

**St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth  
Sunday, December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2022  
Rev. Gerry Gallant**

**The Promised One  
Advent Week 4  
Isaiah 7:1-16**

**Welcome**

Brothers and Sisters in Christ  
as we enter this season of Advent,  
may the love of God the Father,  
and the grace of Jesus the Son,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be and abide with us all.

**Announcements**

**Call to Worship**

If our lives are dry and parched,  
**Lord, send the living waters of your Spirit  
to revive us, to enliven us,  
to bring forth new life.  
Immanuel, come quickly.**

If our times are empty and barren,  
**Lord, grant us a rich harvest,  
send us home with sheaves of blessing,  
fill us with your abundance,  
and teach us to share the harvest with others.  
Immanuel, come quickly.**

If our bodies are weary and heavy laden,  
**Lord, fill us with laughter;  
give us shouts of joy;  
envelop us with your gladness.  
Immanuel, come quickly.**

If our lives are small and trivial,  
**Lord, make us see great things;  
enlarge our vision;  
widen our borders.**

**Immanuel, come quickly. Amen.**

**Prayer of Adoration and Invocation**

Father, all-powerful and ever-living God,  
 we do well always and everywhere to give you thanks  
 through Jesus Christ, our Lord.  
 When he humbled himself to come among us as a man,  
 he fulfilled the plan you formed long ago  
 and opened for us the way to salvation.  
 Now we watch for the day,  
 hoping that the salvation promised us will be ours  
 when Christ our Lord will come again in his glory.  
 We ask this through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen

**Advent Candle Lighting**

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world;  
 the one who follows me will not walk in darkness but have the light of life."  
**We light this candle as a sign of the coming light of Christ.**

*[Candle Lighter]*

Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,  
 and your healing shall spring up quickly;  
 your vindicator shall go before you,  
 the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.  
 —Isaiah 58:8, NRSV

Come, Lord Jesus, our light, and our salvation.  
**Let us walk in the light of the Lord**

**Opening Hymn # 165: "O Little Town of Bethlehem"**

O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie!  
 Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by:  
 yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light;  
 the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

For Christ is born of Mary, and, gathered all above,  
 while mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of wondering love.  
 O morning stars, together proclaim the holy birth,  
 and praises sing to God the King, and peace to all on earth.

O holy child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray;  
 cast out our sin and enter in; be born in us today.

We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell;  
oh come to us, abide with us, our Lord, Emmanuel.

### **Call to Confession**

Prepare the way of the Lord!  
Let us make our confession to God.

### **Prayer of Confession**

God of salvation, in Christ you have done great things—  
our hearts are filled with joy.  
By your power you lifted us out of the wasteland of sin  
and brought us with joy and laughter into your kingdom.  
Salvation is your gift to us.  
But we confess that often we try to replace your gift with our own efforts.  
We try to complete what is already perfect;  
we try to add to what is already full;  
we try to earn what we already have.  
Forgive us for our foolishness.  
Help us to focus on your grace.  
Help us to live grateful lives in return.  
For Jesus' sake alone, Amen.

### **Assurance of Pardon**

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.  
Your sins are pardoned.  
The penalty is paid.  
**Thanks be to God.**

### **The Lord's Prayer**

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.  
Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One.  
For Thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory,  
Forever and ever. Amen.**

**Music Ministry: "Christmas is Coming" by Choir**

### **Responsive Reading**

**Question 102. What is the first commandment?"**

"You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3; Deuteronomy 5:7).

**Question 103. What do we learn from this commandment?**

We learn that we are to give the highest honour and adoration to God alone and not to anyone or anything else.

Deut 4:39, Isa 44:6

**Question 104. What is the second commandment?**

“You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them” (Exodus 20:4; Deuteronomy 5:8).

**Question 105. What do we learn from this commandment?**

We learn that we are not to make idols, either with our hands or our minds, which take the place of God. Idolatry is putting some created reality first in our lives, worshipping the created rather than the Creator. Any excessive attachment to things, persons or an ideology may result in idolatry.

Ex 32:7-8, Deut 4:15-16, 1 Jn 5:21

**Children’s Hymn #143: “Infant Holy, Infant Lowly”**

Infant holy, infant lowly,  
for his bed a cattle stall;  
oxen lowing, little knowing  
Christ the babe is Lord of all.  
Swift are winging angels singing,  
nowells ringing, tidings bringing:  
Christ the babe is Lord of all.  
Christ the babe is Lord of all.

Flocks were sleeping, shepherds keeping  
vigil till the morning new,  
saw the glory, heard the story,  
tidings of a gospel true.  
Thus rejoicing, free from sorrow,  
praises voicing greet the morrow:  
Christ the babe was born for you.  
Christ the babe was born for you.

**Children’s Lesson****Prayer for illumination**  
**(Congregant Prepared)****Scripture**

**Isaiah 7:1-16**

<sup>7</sup> In the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, son of Uzziah, king of Judah, Rezin the king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah the king of Israel came up to Jerusalem to wage war against it, but could not yet mount an attack against it. <sup>2</sup> When the house of David was told, "Syria is in league with Ephraim," the heart of Ahaz and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind.

<sup>3</sup> And the LORD said to Isaiah, "Go out to meet Ahaz, you and Shear-jashub your son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Washer's Field. <sup>4</sup> And say to him, 'Be careful, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint because of these two smoldering stumps of firebrands, at the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria and the son of Remaliah. <sup>5</sup> Because Syria, with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, has devised evil against you, saying, <sup>6</sup> "Let us go up against Judah and terrify it, and let us conquer it for ourselves, and set up the son of Tabeel as king in the midst of it," <sup>7</sup> thus says the Lord GOD:

" 'It shall not stand,  
and it shall not come to pass.  
<sup>8</sup> For the head of Syria is Damascus,  
and the head of Damascus is Rezin.  
And within sixty-five years  
Ephraim will be shattered from being a people.  
<sup>9</sup> And the head of Ephraim is Samaria,  
and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah.  
If you are not firm in faith,  
you will not be firm at all.' "

<sup>10</sup> Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz: <sup>11</sup> "Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven." <sup>12</sup> But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test." <sup>13</sup> And he said, "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? <sup>14</sup> Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. <sup>15</sup> He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. <sup>16</sup> For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted.

### Sermon

We are only a week away from the largest birthday party celebrated in the world. Every year on December 25<sup>th</sup>, people from all around the world, Christians and non-Christians, people from every nation, language, and tribe, get together and have a holiday that is based on the birthday of Jesus Christ. God is reaching out into the world every year during this season of advent and pointing the whole world at the importance of the birth of Jesus and the meaning behind his birth which was prophesized. God wants the entire world to know that we should be celebrating the birth of Jesus. A birth that

reminds us of God promise to be with us, has been fulfilled and our celebration during Advent and Christmas is a sign that we are in a relationship with our God.

God announced the birth of Jesus almost 700 years before his birth to the people of Judah. He did not specify when this birth would take place, but he told them they would know that it had happened because the baby would be born of a virgin and that the baby would be called 'Immanuel' which simply means 'God is with us.' A prophecy that we celebrate now during the Christmas season, in which we celebrate that Jesus was born of the virgin Mary in the town of Bethlehem.

This birth came a long time after the prophecy was given to the people of Judah by the prophet Isaiah. So why would God announce the birth of his Son so far in advance? Could you imagine if someone sent out birth notices to celebrate the birth of their son in 2723? God did this because the knowledge of their coming salvation in His Son was something the people of Judah, and particularly the people of Jerusalem at that time needed to hear, they needed to know that God was with them even when the world was against them.

Judah at the time was being led by King Ahaz, and he was perhaps one of the worst kings to sit upon the throne of Judah. Both his grandfather and father had been faithful followers of God, however Ahaz seemed to make all of his religious decisions not because of his faith in God, but because he sought out the approval of the people, or any god or idea that he thought could garner him some power here on earth. Because of this Ahaz often made it his religious policy to follow the God of whatever nation or people seemed to have the most power at the time.

One commentator described Ahaz religious policy by saying that he was 'like a careless driver who keeps switching lanes to get ahead without and regard for the safety of others or speed limits.' Ahaz would easily shove aside the alter of God in the Lord's own temple to make room for the idol of any pagan god that appeared to have power at that time. Ahaz even went so far as to sacrifice his own children in fire to the god Molech in hopes of gaining favour.

Yet none of this catering to the false gods and idols benefited the nation of Judah and the people of God, in fact it actually made things worse. In 2 Chronicles 28:6 we learn that in a single day of battle 120,000 soldiers fell in battle and another 200,000 were taken captive.

The people of Judah are in this piece of scripture facing the armies of the enemies of the nation of Judah who are marching towards Jerusalem, intent on destroying the city. The people of Judah are terrified knowing that this army is coming, knowing that it is intent on laying waste to their homes and families. This means that the people of Judah were shaken, yet Ahaz still will not turn to God and ask for his help. When the prophet Isaiah went to King Ahaz, he did not find Ahaz coming to God repentant of his wandering

away, instead Ahaz was out wandering through the city inspecting its defenses before the impending attack. Ahaz had even gone so far as to take money from the temple funds and send it to the king of Assyria in an attempt to have that nation come to his rescue.

This is something we all do even if not at the levels of King Ahaz. How many times in our lives do we want to prove that we can handle everything ourselves instead of turning to and relying on God in our times of trouble or times of need. We often do this because we feel the need to prove that we can do it ourselves, this is what King Ahaz was trying to do, to prove that he could protect the nation, he did not need God's help.

This also does not mean that we simply drop it all in God's lap and walk away. When we turn to God with our problems, it does not mean that we sit aside and do nothing, we cannot just sit down and wait for God to do everything, we need to be willing to work through the process while he provides what we need.

However, it is often when we are working in our lives that we believe that it all depends upon us and our efforts. How often do we spend more time at work trying to earn that extra money or recognition for promotion, giving up time that we could be spending in prayer or in worship? How often do we spend hours on the internet looking for great deals, investments, opportunities or even ways to get recognized rather than opening our bibles and seeking guidance on eternal matters like salvation? Often people of this world are more like King Ahaz, thinking that they know what is best for them and that they do not need God's direction and influence in their lives. So, they place the things of this world ahead of God consistently.

Yet even with King Ahaz refusing to recognize God, refusing to seek his guidance and forgiveness, God does not give up on King Ahaz. God could have easily said, 'Since you refuse to recognize me as your God, I will abandon you', but instead Isaiah tells King Ahaz, 'Be careful, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint'. God is even now constantly reaching out to the people of this world trying to get them to turn to him and this is even more visible here in the Christmas season.

You would think that God reaching out to him through Isaiah would bring comfort to King Ahaz, that he would be overjoyed to learn of God's support. But Isaiah did not react in any way, to him it was completely irrelevant that God had vowed his support of the nation of Judah. God still does not give up; he continues to try to get King Ahaz to return to faith. King Ahaz told him, 'Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.'

God offers to perform a miracle for King Ahaz, any miracle that he asks for, and how does King Ahaz Respond. He says, 'I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test.' King Ahaz disregards God, he knows that if God performs a miracle that he would feel obligated to return his faith and obedience to God. So rather than accept God into his

life, he pushes him away so that he can continue living his life the way he chooses. This happens all the time in our world, people who can see God at work in their lives, yet they refuse to recognize God's presence in their lives, or they push him away because they prefer having things their own way rather than allowing God into their lives and having their lives changed when they begin living according to God's word.

Isaiah could not believe Ahaz's pride and he nearly loses his temper with Ahaz, 'Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? <sup>14</sup> Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.' Isaiah tells King Ahaz that he will be given a sign of God's promise even though he does not want one, that sign will be the birth of his Son, one who is more than just a human man, the Son of God who was both fully man and fully God. This sign being given by God would have no impact on Ahaz, it would come hundreds of years after his death, but it would be of great importance to the people of God.

The birth of Jesus Christ was for the benefit of all of us. It was a sign of God fulfilling his promise to be with us. Yet, like Ahaz there are many people in this world who may not want God with them, they might prefer to not have God in their lives so that they can live in the enjoyment of their own personal pursuits. This is why the celebration of Christmas and its whole purpose being around the birth of Christ is being twisted into happy holidays, or the winter festival in the modern world, they want to remove Christ from Christmas so that they do not have to acknowledge his presence in the world.

I heard this process described in an interesting way. Imagine if I came in today and told you that on my way here, I saw a firetruck outside your house. Many people would feel some form of panic at this information, after all why is a firetruck parked outside your house? I would imagine many of you would make a quick phone call to try to discover what was going wrong at home. After all, if there is a fire truck, or police car, or ambulance it often means that there is something wrong at home.

This is what God With Us means to people who live their lives in sin, that the emergency vehicle is parked outside their home, and they feel that sense of panic. When we acknowledge God is with us, it also means we need to acknowledge God and his authority and his power in our lives. And it points out the sin we have in our lives, the things that are wrong in our lives because we are in a way forced to recognize the ways in which we do not live up to God's Word. Recognizing that God sent his son to the world during the Christmas season means that you need to acknowledge the miracle of the virgin birth, and because of that one miracle that Jesus was the Son of God, both fully man and fully God.

Celebrating Christmas as Christ's holiday also reminds mankind that we do not show appreciation to God for the gift he has given us as much as we should through the entire



year. Mankind is called during this season to acknowledge God's power and authority over all of creation and that thought troubles people who do not have faith.

However, while we might feel that uneasiness knowing that a fire truck is outside our home, we can also feel some comfort in that knowledge. After all, that firetruck comes to deal with the fire, or to help with the whatever is wrong. This is what Jesus did, he did not come to judge the world on that Christmas day, he did not come to separate the good and the bad, he did not come to make a list of who is naughty or nice.

Instead, Jesus came to save all of mankind from their sins, to bring them salvation and reconciliation with God. Jesus came because without him we cannot overcome our sinful nature any more than we can put out a fire with a squirt gun. We need a lot more than our own will to be saved from the fires of hell, we need the power of Jesus Christ in our lives, we need Immanuel, we need God With Us. God is the one who pays the debts of our sins with the blood he shed upon the cross, the blood that gives us salvation from the eternal fires of hell. We celebrate Christmas because the birth of Jesus reminds us that God is on our side, God is our father, and he sent his son to save us from the debt of our sin and eternal separation from Him.

We celebrate Christmas because God is with us and because we are with God. The same way in which sports fans wear Jerseys and paint their faces to support their teams as the playoffs approach. We decorate trees, dress in the colors of Christmas, decorate our homes and churches not because of worldly expectations, but because we want to celebrate the birth of Christ and show God that we are celebrating the birth of his Son and us being with Him. If King Ahaz were alive today, he would probably believe that everything we do around Christmas is foolish. He would question why we believe in the foolishness of God. After all King Ahaz desired to be the master of his own fate, in full control of his own destiny, and left to believe in whatever he chose to believe. This is the way that many people in the modern world think about Christmas, hence the desire to remove Christ from Christmas, because to celebrate the birth of the Christ-child would mean acknowledging God and relinquishing a portion of their life and faith to God.

This is what is happening in our day, millions of people celebrating Christmas without Christ. People who decorate trees, give gifts, have parties, where the focus is not Christ, but instead their own personal pleasures. To them point of Christmas is not to honor Jesus but to take pleasure in the things of this world that they enjoy. They do not seek to glorify Christ, but instead to glorify themselves. God wants all of mankind instead to celebrate the birth of Jesus with an attitude that shows we are with God, content to live how he calls for us to live, even when it goes against the things in which we take pleasure. God calls for us to celebrate the birth of Christ by forgiving others, by enjoying our fellowship with others, and by spending less time focused on the gifts we both give and receive in this world and more time spent focusing on the one and only perfect gift we will ever receive in this world, the grace, mercy, love and forgiveness that was given to

us through the birth of Jesus Christ and His death upon the cross, the gift that reconciles us with God and gives us our salvation.

So, as we approach this grand birthday party, the one that the majority of the world takes part of, let us be set apart from the world, let us celebrate differently because we do not need to guess how God thinks about us, we know that he desires to be our God and to have us as his people. The birth of Jesus was a sign of his promise to be with us always, so let us celebrate the birth of Jesus as a sign of our desire to be with God. Let us go out as the light of the world, helping others, sharing our faith, and praising and worshipping our God in the way we live bringing glory to his name in all that we say and do. Let us live as Gods thankful people.

Let us pray,

### **Prepare Our Hearts**

O merciful God,  
 you sent your eternal Word  
 to take on human nature  
 in the womb of the virgin Mary.  
 Grant that your chosen people  
 may put off fleshly desires,  
 to prepare their hearts  
 for the visitation of your dear Son,  
 Jesus Christ our Lord,  
 who lives and reigns with you  
 in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
 forever and ever.  
 Amen.

*Source: Wilhelm Loehe, Agende für christliche Gemeinden des lutherischen Bekenntnisses, 1844*

**Music Ministry: “Hope, Peace, Joy, Love” by Susan Parsons**

### **Invitation to Offering**

#### **Offering**

Presenting our tithes and offerings is an act of worship. I want to encourage you to write a cheque and drop it in the mail to the church using your envelope, if you have one. (St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church, PO Box 161, 1 Drummond St W, Perth, ON K7H 3E3). We

also have another option for you for giving and that is you can make an e-Transfer. This note from our treasurer:

**E-transfers are now accepted. Please note the new email address for this purpose only. [standrewspertthoffering@gmail.com](mailto:standrewspertthoffering@gmail.com) If you have an Offering Envelope #, please include it in the message section of the INTERAC transfer page you fill in. If you wish any part of your donation to go to a specific fund (e.g., Presbyterian Sharing) please mention this in your message.**

**Offertory Prayer**  
**(Congregant Prepared)**

**Closing Hymn #148: "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear"**

It came upon the midnight clear,  
that glorious song of old,  
from angels bending near the earth  
to touch their harps of gold:  
'To all the earth goodwill and peace,  
from heaven's allgracious King!'  
The world in solenm stillness lay  
to hear the angels sing.

But with the woes of sin and strife,  
the world has suffered long;  
beneath the angel strain have rolled  
two thousand years of wrong,  
but we, through din of war, hear not  
the love song which they bring.  
Oh hush the noise, Oh still the strife  
and hear the angels sing.

For lo! the days are hastening on,  
by prophets seen of old,  
when with the evercircling years  
shall come the time foretold,  
when peace shall over all the earth  
God's promised splendours fling,  
and all the world take up the song,  
which now the angels sing.

**Pastoral Prayer**

Amazing God! We adore you and we praise you.  
We bring our praises in the name of Jesus Christ,  
your Son, our Lord.

He was born among us!  
He was born one of us!  
He was born one for us!  
He was born to be with us!  
He was born that we might live!  
He was born that we might become children of God!

We praise you for the way he demonstrated your merciful love  
and your gentle touch upon our lives.  
We praise you for his coming as light for all your people  
of every age and in every place.  
We praise you for his coming to set us free,  
to open blind eyes, and to heal broken hearts and lives.  
We praise you for his readiness to enter into  
all that life in this world means to us, that we might,  
by your grace, share all that heaven is in him.  
We praise you for the way he identified himself with us.  
He entered into our pain, our rejection,  
our sorrow, our hopes,  
and through his baptism, he even tasted  
the results and effects of our sinfulness.  
We praise you for accepting his sacrifice on the cross  
as the price of the healing of our relationship with you.  
We praise you more that through his resurrection  
he has guaranteed our share in his eternal kingdom.  
Lord, our praises are limited by time and space  
and by our human weakness.  
By your grace, enable us and empower us  
that we shall be with you and praise you for ever in Christ.  
Amen.

### **Benediction**

May the Lord make you increase and abound in love  
for one another and for all,  
just as we abound in love for you.  
And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness  
that you may be blameless before our God and Father  
at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints