

***First Sunday in Advent November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2025***  
***WHAT WAS, IS, AND WILL BE***

***Prayer***

Jesus, during this time of Advent, of waiting, help us not only to celebrate your incarnation but also eagerly await your second coming.

AMEN

***Background***

We know from verse 1 who Isaiah's father was; but what else do we know about him? He's a contemporary of Micah and Hosea with a mission to proclaim God's word to Judah, the southern kingdom consisting of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, in the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. It was during his ministry that the northern kingdom of Israel was taken captive by the Assyrians.

In the chapter before today's reading, He proclaims judgement against both the Nation of Judah and the holy city of Jerusalem (Is 1:2b)

*"Children have I reared and brought up but they have rebelled  
against me.*

*and (Is 1:21a)*

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*How the faithful city has become a whore, she who was full of justice! Righteousness lodged in her, but now murderers.*

Amid all this wickedness, God gives Isaiah a vision of a better time and place – as it says in verse 2, a vision of the last days.

I've done some hiking in my life, and when you're out there on the trail, it's not easy to judge where one mountain range ends and the next begins. So too with end-times prophecy in the Old Testament. As I'll point out, today's reading includes both visions of the first and second comings of Christ; and it's important that we clearly distinguish between these two events.

The last days began with the incarnation – Christ's first coming. The writer of Hebrews is clear in describing Mount Zion, as referenced in verse 3 (Heb 12:22-24)

*But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the*

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*spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.*

***What Was***

The ***What Was*** in the sermon title refers to the time prior to the birth of Christ, reflected in part in verse 2. The world into which our Savior was born had lost its way – God’s people were trying to use obedience to the Law, which was given by Moses, to please God rather than belief in the promise, which had been given to Abraham. The people flowed to the temple in Jerusalem to offer sacrifices for their sin and worship God, whose presence was said to dwell in the Holy of Holies. And believe it or not, the Pharisees were the very best people in following the Law, believing that the keeping of every jot and tittle of the law brought them favor with God. But they have forgotten the true purpose of the law, as Paul explained to the Galatians (3:24-25)

*So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.*

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Indeed, scripture tells us that Christ fulfilled the law (Matt 5:17)

*"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.*

While we are in the latter days, we still today misunderstand the law of God. For hundreds of years, based upon Jerome's mistranslation of scripture, the church used laws and interpretations of laws to classify sins as venial and mortal, and to ascribe penance (the modern equivalent of sacrifice) to be made to restore favor with God. Even after the reformers' rediscovery of the free gift of God's grace through faith because of the finished work of Christ, modern Christians still want to believe that they can contribute to their salvation, through minimizing their sin or doing acts of charity, mercy, and piety; God, however, looks not to the actions or attitudes, but solely on whether a person has faith, knowing, like Luther, that they can never be holy enough or do enough good works, but must rely solely upon the free gift of grace and forgiveness obtained for us by Christ's perfect life, death on the cross, and resurrection from the dead. God gives that same gift to all of you through the very proclamation of His word here today.

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**What Is**

If the **What Was** represent the time prior to the birth of Christ, the *What Is* reflects the time between the first and second coming of Christ, described in verses 2 and 3.

God's chosen people no longer flow from all nations to Jerusalem and a temple made with hands, but to Christ, a more perfect temple. We know from other scriptures that the church is the body of Christ; Paul reminds the church at Corinth of this, writing (1 Cor 12:27)

*Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.*

And John in his Gospel (Jn 4:24) emphasises that

*God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."*

God is with us 24/7; wherever we are; we can praise and honor God. This involves extolling His virtues and His works, expressing gratitude, surrendering to Him, being obedient, and acknowledging Him for who He is because of who He is. In praising God, we give Him glory.

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We no longer offer sacrifices, as Christ's death on the cross to pay the penalty of your sins and mine was the ultimate fulfillment of the animal sacrifices made under the law.

And the prophecy noted in verse 3

*For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.*

Was fulfilled when Christ gave direction to the apostles in Acts (Acts 1:8)

*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*

***What Will Be***

By now you should know that the ***What Will Be***, as recorded in verse 4, is the time after Christ's return to earth at the end of all time.

According to our confessions,

"Our churches teach that at the end of the world Christ will appear for judgment and will raise all the dead. He will give

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the godly and elect eternal life and everlasting joys, but he will condemn ungodly people and the devils to be tormented without end" (Augsburg Confession, Article XVII, 1-3).

So how do we know if we are included in the godly and elect?

We know not from our feelings or our actions, but by the actions of God to and for us.

At your **baptism**, through water and word, God adopted you as His child, wrote your name in the book of life, and sealed you with the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Whenever you **hear or read His word**, the word of Law should remind us that indeed we are poor, miserable sinners and that we justly deserve temporal and eternal punishment. But even more, the word of Gospel reminds us that (Rom 5:8)

*God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners,*

*Christ died for us*

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And that death was inclusive; no one is excluded from that love – Christ’s death even covered the sins of those who DON’T believe in Him. The ONLY reason that one is considered ungodly is that they DO NOT BELIEVE God’s promise, given to Abraham, to Moses, and to you, that He has provided in his son Jesus, a second Adam, an antidote to sin and death that entered the world when Adam and Eve fell in the garden.

Finally, through the Lord’s Supper, God reminds us of His love for us and feeds us in a tangible, unmistakable way. His Body was broken and given **FOR YOU** and His precious blood, more valuable than silver or gold, was poured out for the remission of **YOUR SINS**.

Come, taste, and see that the Lord is indeed good.

AMEN