

December 2, 2007
Advent 1

"Come Let Us Go Up to the Mountain of the Lord"

ISAIAH 2:1-5

This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem: ² In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. ³ Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. ⁴ He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. ⁵ Come, O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the LORD.

If you are a fan of the *Sound of Music* currently playing at the PCPA theater in Santa Maria, then you probably know the words of the familiar song, *Climb Every Mountain*." I'll pause and you complete the sentence. "Climb every... mountain. Ford every... stream. Follow every... rainbow. Till you find your... dream." Follow your dreams may be good advice for starting a new career, or a new business or even finding that one special person with whom you will spend the rest of your life. However it is not good advice when it comes to finding the path to eternal life and peace with God. For you see, Scripture tells us, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure, who can understand it."

This morning the prophet Isaiah encourages to join people climbing up to the mountain of the Lord and calling out to other people in the world, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord." It is a call for people to come from everywhere and see the wonders or the miracles the Lord has done for them including the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. Ask someone in school or at work or possibly even some members of your family, "What gets you more excited about Christmas- a. getting presents; b. finishing the semester at school; c. gathering with the family d. the office party; or e. Jesus?" Jesus often comes in last. This morning we want to use these words from Isaiah about inviting people to come to the mountain of the Lord to help us get excited about inviting people to know the real meaning of Christmas.

What a place!

Have you ever driven down a certain street with your family or friends just to see one of those houses that are covered with bright lights? No lights can compare to the glory that shines on the mountain of the Lord. Isaiah sees the mountain of the Lord rising up and becoming chief among the mountains. He sees it rising up above the hills. He sees all nations streaming to it. He hears many people saying to each other, "Come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob."

What is this mountain of the Lord mentioned here and several other places in the Old Testament? According to the words of Isaiah, the mountain of the Lord is the place where

the house of God or the temple was built. This little mountain, actually just a hill, is also called Mount Zion. It has tremendous historical significance for Christians because it was the place where daily animal sacrifices were offered that pointed ahead to the blood of Jesus that would save us from our sin.

This famous temple mount is still in Jerusalem today. This past week leaders from the Mid East gathered in Annapolis to discuss possible ways to bring about peace between Israel and the Palestinians. The huge sticking point between the Jews and the Muslims is this very temple mount. The orthodox Jews hope to someday rebuild the temple on the site of the temple mount. The Muslims believe a rock on this site is where their prophet Mohammed ascended into heaven. If the Jews ever try to take over the site and rebuild the temple, every Muslim in the world will feel compelled to engage in a holy war against Israel and her allies.

We treasure what happened in history at the temple mount when thousands and thousands of animals were sacrificed to point to Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. However, we do not feel a need to build some huge shrine over this ancient site. We don't need to know the exact place where Jesus was born, or where he died, or the empty tomb where he rose from the dead. The miracles that took place in Jesus life near this temple mount rise up like a mighty mountain for the whole world to see. Every light that sparkles at Christmas tells us to look at Jesus the light of the world, the greatest miracle the world has ever seen.

Think of the miracles that loom up like a mighty mountain and make your life what it is today. Here is a tiny baby lying in a real manger in Bethlehem with real hands and feet and hair and skin. This tiny baby is Lord and God, just as the angels said when they announced, "Unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior which is Christ the Lord." Here is Jesus death on the cross looming up large as a mighty miracle when he cried out with a loud voice, "It is finished!" Here is Jesus rising from the dead and even showing Christians of every age the nail marks in his hands when he said, "Peace be to you." These are the miracles by which we are saved and rescued from eternal death and punishment. These miracles in the life of Jesus rise up like a mountain above all other mountains in the world. Even to this day Jesus offers us his body and blood in the Holy Sacrament, a mighty miracle, which gives us forgiveness and peace with God and strength to live a whole new life.

Hebrews 12 gives us the clue to how beautiful this holy mountain is for us. "But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands and thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the first born, whose names are written in heaven." Notice it says, "You have come to Mount Zion." Notice dear friends that this is in the past tense, "You have come." You are part of the church of the first born. You are gathering with other believers on this holy mountain of the Lord this morning in this worship and you are celebrating the miracles of Jesus life that come into your life. You want other people to join you and that is why you cannot keep silent. You want to call out to them, "Come with us to the mountain of the Lord." "Look at what our God has done to rescue us."

What people!

Now let's take a closer look at the people that are streaming up to the mountain of the Lord to celebrate the miracles such as Jesus birth once again this Christmas. They have smiles on their faces. Hear them singing the great Advent hymn, "Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee O Israel." Or hear them sing, "Joy to the world, the Lord has come." A former agnostic told the joy that she had when she sang the songs of Jesus birth in worship and knew the meanings of the words.

All of these people have in something in common. Their lives have been dramatically altered and shaped and reformed by the Word of the Lord. They joyfully call out to each other, "Let us go up to the mountain of the of the Lord," because it is there that the Lord will "teach us his ways so that we will walk in his paths." Isaiah writes, "The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." Ask yourself the personal question this morning, "How much has the Bible changed your life?" On a scale of one to ten you would have to say ten. Now ask another question, "How much is the Bible changing your life each day, even in this busy holiday season?" You see how important it is to be in the Word.

If we are not in the Word, then the world around us is going to shape and form us to its way of thinking. Then Christmas will only mean Santa Claus, presents, food, decorations, and getting together with our families. If we are not in the Word we may actually sing "Climb every mountain" and apply it to our spiritual life as if some how we can create our own dreams of how we are right with a perfect and holy God. We need God's Word in our lives as we said at the beginning of this sermon, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure, who can understand it."

You see dear Christians the Word of God is like an MRI. An MRI can give you a detailed picture of organs in your body and show you where you might be having problems. What if I am having serious problems seeing the glory of God in my life, whether it is a sunset, or an encouraging word from another Christian, or Jesus birth in Bethlehem, or his resurrection from the dead, or his promise to open up the heavens and return in glory? What if I allow the problems and troubles of this life to somehow become greater than blessings? Satan is so good at deceiving us that he could convince you that the food you feed your cat is better than best filet mignon grilled to perfection, a fresh green salad, twice baked potatoes, fresh rolls out of the oven, and a piece of pecan pie with ice cream on top. Satan is even better at convincing you that all your blessings in Jesus are like trash. He can convince you that sinful thinking, grumbling and complaining are the best food you could ever eat. Then God's word comes into your life like an MRI and shows you how foolish you were to ever think this way. It leads you to say with all sincerity, "God be merciful to me a sinner." It shows you the miracles of Jesus life. You once again become people molded by the Word as you confess with John the glory you see in Jesus: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

What peace!

The people who stream up God's holy mountain and see the blessings they have in Jesus are also transformed by these blessings to live in peace and harmony with other people. It is Jesus who changes us and gives us a peace in him that this world cannot give. Isaiah writes, "He will judge between the nations and will settle the disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation

will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore." These words about beating swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks are inscribed in stone in the park near the United Nations building. When people become Christians they lead their nation to work for peace in the world as our country and president are trying to do at this time in our history.

Where lives really begin to change are in the home as husbands and wives learn out of love for Jesus to be peaceful and loving to each other. Husbands love their wives as much as Christ loved the church. Wives respect their husbands even when they are not the man they once dreamed of marrying. Children show kindness and love to each other instead of fighting and anger. Ephesians 4: says, "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." The peace and forgiveness you have in Jesus becomes such a powerful force in your life that you can't wait to begin another day to pound your sword into a plowshare and your spear into a pruning hook. Such is the beauty, the joy and transforming peace that exists on God's holy mountain where people live their lives close to the blessings they have in Jesus. What a beautiful place! What a beautiful people! What a beautiful peace! Amen.