

by Joan Mitchell, CSJ

In the scriptures this Advent the prophet Isaiah yearns for peace. The prophet speaks in a time bloodied like our own by war, a time of lives interrupted like our own by deportations. Assyrian armies have trampled the northern tribes of Israel, forced them off their land, uprooted their olive groves, and resettled their regions with foreign tribes that worship other gods.

Isaiah cannot believe their faithful God will leave Israel in despair and defeat. Although they walk in darkness, Isaiah trusts God will one day shine a great light. A child will be born whose name will be—

*Wonderful Counselor,
Mighty God,
Everlasting Father,
Prince of Peace (9.6).*

Perhaps because Isaiah would find our daily headlines familiar, we find his visions of peace still

compelling. Isaiah envisions nations learning God's law and then studying war no more.

*They will beat their swords
into plowshares,
and their spears
into pruning hooks (2.4).*

In the midst of war Isaiah imagines the dead stump of the royal family tree sprouting a leader filled with wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, knowledge, reverence, and awe in God's presence. In the midst of war Isaiah envisions a peaceable kin*dom where the wolf lives with the lamb, the leopard with the kid, and a child can play near a snake (11.1-9).

When young king Ahaz makes an alliance with Assyria and its

gods rather than trust Israel's God, Isaiah insists—

*A young woman will bear a son
and shall name him Emmanuel
(7.14).*

Advent is a season for imagining peace is possible. In finding gifts that delight and express our love, we experience the warm circle of belonging most families want for themselves. Our global world challenges us to widen our family circles. Our work to build peace rekindles the promise the Christ child brings to the world, promise that lives in each of us.

Envision peace. What does peace look and feel like? Color and reflect on the word *shalom*, peace, in Hebrew below.

Sunday Readings: 1 Isaiah 2.1-5
Romans 13.11-14 Matthew 24.37-44

SUNDAY

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GOSPEL

When does Jesus come to us?

Light one candle on your Advent wreath.

LEADER: Holy Spirit, in you we live, move, and have our being.

ALL: Awaken us to your presence in our joys and struggles.

LEADER: Overshadow us as you did Mary.

ALL: Birth in us new energy for peace making.

LEADER: Help us find ways to beat our guns into microscopes, turn our bombs into bread.

ALL: Help us sweeten our tweets and deepen our dialogues.

LEADER: Bless our capacity to love and give new life.

ALL: Come, complete in us all you have begun. Amen.

NARRATOR: Jesus said to his disciples—

JESUS 1: As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. In the days before the flood people were eating and drinking, marrying and being married, right up to the day Noah entered the ark. They suspected nothing before the flood came and destroyed them. So will it be at the coming of the Son of Man.

JESUS 2: Two men will be out in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal; one will be taken and one will be left. Stay awake, therefore. You cannot know the day your Lord is coming.

JESUS 3: Be sure of this: If the owner of the house knew when the thief was coming he or she would keep a watchful eye and not allow the house to be broken into. You must be prepared in the same way. The Son of Man is coming at a time you do not know.

Matthew 24.37-44



Matthew delivers a wake up call.

Jesus' disciples follow him as he leaves the temple mount in Matthew 24, the source of Sunday's gospel. They look back in appreciation at the building King Herod has rebuilt to burnish the city skyline with elegance. Then Jesus prophesies the temple will not stand, "not a stone upon another stone" (24.2).

What is prophecy in Jesus' lifetime is history when Matthew writes some 50 years later. The gospel writer knows the temple lies in ruins. Its destruction in A.D. 70 leaves Israel's spiritual icon in rubble, creating an indelible memory much like 9/11—a wake-up call. Matthew wants believers to recognize they are the new

temple, living stones of a new community of faith.

● When in your life have you realized that you were complacent about God? How did God get your attention?

● When have you recognized God's presence and power in your life?

The 1st Sunday of Advent begins the Church year with a focus on Jesus' second coming, an event that seems even farther off to us than to the Christians for whom Matthew writes.

Jesus' wake-up call sounds its alarm with three examples: the clueless people in the days of Noah, the workers snatched

in the field and mill, and the burgled homeowner. The clueless party people could many times be any of us, wasting our lives without appreciating the people who bless our days and the gift of life itself.

The snatched-away workers project an ominous and urgent feel. There is no reason why one is taken and one has another chance. Clearly the time to pay attention is now. The parable of the homeowner makes clear a thief depends on the homeowner's forgetfulness.

To not miss God's comings, Jesus cautions us to stay awake. Staying awake spiritually simply means paying attention—living, loving, remembering consciously. We celebrate

liturgies in our churches that help us appreciate God's presence and gifts in our lives. We celebrate rituals in many other places—tucking a child in bed every night, honoring birthdays with cake and memories, gathering in times of sorrow.

● **How might God be present in these rituals? How might they be holy even if not “church-y?”**

Advent is a time of remembering God's fidelity and God's desires for relationship with people. The birth of Jesus Christ reveals a divine value in human life and relationships. The birth of God in human flesh is an emptying of divine prerogative and a privileging of our human capacity to heal, share, forgive, reconcile, free, accompany. We are pregnant with the Spirit and in labor to bring God's kin*dom to birth among us.

Now is the time to live like Jesus. Now is the moment to feed the hungry, to forgive those we really love, to restore depressed spirits to joy. Now is the time to watch birds eating the seeds of last summer's blooms and to let “I love you” and “I'm proud of you” no longer go unsaid. Now is the time to give ourselves to those we love and those whose lives we touch.

Advent says, “Just in case you have been dozing, wake up and be ready for something wonderful!” God promises us gifts and graces as

the Church year unfolds. Many gifts will come through the liturgies of our lives together—tears shared together, ears that listen to our joys and sadnesses, eyes that appreciate the house bedecked once more for Christmas, hands that set the tree straight and deliver food baskets.

● **What gifts has God given me to share?**

● **Celebrate each day of Advent by gathering around the Advent wreath. Pray for peace in our world and love in our families.**



God's law will teach all peoples.

The prophet Isaiah, one of the earliest prophets whose words were written down, anchored his faith in God in the temple. In Sunday's reading the prophet envisions the mount on which Israel's first temple stood as a mountain to which all nations will come to learn peace. Isaiah's poetry pictures peoples streaming up the paths to the city and temple of God.

In the innermost room of the temple, the Holy of Holies, rests the Ark of the Covenant, which contains the tablets of the law of God. For Isaiah, Yahweh's mountain and temple stand for God's covenant law with Israel, of which the ten commandments are the terms. Isaiah sees this law as a font of justice not only for Israel but

for the nations. Isaiah calls each of us and each parish community to take one more step toward peace this Advent.

Isaiah's vision of peace

This is what Isaiah, son of Amoz, saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

In the days to come, the mountain of God's house shall be established as the highest mountain and raised above the hills. All nations shall stream toward it; many peoples shall come and say: “Come, let us climb God's mountain, to the house of the God of Jacob, that God may instruct us and we may walk in God's paths.”

From Zion shall go forth instruction, the word of God from Jerusalem. God shall judge between the nations and impose terms on many peoples.

They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; one nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again.

O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in God's light!

Isaiah 2.1-5

● **Envision peace, the wholeness of the human family in harmony. What does peace look and feel like?**

● **As a way of staying awake during Advent, pray daily for peace.**

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CELEBRATE ADVENT EACH DAY

November



1st Sunday of Advent

Do simple acts of peace building. Speak without violent words. Ask others' views.

December

1 Plan and practice for an evening of caroling with family, friends, coworkers. Join a community or church choir.

2 Remember the four women killed in El Salvador—Ita Ford, Jean Donovan, Maura Clarke, Dorothy Kazel. Pray and act for the poor they served.

3 Pray by name for each member of your extended family.

4 Read aloud the *Best Christmas Pageant Ever* as a family.

5 Invite family members to put a shoe out so St. Nicholas can leave a gift tonight. Fill it with treats.

6 Listen to the Advent section of Handel's *Messiah*.



2nd Sunday of Advent

To build peace, practice seeing from others' points of view.

8 Pray the Hail Mary slowly and reflect on who Mary is.

9 Celebrate the feast of St. Juan Diego; honor the indigenous peoples of the Americas.

10 Pray, "Let me see your face, O God. You are the desire of my heart."

11 Hum Christmas songs today and invite people to join you in bursting into song.

12 Celebrate Our Lady of Guadalupe, patron of the Americas.

13 Light a candle in honor of the 4th-century Swedish martyr St. Lucy, whose name means *light*.



3rd Sunday of Advent

Do an act of peace building toward neighbors different from you.

15 Pray for those who abuse others verbally, sexually, emotionally. Object to and report abuse you witness.

16 Buy gifts and/or food for a family in need.

17 Eat and/or worship among people racially or ethically different from you.

18 Surprise a coworker with a Christmas card that expresses appreciation.

19 Breathe in, "Spirit of God, inspire me;" breathe out, "Spirit of God, unsettle me."

20 Celebrate the solstice by turning off TV, video games, lights, computers, phones. Share a family time by candlelight.



4th Sunday of Advent

Do a difficult act of peacemaking, such as mending a long-torn relationship.

22 Bake a Christmas bread for someone who won't talk to you.

23 Rise early. Greet the dawn as Earth turns toward light. Name ten blessings you hope continue.

24 Prepare your crib set and gospel figures for telling the Christmas story with your family.

25 Put the Christ Child in your family crèche. Tell the Christmas story together.

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