

**Goal: That the hearers would more joyfully be prepared to receive Jesus.**

Today we begin a new Church year with the first Sunday in Advent. Advent is Latin meaning “enter” or “come.” So during Advent we focus on the ways that God comes to us in the past, present and future. This morning we hear Isaiah pray on behalf of God’s people imploring God: ***“Oh, that You would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at your presence—as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil—to make your name known to your adversaries, and that the nations might tremble at your presence!” (Isaiah 64: 1 – 2)***

Isaiah prayed for God to come down to earth in power and destroy His enemies, because that’s exactly what God did when He delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt. Most of us remember the 10 plagues on Egypt, the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night, the parting of the Red Sea, and God’s destruction of Pharaoh and his army. Those things happened 100’s of years before Isaiah’s time and people still talked about them.

But it’s no wonder they still spoke of God’s mighty acts during the Exodus because the people of Israel in Isaiah’s day were hoping God would do the same for them. They prayed: ***“Come down God, and destroy OUR enemies, because they’re YOUR enemies too. Come down in power and glory!”*** And about 800 years later God DID come down to earth. Jesus was riding into Jerusalem, ***“And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!” (Mark 11: 9 – 10)*** Hosanna means “Save us” in Hebrew. And the Jews wanted Jesus to save them from the oppression of the Roman Empire. They wanted Jesus to destroy their enemies, and they believed He had the power to do just that!

They had seen Jesus perform awesome miracles on par with God’s acts in the Exodus. Jesus changed water into wine, healed the sick, cast out demons, and multiplied a few bits of fish and bread into enough food to feed thousands. Jesus calmed the wind and the waves by saying, “be still” and He even raised the dead. They thought a man like this would have no problem destroying the Romans, the enemies of God’s people.

We’d also like God to come down and save us from our enemies. In some cases our enemies are our negative things like: poverty; sickness; crime; a poor economy; or natural disasters. In other cases our enemies are those who don’t like Christians. In our

country Christians are mocked but in other nations our fellow Christians are fired from their jobs, driven from their homes, enslaved, and even murdered. *“Oh Lord, that you would rend the heavens and come down.”*

So why doesn't God answer our prayer? I guess we need to learn more from His Word this morning. Isaiah writes: ***“You come to him who joyfully works righteousness, those who remember you in your ways.” (Isaiah 64: 5)*** Does that mean God only helps those who live better lives than most people and win God's favor? NO! It's those who remember God's ways, confessing their sins and trusting in God for undeserved mercy.

Isaiah goes on to admit that God's people have sinned against Him doing that which He commanded they don't. But even worse, they thought that God would overlook their sins because of their good deeds. That's why Isaiah says, ***“You were angry, and we sinned; in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved? We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.” (Isaiah 64: 5 – 6)*** Even the good things we do are garbage before God if we think we can bribe Him with our good works. Simply put, God's people were their own worst enemies. And in their sins, they became GOD'S enemies too! They didn't realize when they prayed *“Oh, come down and destroy Your enemies”* that they were asking God to also destroy THEM.

Jesus tried to explain this to the Jews of His day. He told them to repent and come to Him for forgiveness and life with God. Some of God's people hated Him for suggesting they were sinners. Others ignored Him hoping He'd just save them from the Romans and let them live their lives the way that they wanted. None of them wanted to hear that their worst enemy was their own sin against God.

And, you know, we have the same problem today. We want God to come down and rescue us from our problems and give us the good life we think we deserve. We want Christ to come down and destroy our enemies. But we fail to realize that because of our sins, WE are God's enemies, and we need to be saved from ourselves and the hell we deserve. That's why this First Sunday of Advent announces the Good News that God comes down to speak His Truth so that we would be saved.

Isaiah ends his prayer with these words of hope: ***“But now, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. Be***

***not so terribly angry, O LORD, and remember not iniquity forever.” (Isaiah 64: 8 – 9)***

And in Isaiah’s day God came down with words of hope for sinners. ***“The virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel.” (Isaiah 7: 14)*** ***“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given...and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” (Isaiah 9: 6)*** 800 years later God came down and entered Jerusalem and the people shouted ***“Hosanna! Save us!”*** A few days later they put Him on a cross and mocked Him saying, ***“Save your self and us!”*** Little did they know that Jesus was saving THEM and US by not saving Himself.

God **had** come down to destroy His enemies! He destroyed His enemies when He put your sin and my sin on Jesus and damned Him in our place. Jesus died for our sins, and then He conquered death for us. And today, Jesus comes down to us in the waters of Baptism. He comes down to us through His Word, we read and hear. He comes down to us when He gives us His own Body and Blood to eat and drink. He comes down to us, exposes our sins and shows how we ourselves are the enemy. Then He gives to us peace and forgiveness that only He can through His Son’s coming and saving us.

And the Apostle Paul encourages us to look ahead to His second coming by reminding us that: ***“(God) will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord.” (1 Corinthians 1: 8 – 9)*** God is your Father and you are His people. You live for the Lord in this world as you wait for Christ to come down again when He returns in power and glory. On that day God will destroy His enemies, all those who have rejected His Son as their Lord and Savior. That is why Jesus tells us to pray for our enemies because we’d be facing their same fate if it weren’t for the Grace of God.

God has shown us that our real enemy is our own sin against Him. And God came down to save you from your enemies, from sin, from death, and from hell. You are forgiven. God is your Father. Therefore, live each day in repentant faith as you look forward to the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of your Lord and Savior. ***“Oh, Lord, that You would rend the heavens and come down!” (Isaiah 64: 1)*** Amen!