

First Sunday of Advent, November 28, 2010, Year A

St. Bartholomew's Church in the Town of Tonawanda, N.Y

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ - Associate Rector Scripture: Matthew 24:37-44; Isaiah 2:1-5

"Come, Let Us Go Up To The Mountain"

Funny, this is the third year in a row that I have been blessed to preach and greet you on the First Sunday of Advent – and tell you “Happy New Year!” It is a New Year for the Church, as we move from Year C to Year A in the Sunday Lectionary, and from Year 2 to Year 1 in the Daily Lectionary. Indeed, Happy New Year! The reason I know this is year three – is that it was four First Sundays of Advent ago, in 2007, that our dear friend Paul Wilbur led us in worship on the first Sunday of Advent – and he preached about going to the mountain of the Lord. He was reminding us to prepare the way.

Every time I read today's passage from Isaiah 2, as we did this morning, I cannot help but recall Paul's song “Come Let Us Go up To the Mountain” from his CD “The Lion of Judah.” This song echoes the words of Isaiah, which are also in Micah 4:1-2. It has a haunting melody that just captures you. How absolutely ironic: a message about the Lion of Judah and how He will change the face of mankind – and we will walk His paths and He indeed will teach us His ways. The last line is compelling – **“let us walk in the light of the Lord.”**

Please look to the back of your bulletin and follow along with me: *"The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. Now it will come about that in the last days The Mountain of the house of the LORD will be established as **the chief of the mountains**, and will be raised above the hills; and **all the nations will stream to it**. And many peoples will 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 concerning His ways and that we may walk in His paths."** For the law will go forth from Zion and the **word of the LORD from Jerusalem**. And He will judge between the nations, and will render decisions for many peoples; and they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, and never again will they learn war. Come, house of Jacob, **and let us walk in the light of the LORD.**" (Isaiah 2:1-5)*
Both Isaiah and Psalm 122 give us a beautiful glimpse of what God has planned for humanity – we are to come to Him and His kingdom, and that ALL nations (the Gentiles) would stream “uphill” (against the tide) to His Mountain and worship Him. There will be judgment, and the Word (Jesus Christ) will go forth from Jerusalem. Again Paul Wilbur comes to mind as he sings from Psalm 122 in the song “Up to Jerusalem” from his CD “Shalom Jerusalem.” The image of throngs of people going up to Mount Zion is very powerful and inspiring. There would be an everlasting peace, indeed as the incarnate Word of the Lord, Jesus Himself, will reign.

The Lord God also speaks through the Prophet Zechariah when He shares His plans: *"I will return to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts will be called the Holy Mountain."* (Zechariah 8:3)

God's magnificent Temple was built on mount Moriah; the very same mountain that God showed to Abraham, on which he would lead his only son Isaac, carrying the wood for his sacrifice. This was the mountain on which David purchased the threshing floor, and Solomon built the Temple. It was called the mountain of the Lord's house. The Temple was to be the place, the mountain on which people would express the public worship of the one, true God; **to be seen by all nations**; and so eye-catching that all nations would forsake other objects (putting aside their Asherah poles) and places of worship (their “high places”), being drawn by the glory of the worship of the one true God. Can you imagine the sheer joy that will be found

in **the kingdom in which only God will reign**, where all hearts will be drawn to Him, where pain and struggling will be no more? No more worry about our next paycheck, we're not going to have to worry about where the car insurance money is to come from, we're not going to have to worry about "when I do this it hurts!" Those things are not going to be there anymore.

Through Isaiah, God is giving Israel, and us, a vision of what will be, when Christ, God's Holy Word, dwells and reigns from that Holy Mountain. What a glorious picture of what His kingdom will be like. People will be coming to Him, they will flock to His Mountain, which is high above all others; they will seek His truth and they will "*let Him teach them His ways.*" There will be peace, wars will end, and nations will lay down their arms. What a vision:

- a promise of reconciliation,
- a promise of peace,
- a promise of joy.

There is much anticipation, but there is also a call for both Israel, and us to "*come, let us walk in the light of the Lord.*" As His people walk in His ways, they become part of the Kingdom of God as He brings this word to pass! God will be exalted and *all of the world* will seek Him. Wars and injustice will be over and done with forever! There will be peace as swords are driven into tools of farming. Can you just imagine the awesome praise and worship that will take place in His presence? Oh I cannot wait!

In Psalm 122, we are blessed today with these words: "*I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD."* God is once again calling people to His Holy Mountain, to His side, to praise, worship, and to dwell with Him in His holy city. The Bible tells us that this was a psalm written by David about the ascent to the mountain of the Lord. You can almost imagine sheer droves of people going up to the Temple, shouting and singing with joy. What a moment that WILL BE when the Messiah comes again – when Jesus returns the very same way that He left – as the angel in Acts chapter one told the disciples. Are you prepared for the journey? In your praise and worship of the Lord - do we ascend together with joy to the Mountain of the Lord, seeking His face, seeking the light of His love? Do we lock out all of the outside "stuff" so that we can seek Him and feel His peace and His mercy and His love?

Let me share with you a story of a wise old Rabbi who taught his students by asking them questions. He asked, "How can a person tell when the darkness ends and the day begin?" After thinking for a moment, one student replied, "It is when there is enough light to see an animal in the distance and be able to tell if it is a sheep or a goat." Another student offered this, "It is when there is enough light to see a tree, and tell if it is a fig or an oak tree." The old Rabbi gently said, "No. It is when you can look into a man's face and recognize him as your brother. For if you cannot recognize in another's face the face of your brother, the darkness has not yet begun to lift, and the light has not yet come." What wisdom regarding those who know the Lord and walk in His light, and those who do not yet have the Light of His love!

The Apostle Paul in his letter to the people of Rome (Roman 13) says "to awaken from sleep." This is a call for every believer – not just the Romans. "**Hello! Open your eyes, remove the scales, get the sleep out of your eyes and come out of the fog, for the day is dawning!**" Just as it did when Paul was alive, the day of salvation is coming closer; and so this is an essential call. This "wake up call" is urgent! God is with them, and will be faithful to bring them out of darkness and into light - but they have got to open their eyes and recognize what the culture, the personal choices, and the sinful actions are that have lulled them to

sleep; a chosen lifestyle that has turned toward darkness. Sound familiar? The people of Paul's time and I believe many today, are headed away from the mountain, and away from God's ways and His Light. God's call is for people to come out into the light, so that they will not fall off His paths and into these traps. Isn't it remarkable what having the light of Christ can bring you? Listen to Paul's words from Ephesians 5: "*But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light. For this reason it says, "Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."* (Ephesians 5:13-14) I would like to suggest to you that Christ will shine "in you." Let His light shine!

Jesus tells us in today's Holy Gospel from Matthew that we "*must be ready!*" We do not know when the Son of Man will come. There is something about being ready, being alert, and being prepared. Each one of us needs to be proactive and not just reactive – waiting to see what happens and then dealing with it. It is not good enough to just wake up and be aware; but we must be diligent **to choose Christ, to choose His way of love, to serve Him, to stay in His Word and to keep on waiting** - expectantly.

I would like to suggest something to you from this Gospel – this may be a new idea, a different idea, a different interpretation. The coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. Why did God send the flood? Because of sin, because of the way that people were living their lives: "*and the flood came and took them all away and so it will be with the coming of the Son of Man.*" Here is what I want to suggest to you: the next portion many people look at as the rapture and that very well could be. There was judgment in the day of Noah. The people that were "taken" were the ones that were not in the Ark. Jesus goes on to say "*there will be two men in the field, one will be 'taken' and the other one left*" The image is sometimes interpreted as the taken are raptured, (maybe) but I would like to suggest to you that the taken one will be judged, like in the days of Noah – one will be taken and one will be left. As our Bishop says – "you have a choice – 'smoking or non-smoking!'"

How do we know? We pray, we ask the Lord to enlighten us through His Word. He has given us the Counselor, the Comforter, the Holy Spirit dwelling in us and among us, constantly offering direction for us, intercession for us, working to convict our hearts and giving us courage to persevere in all things and in all circumstances. It is not by our power, it is not by our strength. The truth is - Christ will return whether we are ready for Him or not! **It is the age old tension of "the already and the not yet"** – Jesus Christ has already come and was born in Bethlehem, died on Calvary and rose again on the third day, but has not yet come back to carry us with Him for eternity. It would appear to me that every day of our lives should be Advent, not just 4 weeks in November and December, but every day, we should be preparing for the coming of the Son of Man, expectantly preparing for His return and for us to journey to His Mountain. **Come Lord Jesus, come let us go up to the Mountain of the Lord.**