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Come, Lord Jesus—as King!

The Christian Church exists in the secular calendar, but marks time with the Church Calendar, also known as the Christian Year. Century after century this calendar retells the story of God's plan to save the world from sin and death and the plan centers in Jesus Christ. The season of Advent, the first season of the Christian calendar, begins by taking us to Jerusalem where Jesus arrived on Palm Sunday to carry out the culmination of God's plan--to give his life for all people.

Sermon
Isaiah 2:1-4

This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem: In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.

Introduction: Traditions always seem right on holidays. There's always a Christmas tree at Christmas and there are always fireworks on the Fourth of July. Maybe traditions seem especially right on Thanksgiving. I don't know if this is true at your house, but there's not a whole lot of innovation at our house on Thanksgiving. It's the same menu and the same recipes year after year—and most of the recipes are inherited from one grandma or another. The people around the table change; some family members have left and new family members have arrived—but the traditions seem to stick and no one complains.

For more than a thousand years the Christian Church has carried on the tradition of the Church Year. The Church Year is a set of seasons, Sundays, and festivals that retell the words and works of Jesus. There have been a few tweaks over the centuries, but the basics stay the same. The Church Year always starts with Advent and then comes Christmas and Epiphany and Lent and Easter—well, you know. There isn't much new here. You may learn something that you didn't know before or something you forgot. You may discover an insight or gain some comfort or feel some incentive that's new. But the truths of the Christian religion haven't changed since St. John wrote **Amen** at the end of the Revelation. So what we hear and say in worship isn't anything new. The truth about Jesus stays the same and the Church Year retells that truth year after year after year.

There was a time, of course, when there was no Church Year and the stories about Jesus hadn't been told year after year after year. There was a time when Jesus was still far off in the future. Believers weren't retelling the past; they were dreaming about the future. They were looking for something new, a new way of life, a new era. In the First Reading for today, the prophet Isaiah gave them a glimpse of that new age. He didn't get into specifics, but he forecast the **source** of the new age, he shared its **scope** and its **significance**, and he laid out the **scene** of what it would look like. 700 years later the new age began and it began with Jesus.

This morning Isaiah's words are providing us with a summary of that new age. His words are prophecy so the details aren't here. But what Isaiah shares with us on the first day of a new church year shows us what we can expect for the rest of the year. And so on this first Sunday of Advent,

The New Year Introduces the New Age

1. There never was a time after sin arrived that the faithful didn't know a new age was coming. The flowers were still blooming in the Garden of Eden when God promised to send a Savior to solve the problem of sin. But nobody knew when, where, how, or who. Moses could see a prophet; David could see a king; Job could see a redeemer. But the clearest vision of the new age was at the temple in Jerusalem. The ritual that God set up in the temple centered on animal sacrifices. Peace with God demanded the sacrifice of blood: Perfect innocent blood for imperfect guilty blood. Millions of mammals shed their blood at the temple. This was the principal God was teaching: **Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.**

And so Jesus came to Jerusalem to shed his blood. He shed his blood on a cross not on an altar, on an ugly hill not in a marble temple. But Jesus was the ultimate sacrifice; he shed his blood once and he shed it for everyone. Jesus became the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Jesus became the temple where sins were forgiven and death was destroyed. The Jerusalem hill called Golgotha became taller than the Himalayas and the cross became the pinnacle of Christian faith.

Isaiah could see the **source** of the new age. **In the last days, he wrote, the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills.** Isaiah couldn't see the cross and he couldn't see Jesus. But he could see where the new age would begin. We see the cross and we certainly see Jesus, and we must remember that everything we are begins at Jesus' cross. The Bible teaches us many things—how to live, how to work, how to pray, how to suffer, how to die—but everything the Bible teaches looks back to that cross which stood on a hill outside Jerusalem. There is a reason why we hang a cross on our walls and wear it around our necks and put it on top of steeples and in the center of altars. The cross is the **source** of this new age we live in.

2. God designed the temple and set up the rituals for Israel. The Jews were his chosen people and he planned that the new age would start with them. Some Jews were convinced the new age would stop with them. Isaiah saw something different. He envisioned the **scope** of what was coming: **Many peoples will come and say, Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the temple of the God of Jacob.** In the new age people from everywhere would come to Jerusalem, not to the gold and glitter of a building but to the grime and the grace of the cross. Jesus told his followers to make disciples of all nations and that's what they did. So here we are—descendants of Europeans, citizens of America who worship Christ in this new age. And there are more: Asians, Africans, Australians, too. Over the span of 2000 years, from the Arctic to Antarctica, billions of people found something better than the idols of their homeland and their history and they came flocking to the cross. The **scope** of the new age is **every nation, tribe, language, and people.** This truth dominates our witness and prayers and offerings because Jesus wants everyone to know the message of the cross just as we do.

3. Isaiah heard the message. He heard it in the context of his age and not in the detail of the new age but he understood its **significance.** **He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths. The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.** The message Isaiah envisioned is the message we believe. No more symbols and secrets and sacrifices; the message of the new age is simple and clear for everyone to understand. The message is practical; it provides guidance for life and hope in death. The message is true and reliable; it comes from God himself and God does not tell fairy tales. The message is powerful; it changes the way we think and speak and act. We've all heard this message before but it never gets old. It's like a cool breeze on a scorching day of sin. It's like rain after the drought of sadness. It's like a fire when fear is freezing us. Of all the words that go whirring and whizzing past us, the message of the cross is the only message with real and eternal **significance.** The good news about Jesus is a message that matters.

4. So Isaiah has shown us the **source**, the **scope**, and the **significance** of the new age. And finally he sets the **scene**; he describes what the new age looks like: **He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.** There is peace with God in the new age and where there is peace

with God there is peace among people. Where Jesus comes to live in hearts with his Word and sacraments, arguments and debates quiet. This peace exists in Christian homes and Christian churches and even in Christian communities. Christians turn their rifles into rakes and their guns into gardening tools. But Jesus doesn't live in every heart and his peace doesn't pervade every place. Rifles remain rifles and guns remain guns. But Isaiah sees the scene changing. He envisions the scene of heaven where the new age continues even after the earth ends. The **scene** of heaven is gorgeous and glorious and forever.

In this prophecy Isaiah introduced Old Testament believers to the new age that would begin with the coming Christ. The Holy Spirit didn't share details, but Isaiah caught the basics. As he looked ahead to what he called the last days, Isaiah saw the **source**, the **scope**, the **significance**, and the **scene** of the new age of the Savior's grace. We know the details. The **source** is the cross; the **scope** is the world, the **significance** is life-changing, and the **scene** is breath-taking. These are the truths that the Church Year retells and these are the truths that save us and strengthen us and support us all year long. Happy new year! Amen.