

Song of the Prophet
Isaiah 40:1-11

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, its official, the Christmas season is now at hand. You can tell if you drive, for many people have up their Christmas decorations. I wonder if their electric bills are going up? Shawano and Clintonville have decorations up. The creche is now up front of many churches. Christmas trees are now for sale in numerous lots. All the stores have up their Christmas displays. Of course, some of the store displays were up before Halloween, so what does all this really mean? We even have had an early snow – which has since melted – and the current temps are unusually high

I know Christmas is in the near future is because the children are working on the Christmas program, and last Sunday Pastor Kessen spoke about the New Year, a new church year that is, for the church year always begins with Advent. Advent is that time of preparation for the celebration of Christ's first coming and for Christ's return.

As we see the hustle and bustle of people during this time of year, it can be rather depressing. There is so much joy in the season, but there is also much pain and suffering. People are unable to give what they feel are the best gifts because of money problems, and so they get depressed. Others have lost loved ones this past year and will spend this first Christmas without them, and there is a certain emptiness during the holidays.

Why? For many, something missing in their Christmas, and the word Christmas itself gives us a quick clue for there is a portion of that word which seems so much to be forgotten, the first six letters, C-H-R-I-S-T, Christ.

How many of you get caught up in the spirit of the season and misplace Christ? Are you worried about what to buy someone – do such thoughts occupy your minds when you say portions of the service from memory? Or maybe during the sermon your mind wanders as you mentally make plans of what to buy and for whom?

Ask kids what Christmas is about and they'll tell you. Many are thinking of vacation from school. Some are thinking about the good food and seeing relatives they have not seen in a while, fun in the snow, and most importantly - PRESENTS under the tree. It is indeed unfortunate that so many all fall prey to the kind of thinking that often removes the name of Christ from Christmas.

What is more, Christ isn't *ALWAYS* the central focus of your Christmas thinking. What I mean is, that many Christians want the baby Jesus, the manger, the glad tidings of great joy, but they do not want God's Christ.

If Christ were not born on that first Christmas, there would be another week and a half or two of school. If there would have been no gift from God of His Son that first Christmas, the thought of giving gifts would not have begun. The only time to give or receive gifts would be on birthdays. And, isn't Christmas the biggest birthday bash of all time? Isn't the gift from God of His very own Son to die for the sins of everyone, the greatest gift of love ever given? And there is the rub, God's

Christ is finally and fully unwrapped as our greatest gift when He is nailed to the cross. Too many believe that is not something they want to hear during the Christmas season, they think it is depressing – yet that is the greatest gift and the most comforting news ever spoken.

Giving and receiving gifts, gathering with family – those Christmas practices are good. But we need to remember to focus upon God's gift of Christ this Christmas, or we will be miserable. He is the only way to be happy and comforted in this season. In fact, that is exactly what our text from Isaiah talks about.

Advent is a season of preparation for the coming of Christ, celebrating the one who has come, *and* who is to come again.

This lesson from the prophet Isaiah is perfect for meditation during this time of preparation, because the message contained in it helps to prepare you and focus you upon this One who has come and will come again. In fact, this text gives you the reason to celebrate the season of Advent as a season of comfort and joy brought about in hope and anticipation for the return of Christ. It gives you a song to sing, the song of the prophet, a song of comfort.

John the Baptist's father, Zacharias recorded the song we will study next Wednesday night. It is John who is identified in Scripture as the voice of one in the wilderness crying, "make ready the way of the Lord," the one whom our text today prophecies about.

Today people hurry about, everyone is running their lives so fast, each person living for each day and for tomorrow. Everybody seems worried about the future. As our text tells us, all people are like grass that withers, but the Word of the Lord will stand forever. It is for this reason that the comfort of the Lord our God is to be found, in His Word. And where is the Word? The Word is Christ, and it is in Christ that your comfort is found. As the Word comes to you today in its many forms, Christ is here with you, He the Word that stands forever.

The comfort God gives to you is spoken of in the prophet's song. Our text says, "Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she has received double for all her sins." Dear brothers and sister in Christ, you are Jerusalem – by faith. Eternal Jerusalem is made up of all those who have the faith in the Messiah promised to Adam, Abraham, and all the Patriarchs. All those with faith in Christ are God's church, the bride of Christ, and as the bride of Christ is why our text calls Jerusalem a she. We are Jerusalem, and comfort is in the appearance of God's Christ, the Word incarnate, to our dwell among men.

Good tidings are that your God has come once to the earth. He came in human flesh and paid double for your sins. He came to earth and humbled Himself. He came to earth, and while here, saw and felt all that brings you pain and suffering. He knows what temptations and trials you go through. He is physically acquainted with your suffering. In His coming in human flesh, He resisted temptation, bore your griefs and carried your sorrows, because of your sins He was smitten by God and afflicted. Yes, Christ was even pierced for your transgressions and the chastening for your well-being fell upon Him.

Yet, despite the fact that He suffered all these pains, griefs, and punishments, and yes, even though

He died for you, it was a victory. Through this unusual activity of God, Satan was defeated. Yes my dear friends, the power of God is revealed in the pain and suffering of Christ. Paul says that the ultimate power of God is the power of Christ crucified. Yes, His death for your sins is His ultimate power. To show how powerful that death was, three days later He arose again from the dead.

God's power defeated sin for you. Something you cannot do! God's glory was revealed to you in that first advent upon the earth of His Son. His glory was born in a stable and laid in a manger. What humble beginnings. God's glory continues to be revealed to you today. You hear that you are forgiven in His Word as it comes to you, through the humble mouth of a sinful man.

God's glory also comes to you in the supper of His precious Body and Blood which He gives you to eat and to drink. Wrapped in the humble forms of bread and wine, as He was once wrapped in strips of cloth, Christ comes to you with the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. He feeds you and gives you of Himself to strengthen you and comfort you here in this life.

These gifts from God of Himself are the greatest comfort He can give to you. These gifts not only come from Him, but in them, Christ Himself comes to you. What greater comfort is there than a God who comes *for* His people, *and then to* His people to help them with their greatest need and struggle, the battle against sin.

It is this very Son of God who still helps you and hears your prayers. He is the One who is there to comfort you in your every trial and temptation, just as He has promised – to be with you to the very end of the age.

God further comforts His people by sending to them an under-shepherd to care for them, to be there for them, and to speak to His sheep the tender Word of His loving care and comfort. It is by the hand of this under-shepherd that God also feeds His dear children the strength of His own Body and Blood.

Christ Himself is the one preparing you for this coming Christmas. For God comes to you, giving of Himself in Christ to comfort you, His people. Comfort for God's people comes to you and to me through Jesus. He Himself said, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." These words of Jesus are good words, the sweetest words of comfort meant for God's people. Millions of suffering saints have found comfort in them. As you come weekly into His house to receive His gifts to you, think on these words as you receive that comfort of God to you and the rest it gives your souls.

My dear friends, God's glory will be revealed to you on that last day when again His Son returns to give unto His adopted children His gift of eternal glory in the heavenly mansions He has prepared for them. Your comfort comes in knowing that you will receive that gift as well, for it is God himself who comforts His people. It is God who comforts you.

So, let us remember the Prophet's Song, a song of comfort. Let us keep it ever in our hearts and sounding forth from our lips. If we don't remember where it is in the Bible, it has been nicely paraphrased for us in the hymn we just sang before the sermon, number 347. Yes, God's Word shall stand forever, for you and for me. Amen.