

## **Sermon – Isaiah 2:1-5 – Advent 1 – Year A – November 30, 2025**

Today, as we light the first candle on the wreath, we step once again into a season that begins not in celebration but in shadows. Advent opens in the places where longing lives — in the space between what is and what could be. This is not a mistake or a liturgical oddity. It is a profound spiritual truth: we begin in the darkness because it is only there that we learn how to watch for the light. Advent begins by telling us the truth about the world — and about ourselves. Only then can it tell us the truth about God.

The invitation of Advent is to wait — but not with passivity or resignation. Christian waiting is active, attentive, alert. It is the waiting of people who know that God is not yet finished with the world, that the arc of history bends toward something more whole than what we see now. It is the waiting of people who trust that the deepest truth of creation is not despair but hope.

Isaiah gives us a vision shaped entirely by that hope. He speaks of a mountain rising — “the mountain of the Lord’s house” — lifted so high that all nations are drawn toward it. They come not out of fear, not for conquest, but because they long to learn a better way. Isaiah imagines people calling to one another, “Come, let us go up... that we may walk in God’s paths.” And then he describes what may be

among the most powerful images in all of Scripture: swords beaten into plowshares, spears into pruning hooks, nations refusing to train for war.

It is a dream of a remade world — one where human creativity is no longer twisted toward destruction, where what once harmed can now cultivate life. Walter Brueggemann, one of the great interpreters of Isaiah, writes: “The prophetic task is to imagine the world as it should be and to bear witness to that alternative reality.” Isaiah is doing exactly that. He is imagining a world rooted in God’s deep peace — a peace so complete that the tools of violence become instruments of nurture. Advent gives us this vision at the very beginning of the Christian Calendar year so that we remember why we hope. The world is not yet what it should be, but God has already imagined its healing, and invites us to imagine it too.

Advent is about living between this vision and our current reality. We know too well that plowshares have not replaced swords; that nations still train for war; that fear still shapes our public life; that injustices — small and large — persist. And yet here we stand, lighting a candle, insisting that the darkness will not have the last word. This is why our waiting is an act of resistance. To hope in God’s

promised future, even while recognizing the world's brokenness, is to stand with God against everything that harms and diminishes life.

The Gospel today says, "Keep awake." This is Advent's other great theme: vigilance. Not anxious vigilance, not frantic busyness, but holy attentiveness. Watch for the signs of God's presence in the ordinary. Stay alert to compassion breaking through, to the quiet ways Christ comes among us even now. We cannot know the hour when God's newness will break in, but we can choose to live as people ready for it.

To "walk in the light of the Lord," as Isaiah urges, means beginning precisely here: with honesty about the world and with commitment to God's future. It means attending to the wounds around us and refusing to turn away. Swords still exist — not only as weapons of war, but in the forms of policies, prejudices, economic systems, and social assumptions that cut and divide. Walking in the light means seeing these clearly and choosing how to respond. It means listening to those whose stories are overlooked. It means letting ourselves be moved by suffering, compelled by compassion, and shaped by justice.

Madeleine L'Engle once wrote: "We draw people to Christ not by loudly discrediting what they believe, but by showing them a light so

lovely that they want with all their hearts to know its source.” Her words capture the heart of Advent spirituality. We are called not only to speak of hope but to embody it — to shine with a light so compelling that others recognize something holy within it. The world is weary. Advent people are meant to be those who carry a “lovely light” — a gentleness, a courage, a compassion — that points beyond itself to God’s coming peace.

And because of this, Advent is always communal. Isaiah’s mountain is not a private refuge; it is a gathering place for all peoples. At its best, the church becomes a sign of that mountain — a community where strangers are welcomed, where justice is practiced, where the vulnerable are protected, where reconciliation is pursued, where the tools of peace are crafted in daily, modest acts. When we keep awake together, when we support one another, pray together, encourage one another, we make visible the world Isaiah imagines in fullness.

As we begin this season, we face a world that often feels as though it is unraveling. Violence persists. Nations rage. Creation groans under misuse. Many feel isolated or afraid. Advent does not ask us to deny any of this. Advent asks us to face it honestly — and then to choose hope anyway. To light a candle anyway. To imagine, with Isaiah and

with Brueggemann, the alternative reality God has promised — and to live as though it is already dawning.

But of course, the world offers its own version of hope this time of year. Today, we enter what some call a magical season — the weekend between Black Friday and Cyber Monday. Only 26 shopping days until Christmas! This is the time, we are told, to spread sweetness and light by making all the right purchases. Deck the halls! Admire Rudolph! Be overwhelmed by the magic and joy of the season — at any cost!

And yet, we know how this usually goes. The world promises us so much — and it rarely delivers.

Which raises a question: why doesn't the Church lean into all this? Why not Jingle Bells in our hymnal? Why not an inflatable Santa on the front lawn? Christmas is, after all, a church thing — so why not meet the holiday crowds with a little festive marketing?

Instead, year after year, the Church stubbornly begins Advent not with a carol but with a call to wakefulness, to honesty, to transformation. Not with sleigh bells, but with Isaiah's dream and Paul's challenge. Not with sentimentality, but with hope that refuses to be fake.

Because the Church is not interested in selling joy at 40% off. We care only about the real thing.

The world's idea of pleasure is simply the relief of desire — a momentary easing of appetite. You can eat three helpings of ham and four slices of pie, but this rarely imparts joy; often it leaves you feeling worse. The longed-for gift brings excitement, yes, but the feeling is fleeting.

Advent's hope, by contrast, is not fleeting. It endures. It deepens. It roots itself in God.

So we keep awake. We keep watch. We look for Christ in the small mercies of each day, in voices of justice, in acts of kindness, in the courage of forgiveness, in every place where life is nurtured rather than diminished. God is coming — quietly and boldly, unexpectedly and steadily. The mountain is rising. The light is growing. And even now, in ways we can scarcely imagine, the world is being remade.

Come, people of God. Let us walk in the light of the Lord. Amen.