

Advent



December 3rd
2023

*Darkness and snow descend;
The clock on the mantelpiece
Has nothing to recommend,
Nor does the face in the glass
Appear nobler than our own
As darkness and snow descend
On all personality.*

—W.H. Auden, *For the Time Being*

—ISAIAH & THE INCARNATION—

“LIVING HOPE IN UNSETTLED TIMES”

Introduction: Clocks & Mirrors

- ‘Advent’ is the English translation of the Latin word ‘adventus,’ which means “arrival” or “coming.” Historically, it was a season of reflection that preceded a season of celebration. While our modern “Christmas Season” is focused primarily on celebration, this is a time of year where people do tend to reflect upon the circumstances of their lives. For many, therefore, this season is often characterized by a mixture of emotions.
- This Advent we are going to reflect together on Isaiah and his writings and the ways that the birth narratives of Luke and Matthew point to the incarnation of the Lord Jesus as the means of their fulfillment.

Key Point: During this season of reflection, we as believers are reminded that we can live with _____ even in uncertain times because the sovereign God has acted decisively in history through the incarnation.

Isaiah & His Times — Judah in the 8th Century BC

The Prophet

“Isaiah lived in Jerusalem, and that capital city features prominently in his prophecies. Isaiah referred to Jerusalem by using more than 30 names. His easy access to the court and Judah’s kings, revealed in his book, suggests that he ministered to the kings of Judah and may have had royal blood in his veins. Jewish tradition made him the cousin of King Uzziah. His communication gifts and his political connections, whatever those may have been, gave him an opportunity to reach the whole nation of Judah. The prophet was married and had at least two sons to whom he gave names that also summarized major themes of his prophecies (8:18): Shearjashub (“a remnant shall return”, 7:3), and Maher-shalal-hash-baz (“hastening to the spoil”, 8:3).”

—Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Isaiah*

Historical Context

The prophet Isaiah ministered during a transition period in the history of the divided kingdom of Israel where relative peace and stability gave way to times of crisis.

1. **Isaiah’s career spanned the rules of multiple kings in Judah and, throughout his ministry, Judah faced a political and economic crisis because of the rise of the Assyrian Empire.**
2. **During his ministry, Judah faced a spiritual crisis because of the unfaithfulness of both the leaders and the people.**
⇒ The nation had come to be characterized by _____, _____ (1:21-23) and _____ (57:4-7).

Isaiah 2:6-8—“For you have rejected your people, the house of Jacob, because they are full of things from the east and of fortune-tellers like the Philistines, and they strike hands with the children of foreigners.” Their land is filled with silver and gold, and there is no end to their treasures; their land is filled with horses, and there is no end to their chariots. Their land is filled with idols; they bow down to the work of their hands, to what their own fingers have made.

Key Point: In both the _____ and _____ aspects of his life and ministry, Isaiah had much that could have filled his mind and heart with anxiety.

The Times of Birth Narratives — Judea in the 1st Century AD

Historical Context

After roughly a century of independence, Judea came under the control of the Romans when it was conquered by Pompey in 63 BC. This was a time of significant cultural upheaval.

1. **The political and religious institutions of the time were controlled by the Romans and their chosen leaders.**

2. There were multiple religious factions at the time that were a reaction to the cultural upheaval of this time period.

Key Point: The common people who had no control over these wider issues, sought to live lives of quiet _____ in the midst of all of the turmoil.

Zechariah & Elizabeth - Luke 1:5-25

Observations

1. Zechariah and Elizabeth were examples of public faithfulness in the midst of personal _____.
2. Zechariah's service at the temple showed its ongoing legitimacy in the lives of God's people.
3. The words of the angel spoken to Zechariah broke 400 years of silence from the Lord.

Key Point: The angel's announcement was intended to bring _____ to Zechariah and Elizabeth personally, and to God's people as a whole.

Trusting in the God of All Hope

- Isaiah understood that God's _____ were the basis of hope for him and his family.

Isa. 8:16-18—¹⁶ Bind up the testimony; seal the teaching among my disciples. ¹⁷ I will wait for the Lord, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him. ¹⁸ Behold, I and the children whom the Lord has given me are signs and portents in Israel from the Lord of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion.

- Zechariah & Elizabeth had hope for their immediate circumstances and for the _____ because of the fulfillment of God's promises.

Luke 1:24-25—²⁴ After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden, saying, ²⁵ "Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people."

Luke 1:68-75—⁶⁸ "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people ⁶⁹ and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, ⁷⁰ as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, ⁷¹ that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; ⁷² to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, ⁷³ the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us ⁷⁴ that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, ⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

For Reflection During Advent

- What aspects of the time in which we live are discouraging to us?
- What parts of our lives, both public and private, tend to cause us to fear or be anxious?
- How does the reality of the incarnation of the Lord Jesus bring hope to us in the midst of these things?

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2. **During his ministry, Judah faced a spiritual crisis because of the unfaithfulness of both the leaders and the people.**
⇒ The nation had come to be characterized by **idolatry**, **injustice** (1:21-23) and **immorality** (57:4-7).

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Key Point: In both the private and public aspects of his life and ministry, Isaiah had much that could have filled his mind and heart with anxiety.

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