

Christmas At FLC 2020
First Lutheran Church
“Faithful Looking for the Light”
Pastor Joshua Graber

Grace and peace in the name of God our loving creator and our lord and savior Jesus Christ. Merry Christmas!

Today we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. We celebrate God coming to earth. We celebrate with hearts, and minds. With Words of Scripture and songs to celebrate this story of God coming to earth.

During Advent we have waited and sung O Come O Come Emmanuel and Come Thou Long Expected Jesus. And now we celebrate God becoming human and after 9 months in the belly of a teenage girl, God Comes in the baby Jesus. After a long journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, God Comes. Through the cold days and nights God Comes.

Isaiah told a story to help people know what to expect in an arrival like this. Isaiah tells us in Chapter 7 that Israel cannot see hope, in the midst of fear of its neighbors—the hearts of King Ahaz of Judah and his people “shake like trees in the forest shake in the wind”. The prophet says this fear grows into a weariness that keeps them from seeing God’s strength.

And at this time Isaiah calls his people into a practice of “close faithful looking” for a sign he imagines for us. This is the same type of close looking and waiting with expectation that we have practiced throughout Advent, as weary and as fearful as we may be, in a world that feels turned upside down. Our faithful

practice reminds us of God's presence in the midst of our fears and distractions. Isaiah says, "The Lord spoke thus to me while his hand was strong on me, and warned me not to walk in the way of this [fearful] people. Do not call conspiracy what this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what it fears, or be in dread" (Isaiah 8:12).

In the midst of the dread, the fears and distractions, Isaiah tells his people to look for a young woman who is with child and shall bear a son, who shall be our Immanu-el. Isaiah tells us a child named "God with us" will come. And if they look closely the faithful will see this sign in their midst. A sign that seems as common as life itself. Through Isaiah God says pay attention, even to what seems ordinary.

The Prophet speaks to a people who have been living in the midst of darkness, after turmoil and conflict, the tools of war and bloody rags of memory, will be gathered and burned as the nation dances and sings to Yahweh in worship, and here is where the child will be born "for us" a child given "to us", "authority will rest on his shoulders, and his name will be Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually and there shall be endless peace" (Isaiah 9: 6-7).

Our faithful and careful looking has led to seeing this celebration in the midst of a time that may seem dark and precarious, for them and for us today. As a baby waits in the mother's belly, God delivers to us good news that helps us celebrate in spite of all the gloom and darkness that may have gathered. In this child is the light that breaks the darkness and all the sin that binds us.

And here we turn to the story we know so well. The careful faithful looking we are again called to, in a story that we need to tell and hear again and again, especially around this time of year. A story that reminds us of God's triumph over darkness and fear. And keeps us looking, always looking for the liberating light we can cherish and share.

Isaiah may have told us what to look for, but when it comes to what we should expect, this story of Christ's nativity reminds us that God comes in the unexpected and the overlooked. God reminds us to pay attention to what may seem ordinary. We are reminded that the love of God for us which is soooooo big, comes to us in a surprising form... a tiny little baby.

And this tiny baby who has all authority, is born in the midst of a family that could easily be overlooked. The Father, Joseph, is an descendant of King David who united his people, but that is a distant memory now and Judah seems to now be under the thumb of a foreign empire that makes the people forget to look carefully for signs from Yahweh. Joseph and Mary, are there at emperor's command, so they go to Bethlehem to be counted. On the surface there is no power in what is about to take place. On the surface this baby is being born, may be seen as a new slave to an empire that forced them to go there, away from their home in Nazareth.

And here we are reminded by the prophet Isaiah of this close, faithful looking we are called to do. We see this scene. A child born away from seats of power and thrones.

He is born in the memory of David, the branch of Jesse that has been covered by centuries, but if you look closely, you see it has not been broken or shaken.

But this child is more than that. His name is Jesus and he will redeem this world of fears and all that holds it captive. Jesus, this little baby, is delivered with all the love of a God who has not quit on humanity. A God who delivers forgiveness rather than judgment. All the love. The promised light. That great big love and that brightest of lights. Delivered to us in this little babe.

And so with our careful faithful looking at this story, we see what the world does not see. In our homes, or in a parking lot, or in a sparse sanctuary, we see what the world does not see. This good news of Jesus born to us, delivered to us, comes once again to a weary world, and once again we light the fire of our human disappointments and our fears, and our hearts dance and celebrate this wonderful news together. Jesus our savior comes to us again! The people that have walked in darkness have seen a great light! O come all you faithful, to gather around and share this light for the world!

May the promises of God light up your hearts tonight and the hope, love, joy, and peace of Christ be with you!