

## **Sermon Draft**

**Text: Isaiah 2:1–5**

**Sermon: “Come Lord, Jesus Come”**

Advent prepares us both to celebrate our Lord’s having already come and already redeemed his fallen creation and to look forward to his coming again in glory. The Collect of the Day is addressed to God the Son. To Christ we pray, “Come!” For what purpose? That ***“we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and saved by Your mighty deliverance.”***

Isaiah 2:1–5, our text is an oasis of Gospel in a desert of Law. In Isaiah 1, Judah is condemned by God for her wickedness in what reads like a prosecutor’s closing statement in a criminal trial. Conspicuous by contrast is this solitary word of mercy: ***“Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow”*** (1:18). ***Immediately after making this gracious promise, the Lord warns his people not to backslide (“if you refuse and rebel . . . ” [1:20])*** and proceeds to catalog Judah’s sins and tell of the nation’s inevitable destruction.

Beginning in with our text Isaiah addresses God, declaring the justice of God’s wrath on ***“the day of the Lord”*** when not Judah only but all mankind will be humbled before the “terror of the Lord” (2:21).

***“Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the Lord has spoken:  
‘Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against  
me’”*** (Isaiah 1:2).

So begins the Book of Isaiah. With the heavens and earth as jurors, God the Almighty Prosecutor presents his closing argument against the defendant, his own people, Israel: They have abandoned their Maker and Redeemer. Their worship is insincere. Their rulers are corrupt. They lack mercy. They oppress the weak and live solely for pleasure. The just sentence for their crimes? Their land shall go desolate, and they shall be burned with unquenchable fire. Similar words of judgment and condemnation immediately follow our Old Testament Reading for today.

But here in Isaiah 2 verses 1–5, the prophet abruptly shifts to words of mercy and a description even of Israel’s future glory. ***“It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains. . . . For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. . . . Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore”*** (vs 2–4). What does this mean?

From the prophet's day to the present time, Isaiah's prophecy about a mountain that God would one day establish high above all other mountains—to which the peoples would stream to hear the Lord's teaching and out of which God's Word would flow to the rest of the world, bringing peace and harmony—has been misunderstood and abused. Just where is the mountain of the house of the Lord?

For many of the Jews living during Jesus' humble ministry, the mountain Isaiah was talking about was Jerusalem. That's where God would come and deliver his people from their physical enemies and establish a literal kingdom on earth that would rule all other kingdoms. Convinced of this, they rejected Jesus, thinking he couldn't possibly be the Messiah, the one sent by God to bring about such an earthly kingdom, since Jesus brought not glory but a cross, not political freedom but forgiveness.

Where then is the mountain of the house of the Lord? For Christian millennialists, such as the authors of the popular *Left Behind* books, the answer is much the same as the old Jewish one.

They, too, believe the mountain of the house of the Lord refers literally to Jerusalem and that one day, before the resurrection of the dead, Jesus will come to set up there a central government and rule all the nations of the world for a thousand years. The godly of the world will be in charge and the ungodly will be suppressed. No wonder our Lutheran forefathers rejected such teachings as “Jewish opinions” (AC XVII 5).

Where is the mountain of the house of the Lord? For modern Judaism, it is the land of Israel. However, unlike the picture Isaiah gives us of the nations of the world streaming to Jerusalem, adherents of modern Judaism treat Israel as the exclusive possession of the Jews. The conversion of Gentiles to Judaism is hardly a priority, and to the extent that there are Gentile converts to Judaism, distinctions remain. A Gentile is still a Gentile.

Where is the mountain of the house of the Lord? For Muhammad, the mountain was Mecca, the center of the Muslim empire and the future capital of a world converted to Islam. But unlike the pleasing picture of peace that Isaiah paints, Islam has always been a religion of bloodshed. When Muhammad first received his “divine revelations” in the early 600s, few in his hometown believed him.

So, he took his new religion north to Medina, where he found converts willing to wage war against his enemies back in Mecca. Thus began Islam, the so-called religion of peace.

Where is the mountain of the house of the Lord? For many of the medieval popes, it was either Jerusalem, the holiest of pilgrimage destinations, or Rome, the center of Christendom and home of Christ's representative on earth, the pope himself. Yet unlike the voluntary streaming of people and the conditions of peace which Isaiah describes, the popes sought to establish the kingdom of God by force during the Crusades through war and during the Inquisition through instruments of torture.

Where then is the mountain of the house of the Lord? A key to help us unlock the mystery is the phrase "*in the latter days.*" The error of first-century Jews and modern millennialists lay in thinking that the "*latter days*" to which Old Testament believers looked forward are still way in the future. How did the author of Hebrews put it? "*Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son*" (Hebrews 1:1–2, emphasis added).

Did you catch that? ***“In these last days.”*** Every day since Christ’s resurrection and ascension until his second coming is one of the last days. There is nothing yet to be accomplished for our salvation between now and our Lord’s coming again in glory! As Paul said in our Epistle this morning, ***“You know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep”*** (Romans 13:11). We are living even now in the last days.

Isaiah also spoke of people freely streaming to the mountain of the house of the Lord to be taught by God and to walk in his paths. So much for an earthly kingdom brought about by force of arms. Remember what Jesus told Pontius Pilate. ***“My kingdom is not of this world” (Jn 18:36). Jesus said that from the days of John the Baptist the kingdom of heaven, instead of committing violence, suffers violence, and he warned against those who would try to “take it by force” (Matthew 11:12).***

No, the mountain of the house of the Lord is the place where God dwells and is enthroned and reveals himself to his people. The mountain of the house of the Lord is where God gathers his people around his Word. In short, the mountain of the house of the Lord is here, in this place, God’s Church, where two or three have gathered in his name.

You and I are part of the fulfillment of Isaiah's 2,700-year-old prophecy!

Imagine a first-century Palestinian, thanks to some time-traveling technology, transported into the present. He might argue that today's world hardly resembles Isaiah's picture of peace—swords being beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. But what did the Christmas angels declare? ***“Peace on earth and goodwill toward men!”*** A modern millennialist might argue that understanding Isaiah 2 in terms of the Christian Church does not take the text literally or seriously enough. But Isaiah says, ***“For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem”*** (Isaiah 2:3). Must the nations make pilgrimage to Jerusalem to hear the Word of the Lord, or does the Word itself go out from Jerusalem to the nations? The risen Christ commanded his disciples to proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins ***“to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem”*** (Luke 24:47). And that's exactly what happened: The Word, the promise of salvation through Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross—went out from Jerusalem, starting with the apostles, and spread to sinners around the world.

Even today, around the world, people of every nation, language, and tribe come to the house of the Lord and are being converted to faith in Jesus Christ, taught by God and walking in his paths.

That Word which began in Jerusalem comes to you today. Although you and I fall under the same judgment which God spoke to his people in Isaiah, God has graciously pardoned us. He has issued a stay of execution. He has done so for the sake of the one who was condemned in our place his Son, Jesus Christ. Risen from the dead, God's Son declares to you this day, "Peace be with you." Your sins are forgiven.

It's true that, just as did the believers of Old Testament times, we still look forward with a sure hope to that Last Day, when God will put an end to all earthly war, remove all sin, wipe away all tears, when there will be only peace and joy in the presence of our Lord forever. But unlike the Old Testament believers, we know that the age of Christ's second coming is the culmination of what has already begun. Isaiah got to view the mountain from a distance. We're dwelling on it! These are the last days. The Light has come into the world! Even now there is forgiveness of sins and peace, peace with God and therefore with one another.

And the Word of the Lord draws the nations to itself.

What a note on which to begin a new church year! Today, on the First Sunday in Advent, Isaiah reminds us that the Lord is faithful to his promises. Though we still live in a world ravaged by war and disease and other calamities, a world still in bondage to sin and death and far from glory, God dwells even now in his house—this house! and reveals himself to us. “**O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord**” (Isaiah 2:5).

Amen