

Isaiah 2:1-5

2:1 The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

2:2 In 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.

2:3 Many 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.

2:4 He 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 anymore.

2:5 O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD!

Homily: One Little Light

Advent is the audacious story of one little candle.

One. That's it. But it's burning bright. And that one bright light will change the world.

Many, many moons ago, the people of Israel demanded a king. Samuel was leery: "A king will only disappoint you. It's God's world, don't you

know?” But still the people insisted, and God told Samuel: “Tell them: ‘have at it!’”

It turns out that Samuel was right. Before too long, one kingdom had split into two: Samaria in the North and Judah in the South. And when the monarchs of these two kingdoms were not seeking to grab power from their subjects, or from one another, they were seeking to take it from Damascus and other neighboring tribes. And at the same time, these kings were doing their best not to be swallowed up and annexed by superpowers like Assyria and Egypt.

In today’s pericope, the king of Samaria, the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and the King of Damascus, make a pact to impede Assyria’s aggression. The two kings also urge King Ahaz of Judah, the Southern Kingdom of Israel, to join this pact. Ahaz thinks about the offer, but declines: “You two provide plenty of buffer for me – fight your own battles,” he says.

In response, Damascus and Samaria invade Judah. And holed up in his castle, King Ahaz seeks the counsel of the Prophet Isaiah. “What should I do?” he asks.

I believe Ahaz was looking for the easy way out: “Tell me it’s okay to make a pact with Assyria. They’ll demolish my present enemies, I’ll pay a tribute, and we’ll all go on about our business.”

Isaiah doesn’t bite. He has another suggestion for the young King:

I will not counsel you on the ways of a world that is broken, nor will I recommend solutions that only prolong the inevitable or repeat a cycle of past mistakes.

YHWH is my God. And ever since the days of Joshua, YHWH has told us that we have a responsibility to live in covenant with our Creator. Should we choose to keep that covenant, we need not fear for our security.

But you, Ahaz, still seek another way. You seem to think that alliances with foreign powers will make you stronger; you seem to think that mercy and justice and kindness are instruments of vulnerability; you seem to think that might is the only form of right.

But I'm urging you to see differently, Ahaz. Look hard. Look long. Look far. For beyond that wall, beyond those armies, beyond the horizon is another world: God's world. It's a city that sits high atop a mountain.

And on that mountain, all the nations of the world will gather, and praise God together. And God will be their judge, not a nasty, finger-pointing, wand-zapping judge, but a wise one, a teacher, an arbiter. God will be like Deborah, sitting under a tree – a judge who makes righteous decisions, but also listens to the grievances of her people.

When this day comes, there will be no need of weapons – when all people live under the auspices of God's justice, weapons are fruitless.

Ahaz, look to this light. God's world is coming. Open yourself to seeing it, and when you do, walk toward it!"

Isaiah spoke. The prophecy was foretold. And even amid silence, one little candle burned brightly.

Would that Ahaz had heeded Isaiah's counsel! He didn't. He paid tribute to Assyria, his enemies were dismantled, and Judah remained relatively unscathed. But not without future damage. Assyria would continue to lord its power of Judah in the next century.

But still, one little candle, one audacious voice, helped changed the world. Ahaz's son Hezekiah would heed Isaiah's future counsel, and under Hezekiah's reforms, Judah would return to the worship of YHWH. And even in the siege of his city, Hezekiah chose to listen to Isaiah's voice – he chose to believe that somewhere out on the horizon, God's world was still coming. He looked to the light of one little candle.

Throughout the centuries, God's work has been made manifest by little candles who have chosen to shine brightly in the darkest of situations. Isaiah's flame ensured that another would burn brightly: Seven hundred years later, an unwed teenage mother, and her little child would respond to God's call. They too would choose to see the promise of God's future.

So here we are today: one tiny candle stands alone. Over the next few weeks, four more will join it. And in twenty-five days, perhaps a hundred more in this room.

And I believe the question for us this season, Millbrook Baptist Church, is this: Will we choose to hold a candle high, and walk in the light of the Lord? And will we choose to know that our singular light can help transform a broken present into God's bright future?

At the completion of *The Hobbit*, Gandolph tells Bilbo:

Surely you don't disbelieve the prophecies, because you had a hand in bringing them about yourself? You don't really suppose, do you, that all your adventures and escapes were managed by mere luck, just for your sole benefit?

Friends, in the season of Advent, we will hear the ancient prophecies. We should not be surprised to learn that we too are part of making God's future a reality.

Our journey starts when we choose to hold high our little candles.

This Little Light of Mine, I'm gonna let it shine, let it shine, let it shine, let it shine!

Amen.