

The Faithfulness Of God Comforts The Faithful.

Text: Isa 62:11, Isa 30:30, 29, Psa 80:1

1) God planned our salvation

Suggested Hymns:

2) God lets us hear His voice

17, 11, 357, 432, 465

3) God hears our Advent cry

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is based on the Introit, *Isaiah 62:11, Isaiah 30:30, 29, Psalm 80:1*, “*Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Surely your salvation is coming; The LORD will cause His glorious voice to be heard; You shall have ... gladness of heart; Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

In the quiet hours of devotion in this holy season of Advent our minds often wonder back to the time before the dawn of the first Christmas. What sustained the children of God in their toil from the cradle to the grave in the Old Testament times, when Bethlehem was yet without fame, and when Calvary was yet without a name?

By what anchor was a person’s life stabilised before he could cling to a manger and to a cross? What brought peace of mind to people before the Prince of Peace was born? What heavenly powers were able to transform an unfulfilled hope into happiness? What gave people the assurance of an eternal salvation before the advent of the Saviour?

These are all Advent questions which occupy the minds of those who will shortly kneel in adoration in David’s royal city. There is an answer to these questions, given by God through His spokesmen of old, the prophets. These men were human, but by inspiration of the Holy Spirit infallibly correct in the transmission of God’s thoughts to God’s world.

The church has done well in that it has preserved the reply of God to these questions as a priceless jewel in the Introit for this second Sunday in Advent. Two passages from Isaiah and one from the Psalms are basic to our instruction

today. The message is that *the Faithfulness of God Comforts the Faithful*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. God Planned Our Salvation

The first element of comfort I bring to you out of the triple text of the Introit is the assurance that God in His faithfulness has done for you what no man could have done. He has planned your salvation. *Daughter of Zion, your salvation is coming*. To grasp the implication of this Advent prophecy, we must look at the setting into which this promise has been placed.

The speaker is Isaiah, that man of God who stands like a mountain peak in Old Testament times midway between Moses and Christ. He had lived in Jerusalem during all the days of his prophetic activity. He knew this city well, and he loved its people. But he also knew from his long, sixty-year ministry that the capital city set the pace and the pattern for the rest of the nation. Judging by its most recent history, the future did not look bright for the daughter of Zion.

Isaiah had already served under three kings, and now he was serving under Hezekiah. As a young man he had been called to prophesy in the very year in which King Uzziah died (758 B.C.). The southern kingdom of Judah, of which Jerusalem was the capital, had flourished mightily under Uzziah, as had also the northern kingdom of Israel under his contemporary, King Jeroboam II. His army numbered 300,000. He built many towers for protection of the herds. He fostered agriculture, commerce, and industry. Under such a reign the daughter of Zion was well pleased. And why shouldn't she be? Every nation loves progress.

When Jotham, the son of Uzziah, took over the reins of government, he received on a silver platter a nation well organized, well fortified, and well supplied. Not since the golden age of David and Solomon had Judah seen such glory. Even religion flourished. Worship in the temple was very popular. The sacrifices needed for worship were brought in abundance.

But religion played second place to material gain and economic well-being. The people had not set their heart on God's will and way. There is no finer varnish for a worldly heart than the outward performance of religious ceremonies. And the daughter of Zion was using that varnish.

But worse things were to come. Under Ahaz all the national prosperity with which his grandfather, Uzziah, had been blessed in his fifty-two-year reign, and all the temple fervour, hypocritical as it was, during the fifteen-year reign of his father, Jotham finally degenerated into open hostility against God and His prophets.

The daughter of Zion had to witness the introduction of the barbaric religious customs of the Moabites. It had to witness the king sacrificing his own son, a prince of the royal house of David, to the hideous idol Molech. It had to witness the removal of the altar of burnt offering from the forecourt of the temple and to see it replaced with an altar designed after one which Ahaz had seen in Damascus.

God's people and God's king had gone mad. God's garden, God's vineyard was being destroyed. It is madness, it is national suicide, to have God pour out His blessings upon a nation and the nation repay God's love with wickedness.

Is it any wonder that God used strong measures to cure this ailing kingdom? The daughter of Zion had to be saved. God sent war! King Pekah from the north, King Rezin from Syria, together they would be God's whip to beat Judah to its knees. But Ahaz doesn't repent. He does not look to God for help. Rather he calls in the mightiest man of his day, Tiglath-pileser of Assyria. The powerful Assyrian comes. He kills King Rezin, he beats the armies of Israel, and leads thousands into captivity, never to return.

This is the salvation that Ahaz thought he needed! But before the last chapter is written, the daughter of Zion herself becomes a tribute-paying slave of Assyria. Can a nation fall lower? "*The Lord brought Judah low because of Ahaz,*"¹ says the Second Book of Chronicles. Spiritual decay was the soil in which the loss of Judah's every freedom had been sown.

Is it any wonder that God sent faithful prophets who walked through God's garden with the pruning shears of God's Word? The Word cuts, cuts away at the dry, the rotted, the diseased, the unfruitful, the dead branches and bushes and vines.

King Ahaz was cut down, but his son, Hezekiah, was cut to the heart. Ahaz dead! Hezekiah was alive. He was alive with faith and zeal. The young king was only 25 years old, but he was wise. Here is his inaugural address, "*Hear*

me, Levites! Now sanctify yourselves, sanctify the house of the LORD God of your fathers, and carry out the rubbish from the holy place. ⁶ *“For our fathers have trespassed and done evil in the eyes of the LORD our God.”*²

He starts his reign with a clean-up campaign. This man will go far in saving a nation from disintegration. God’s house is cleansed. God’s Passover is re-introduced. Tithes and sacrifices are once more brought as the love-offerings of God’s people. Hezekiah and all Judah recognised that their national salvation lay in the faithfulness of Jehovah. King and people confessed their sins. King and people laid hold on the promises of God in every national emergency. King and people in faith laid hold on God.

However, the reformation effected by Hezekiah was not permanent. Hezekiah himself fared better spiritually in days of trial than in the days of peace and plenty. On one occasion he boastfully showed the representatives of Babylon *“all that was found among his treasures.”*³ Pride had taken possession of his heart. God gives him a brief view of the future. Through Isaiah He paints a sketch of the Babylonian Captivity. *“Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house, ... shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left, ’ says the LORD.”*⁴

So, why am I telling you all this out of the history of this ancient people? It is to show you the just judgments of God. To show you that in the midst of these judgments, while every man, woman, and child in Judah was thinking of national survival, God was planning an eternal survival.

Daughter of Zion, your salvation is coming, has a far deeper meaning than the survival of a nation in the midst of a world filled with hate and oppression. The prophecy is far more than an assurance of victory, although surrounded by diabolic forces of destruction. This prophecy is to lift the eyes of the daughter of Zion to her noblest Son, the Messiah, in whom Jehovah had planned the salvation of all mankind.

Judah is to know by the Word of the Lord that its redemption from sin is drawing near. This is comfort for the faithful. The calamities which had befallen the nation should remind them of the often repeated call to repentance. Ruined cities should remind it of ruined souls. Captives transported to foreign lands should remind it of the captives of the prince of darkness.

Your salvation is coming is to re-emphasise for Judah that the God who closed the first Eden had opened another Eden. That the God who condemned the first Adam had planned salvation by the second Adam. That the God who created man is the God who alone would save man.

In this lies comfort for us also. The Word of God given by Isaiah to the faithful of old was intended for the faithful of all times. Judah was to know that God is faithful, that He would not break His promise. Although the Messiah's birth still lay more than seven centuries in the future, the faithful should not lose heart.

In God's own time there would come a King who would accomplish what no David, no Solomon, no Hezekiah could accomplish. These kings could bring glory, power, wealth, security to the kingdom. But only the Messiah could bring salvation. Forgiveness for all would come through His life and death. With forgiveness, purchased at the price of blood, the doors of heaven would open for the faithful.

Again I say, all this has been written for us. From our vantage point in the New Testament church we can look back and rejoice. God was faithful. Step by step He prepared the world for the coming of the Christ. When God was ready, His Son was born.

What does it mean to me? Repentantly I lay my sins into His manger. I need fear them no more. Joyfully I lift out of that manger my pardon. I need tremble no more. Trustingly I carry from that manger a new power. I need walk alone no more. Longingly I look from that manger with a new hope. I need die no more. *Daughter of Zion, "Surely your salvation is coming."* Isaiah wrote that for me. He wrote it for you. Do you believe it?

2. God Lets Us Hear His Voice

Another element of comfort I bring you from the Advent Introit today is the assurance that God in His faithfulness promises to let you hear His voice and by that voice bring gladness to your heart.

Isaiah is the author also of these passages. *The LORD will cause His glorious voice to be heard; And You shall have ... gladness of heart.* In Isaiah the Introit is inverted. First, *gladness of heart*, and then the cause, *God's voice*

will be heard. How fitting these two words, “gladness” and “voices,” in a season that prepares us for Christmas!

Before we see how the Christmas prophet, Isaiah, used these words, let us think of the glorious voice of God in earlier times.

God’s Voice in the Beginning. ***“And God said, Let there be.”*** There was no human ear to hear that glorious voice of God, no eye to see the instantaneous result. Who can describe the glory of that voice that brings a universe out of nothing? God spoke, and there was light. He spoke again, and there was a firmament. He spoke again, and there was land, and there were seas, there was grass, and there were trees. God spoke, ***“and it was so,”*** the Holy Scripture says.

On six days the universe heard His voice, and after sixty centuries that universe still stands as a memorial to the glorious voice of God. Let puny man chisel away at this Gibraltar with his puny intellectual tools! Fear not, God’s Gibraltar will stand!

Then there came the day when God brought forth His noblest creation, man and woman, with whom He would share His glory. No pen has recorded the first holy conversations between man and his Creator. What gladness of heart in that holy association!

And then came the day when man wanted to walk alone. He went, he ate, he was conquered! The previous glorious voice now terrifies man. Sin made the difference. ***“They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD.”***⁵ Adam, why? ***“Where are you?”***¹⁰ ***So he said, “I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid.”***

Down through the ages sin has robbed man of gladness at the sound of God’s voice. Eyes that were meant to shine with a joyful light now look about fearfully, searching for shelter. Arms that were meant to be raised in adoration now grovel in the bushes to find cover for their nakedness. From that tragic day onward, all history is the trembling of the earth at the sound of God’s voice. ***“He uttered His voice, the earth melted,”***⁶ says the psalmist.

Let us look at God's voice in Judah. The history of Judah is a case in point. In the earlier days of Isaiah's ministry, Assyria was threatening the peace of the nations, as mentioned before. Judah felt the impact of this Assyrian drive for world domination.

Instead of looking to God, Judah's king looks to Egypt for help. God warns the whole nation through Isaiah, "***Woe to the rebellious children ... to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt.***"⁷ Can a shadow help in time of need? ***Pharaoh Shall be your shame, And trust in the shadow of Egypt Shall be your humiliation*** shouts Isaiah in warning. He remembered that watchmen who cannot warn are "***all dumb dogs, they cannot bark.***"⁸

In the midst of the threats for Judah's contempt of God's voice, we find God faithfully remembering His vow through Jacob, ***The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes.***⁹ This vow, like all others, God keeps.

"The Lord shall cause His glorious voice to be heard,"¹⁰ says the prophet, and ***"through the voice of the LORD Assyria will be beaten down."*** Here lies the motivation for Isaiah's promise to Judah. ***"You shall have ... gladness of heart."*** How can a nation lose when God fights for it? How can it lose if it needs no more than to unsheathe the sword of God's voice?

How wonderful that the church has from ancient times used this prophetic jewel in the Introit for the Sunday on which we remember the Second Advent of our Lord! Before the coming of the great and glorious day our faithful God will continue to send His voice to the nations.

That voice is the voice of the Law, thundering against the enemies of His church. That voice continues to echo and re-echo in the heart of every human being, ***"You have sinned! You have sinned!"*** That voice gives man no rest until he is convinced of his guilt and then, hearing the voice again in its pleading invitation, ***"Come unto Me,"*** man goes out to a little Judean village to hear the faith-engendering message, ***"Unto you is born ... a Saviour."***

His greatest problem, sin, is solved. The guilt is gone, the curse is gone, the dominion of sin is gone. "Who shall lay anything against God's elect?"

When the last of the elect has heard that voice, when the last soul has been rescued, when the last soul believes in Jesus as his Saviour, when God's plan of election has reached out and snatched away from Satan his latest prey, then it will happen!

In that moment the created universe that first heard God's voice shall hear it again. They shall hear His voice, though buried in the watery caverns of the deep. They shall hear it, though sealed in marble tombs. They shall hear it, though they had their bodies burned. They shall hear it, though the dust of many centuries covers their unmarked and forgotten graves.

The earth shall blossom like a garden with the resurrected bodies of the redeemed. And when they are gone to meet their Lord in the air, the earth shall spew out the resurrected remains of the damned. Once more shall these latter hear the voice, the voice that throughout man's history was a voice of grace, but which now calls out in three simple words, "***Depart from Me!***"

So that you may escape the dread of that day, God has made it possible for you to hear His voice now. He has left nothing undone that you might be numbered among the blessed in eternity. He has done what none other could do. He kept His promise and sent you a Saviour. He kept His promise and sacrificed His Son on the cross.

He will keep His promise, "***Your sins are forgiven you,***"¹¹ if you will only believe what He offers in grace. He will keep the promise once made by Jesus to that searcher for the truth, Nicodemus, "***He who believes in Him***" (***namely, Christ Jesus***), "***is not condemned.***" Believe it, and you shall have gladness of heart! Go to Bethlehem this Christmas, listen closely to God's voice of love, and gladness of heart shall be yours.

3. God Hears Our Advent Cry

What more is needed to bring you comfort in this Advent season of watchful waiting? One thing more. I bring you the assurance from the closing word of the Introit that God in His faithfulness will hear your every Advent cry.

We join Asaph as he pours out his heart, ***Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock.*** How well the church of the New Testament

understood the needs of the faithful, as it chose this verse to close the Introit for today!

Firstly, there is the prayer of confidence. ***“Give ear ... You who lead Joseph like a flock.”*** Here is utter confidence. Asaph writes in the spirit of David. ***“He leads me beside the still waters.”*** This is not the despairing cry of ***“Help, Lord, we perish.”*** This is the confident prayer of the man of God who had witnessed the tender care of Israel’s Shepherd for His flock.

Asaph is not unmindful of five centuries of God’s love. ***“You have brought a vine out of Egypt,”*** he says in this psalm. While he is praying that the Shepherd will listen, he already knows that He who dwells between the cherubims will shine forth, that is, will exert His majestic power to lead His flock safely home. This Shepherd is no hireling. This Shepherd cares for the sheep. He hears and answers their every cry.

How can I impress upon you, who have had so many burdens to bear in this year now drawing to a close, that you, too, can make this your confident cry, ***“Give ear, O Shepherd!”*** Some of you have experienced much pain, much sickness. Cry out, ***“Give ear!”*** He hears.

Others have had much heartache in their homes. Cry out, ***“Give ear!”*** He hears. All of us have felt the smiting blows of our awakened conscience. Cry out confidently, ***“Give ear, O Shepherd! Father, forgive!”*** He hears. ***“Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you.”*** With Asaph we can shout in this psalm, ***“And we shall be saved.”***

Secondly, there is the prayer of consecration. Asaph fully realised the implications of his prayer. The Shepherd who hears the cry of His sheep, the Shepherd who leads His flock in love, will want the flock to follow. ***“He goes before them; and the sheep follow him,”***¹² Jesus said. Asaph understood this. Therefore, when he comes to the end of his psalm, he says, ***“we will not turn back from You.”*** The prayer of a confident hope is always coupled with the prayer of consecration.

To Asaph this prayer was that same as a vow. It should be so with us also. While in this Advent season we again hear of the ancient prophecies fulfilled in Jesus Christ, while we hear how God carried out His plan for our redemption, while we anxiously wait for the Second Advent of our Lord, while we hear again

the promise of answered prayers, our heart shall not be remiss in making its vow.
“We will not turn back from You, O Lord!”

In our homes, our lives shall demonstrate the power of the Holy Spirit within us, for we know that Jesus lives there. His patience with sinners shall show us the patience we need with each other. His chaste language shall be the cleansing power that touches our tongue. His love shall be mirrored in the love we show toward those with whom we walk toward eternity.

In our work and in our play we shall not forget that the eternal Son of God walks beside us. Our business associates shall know by our words and deeds that we are walking with Jesus. If my business partners refuse to hear sermons about my Jesus, they shall learn to know Him from my life. My daily walk and conversation shall be my witness to my world that ***“Christ, the Saviour, is born.”***

All the comfort that I have found, the certainty of my salvation, the certainty of the coming Judgment, the certainty of God’s loving answer to my prayers, all these shall be my contribution to a world in need.

O God, our faithful God, help us to bring comfort to others! Amen

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ 2 Chronicles 28:19

² 2 Chronicles 29:5-6

³ Isaiah 39:2, 2 Kings 20:13

⁴ Isaiah 39:6

⁵ Genesis 3:8

⁶ Psalm 46:6

⁷ Isaiah 30:1-2

⁸ Isaiah 56:10

⁹ Genesis 49:10

¹⁰ Isaiah 30:30

¹¹ Matthew 9:2

¹² John 10:4