

For the director of music. Of the Sons of Korah. A psalm.

¹ You, Lord, showed favor to your land;
you restored the fortunes of Jacob.

² You forgave the iniquity of your people
and covered all their sins.

⁸ I will listen to what God the Lord says;
he promises peace to his people, his faithful servants—
but let them not turn to folly.

⁹ Surely his salvation is near those who fear him,
that his glory may dwell in our land.

¹⁰ Love and faithfulness meet together;
righteousness and peace kiss each other.

¹¹ Faithfulness springs forth from the earth,
and righteousness looks down from heaven.

¹² The Lord will indeed give what is good,
and our land will yield its harvest.

¹³ Righteousness goes before him
and prepares the way for his steps.

2 Peter 3:8-15

⁸ But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.

¹¹ Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹² as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. ¹³ But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

¹⁴ So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. ¹⁵ Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him.

Mark 1:1-8

¹ The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, ² as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

"I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way"¹—

³ "a voice of one calling in the wilderness,
'Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.'"

⁴ And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. ⁶ John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ And this was his message: "After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸ I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Reflection:

These days, it seems that the news is never good. The reason for this is because people are looking in the wrong place for news. They put value in the latest politics or stories of the rich and famous. People miss the good news that Christmas represents. They focus on building up their lives with material possessions. These are all like grass and wither away into nothing important.

Isaiah the prophet foretold a time when exile would end and the people of Judah would return to the land. This return was a prelude to the end of the deeper, more profound exile that every human experiences. The return is marked by good news of God's sovereignty, grace, and salvation. These words were fulfilled by the coming of Jesus. They will be fulfilled for

eternity when Jesus comes again. The time in which we live now feels a bit like exile. We are scattered sojourners, like those to whom Peter wrote his first letter. Our time of exile and wandering in the deserts of life will come to an end. Psalm 85 speaks of the peace and salvation God gives to His righteous people who fear and trust in Him.

Meanwhile in this new exile, as believers we live with a certain urgency. Peter reflects on this and how we live "in between the times." God has made promises, and we need to learn to trust in them. We also learn to live in obedience by faithfully living according to God's commands. We strive to be spotless, blameless, and with no guilt on our consciences but only peace before God because we know we are where we should be.

Just like John the Baptist warned people of the need to repent before Jesus' first coming, Scripture warns us today also to repent so that we are prepared for Jesus' second coming. Do we live in lazy commitment or fervent dedication? This Christmas season challenges us to renew our faith and live with the hopeful anticipation expressed in these passages from the Bible.

Prayer:

1. Praise God for his sustaining strength during 2020.
2. Confess any feelings of exile or lament you feel. Identify what has influenced these feelings.
3. Acknowledge the presence of God in your life right now.
4. Make a commitment of faith to trust in God more, even when you are uncertain of the future.
5. Ask God for a fresh filling of the Holy Spirit to strengthen you for what lies ahead.
6. Determine one way to encourage a believer and non-believer this week