

Is 2:1-5; Ps 122; Ro 13:11-14; Mt 24:36-44

Today we light the Prophet's candle. You and I have tuning in to the prophets all year long. We have considered Isaiah, Jeremiah and many others. We have taken up the promises and warnings they bring from the Lord. As we begin to observe what we call the Advent Season it is striking how this newborn King, this baby Jesus, fulfills the promises God gave so long ago. By the 1st c AD the time had been so long – that God's people had given up watching and waiting for the promised Messiah. Instead, they were not free, but suffering under Roman occupation.

You will be glad to hear that God doesn't expect us to understand everything. What a relief! We don't act on what we don't know. It is enough to act on what we do know. What the Apostle Paul told the church at Rome makes all kinds of sense to me: "...it is now time for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers." (v 11) To us that may be too obvious. Every day that passes brings us closer to the culmination of history. The Bible teaches that history – time – has a beginning, a

middle and an end. One day history will draw to a close. Scripture teaches that “the sky will be rolled up like a scroll” (Is 34:4) When the King of kings returns, there will be true justice in the world.

Our old friend Isaiah says that the Lord will give instruction from the very place of His glory, Mt. Zion (that is Jerusalem). When God’s justice is established, we will hear the ringing of iron on iron – in our day steel on steel. Swords and spears will be refashioned into ploughs and pruning hooks. See it? The implements of war leading to death will become implements for growing food to nourish people in life. Let’s do our best in this cynical age to read the prophet’s words (God’s Word) with faith. I know it isn’t always easy. We don’t want to be looked at as simple minded. Faith is not simple-minded – faith is wisdom in action. And hope in the future is the great corollary to faith – faith in Jesus Christ.

What Paul is writing to the Romans echoes what Jesus teaches His disciples, “Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.” (v 42) Once again, Jesus doesn’t

expect us to know the unknowable. Only be like Noah, says Jesus. He had this inspiration from the Lord to build the huge ark for his family and as many animals as he could gather for the great flood voyage. Noah's neighbors laughed at him. That jeering did not stop him from continuing to work on the blueprint God had put in his mind. In that era, nobody had seen such a massive amount of rain. The Bible indicates that the water came up from springs and streams and watered the crops in the time before the flood. God was about to unleash a massive, global outpouring never before seen in His world.

Noah set about to prepare for what God said was going to happen. In the same way, you and I are called to get ready for Christ's sudden appearing in the world – His return. Even as we are at our daily occupations and work, Jesus says some will be taken and some will be left. There is confusion about what Jesus is saying. Some think that the one taken is lifted out of the time/space reality, as Tim LaHaye prophesied. I don't think so. Noah and his family and the great floating menagerie of creatures were not removed – no, they remained. The flood took away many, many

people. I believe that the ones taken are being culled out and the ones remaining experience Christ making all things new. Here is what we know: To get ready for Jesus' return is to work for His kingdom here and now. Social, racial and economic justice are the work of Christ's Kingdom – you and I are to be about these things right now – as long as we are alive and together as the body of Christ. Our prayers, worship, ministry and mission are helping to bring God's Kingdom into the world today. Christ's Kingdom is for the living. Christ's Kingdom is the reality of the Creator God manifested through His people.

It seems to me there is considerable confusion in the world today about the Season of Advent. Stores are already posting big, bright signs telling us how many shopping days there are before Christmas. Really? We are waiting and eager for the Savior's Birthday – but the journey to Bethlehem was not like going down to the mall. The young woman Mary of Nazareth was uncomfortable and possibly a little anxious to find a safe, quiet place to bring forth her Son. Joseph was not just looking for a parking place close to the entrance. He may have felt the great

responsibility of keeping his fiancée and God's Son safe from the uncertainty of traveling the Roman roads between Nazareth and Bethlehem. The church is dressed in purple for Advent. This denotes a time of contemplating the wonderful miracle of Jesus' birth into the world.

Today, we keep some traditions of the church. We recite the stories about what the prophets have said – about the birth of the two cousins, John Baptist and Jesus – about the journey to the City of David – the glorious opening of the heavens and the choirs of angels announcing Messiah's first coming into the world to conquer sin and death. These are the Gospel.

We meditate in our time upon Jesus' mysterious promise that He will be coming back into this world to put all things to right. When He appears, He will establish exactly what Isaiah prophesies: Peace, pure judgment, the coming of the Light of His Presence with us. Are you ready to meet Him? Are you here today with your prayers, your gifts, your service and your witness to the world? Amen.

