

Living Light

Isaiah 2:1-5 (November 27, 2022)

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The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. ²In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. ³Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. ⁴He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. ⁵O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!

Historical Context

Isaiah wrote these verses about 740 BC, a time when spirits were low in Judah: Assyrian armies were bent on conquest, and many people doubted God's power to preserve the dynasty of David in accordance with his promise; others believed themselves to be invincible in the face of enemies. Because Chapter [1](#) begins with similar words, it appears that this and the next few chapters originally formed a separate document. The ideas in vv. [2-4](#) are also found in Micah [4](#).

The prophet foretells a time when all peoples will make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to learn the way of living revealed by God. In this future time, God will settle disputes between nations and people. It will be an age of peace and plenty. Isaiah exhorts the people to adopt God's ways now.

Theme: Living Light

There is a great deal of truth to the religious traditions that advocate serenity as a spiritual discipline —being "centered", staying mindful, getting peaceful. But it all boils down to recognizing that no matter what happens "out there" we can choose who we are "in here." Regardless of our external circumstances, we can choose how we feel, and what our attitude will be. And that makes all the difference in how we act and how we relate to others.

As we enter the season of Advent and look forward to something better, I can think of no better place to start than by looking at ourselves. Are we the kind of people who bring peace to a room, who spread kindness and compassion to those we meet? I think it's no small question. Because we are the ones who are responsible for being light in our world. If our world is one where injustice and violence and oppression and suffering thrive, at this time of the year when we look forward to something better, we have to ask ourselves whether we are contributing to that suffering, or whether we are contributing to the peace that God is bringing into the world.

That's what Isaiah was saying to the people of Israel and Judah. The prophet Isaiah saw God's justice and peace as light that brings life to the ("pagan") nations. But he did not just see that light as something for an indefinite time in "days yet to come." He believed that the extent to which the Jewish people themselves became living light, the nations would be attracted to that light and come streaming to learn the ways of God. And so, he urged the people of Israel and Judah to "walk in the light of the Lord." That had as much to do with the kind of people they chose to be - their quality of spirit, the attitude of their heart—as it did with the way they acted.