

# The Promise of a Bright Future

## Advent 1A

**Text: Isaiah 2:1–5**

**December 2, 2007**

## The Promise of Peace

With the war dragging on in Iraq and Afghanistan  
and hot spots festering in other parts of the world,  
most of us long for peace.

We yearn for the day  
when people will quit killing each other  
in the name of God and country.

We yearn for the day  
when greed and aggression will  
give way to peace...equity...and justice.

We yearn for the day when people will,  
in the words of Isaiah,  
*beat their swords into plowshares...*  
and *nation shall not lift up sword against nation...*

That was certainly the case in Isaiah's day.  
The Hebrew people yearned for peace.  
They had experienced plenty of war and bloodshed in their history.

By the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE,  
the Israelites had experienced numerous conflicts  
with the surrounding peoples.

They also had endured internal conflicts that led to the  
division of their land into two separate kingdoms:  
Israel, in the North...and Judah, in the South.

As Isaiah carries out his prophetic ministry, it is a turbulent time for God's people.  
The Northern Kingdom already has fallen to Assyria.  
Now the Assyrians have their eyes set on Judah.

Hezekiah, the newly crowned king of Judah, is at his wits end.  
How can he save the kingdom?  
How can he stave off the incessant  
Assyrian advance?

In an act of desperation, Hezekiah forges an alliance with the  
Egyptians and Babylonians hoping to change the balance of power  
and thwart the Assyrian threat.

He hopes this new balance of power will hold the Assyrians in check  
and give peace to him and his people..  
It seems like a pragmatic solution to a real problem.

But Isaiah doesn't see things that way.

As Isaiah looks over the landscape of these perilous times,  
he sees not a crisis of power...of strength...or might—he sees a crisis of faith!

He warns Hezekiah that trusting in political alliances and balances of power will lead not to peace—it will lead to disaster.

It will lead to disaster to more conflict...more bloodshed...more war.

Isaiah warns Hezekiah that the only hope for true peace

is found in putting all our faith...our hope...our trust in God.

According to Isaiah, there is no peace until God gives us peace.

Isaiah, of course, is right!

Shortly after Hezekiah's death, the Babylonians overrun Judah and carry off the brightest and the best into exile in Babylon.

You see, when we rely on our own resourcefulness for our peace and security—

we get so absorbed in our own devices

we fail to see the pitfalls before us.

In 1950 Uziel Gal, a captain in the Israeli army, developed a weapon for Israeli soldiers that would give them a lot of fire power while being both light and agile in combat against their enemies.

The popular weapon he invented now bears his name.

You may have heard of it—it is called the *Uzi*.

It is both interesting and telling that this machinegun is called an *Uzi*.

In Hebrew, *uzi* means *my strength*.

That's what happens when we rely on our own cleverness and resourcefulness... when we rely on our own devices...our own strength... for our peace and security.

If every Israeli citizen had an *Uzi*, would they have greater security?

Would they have a more peaceful coexistence with their Arab neighbors?

No!

There is no peace when we rely only on our own devices.

It is not until we turn to God in faith—and submit ourselves to his ways—that God can work through us

to bring his peace—true peace—to the world.

150 years ago human slavery was accepted in our land.

The battle to rid America of this scourge began long before the Civil War.

It was a long—sometimes seemingly hopeless—battle.

During one particular period, a dark cloud hung over the movement to free slaves.

One political party had caved in and accepted slavery; the other proposed not to abolish it, but only to restrict it.

And the Supreme Court had ruled that

black men were not entitled to the rights guaranteed in the constitution.

There seemed to be no way slaves would be set free.

At a crowded meeting,  
 Frederick Douglas, an eloquent spokesperson for the Abolitionists,  
 graphically depicted the terrible condition faced by slaves.

An unknown historian tells us that  
 a great horror descended over the audience  
 as Douglas went on with his grim account.

Douglas even cried out for the blood of their oppressors.

He said that there was  
 no other relief for Black Americans.

But then he went on to say that there was no relief even in that.  
 It seemed to all who were present  
 that they were destined for destruction.

Just at the instant when the cloud was most heavily over the audience,  
 an old black woman in the front row slowly rose to her feet.  
 Her name was Sojourner Truth.

Sojourner was well known as a powerful spokesperson for her people.  
 When she stood, Douglas paused.

Every eye was on her as she pointed her finger at him and cried out,  
*Frederick, is God dead?*

Her words were like a lightning bolt splitting the darkness.  
 Immediately, the cloud began to break,  
 and faith...and hope...and patience returned  
 with the idea of a personal and ever-living God.

Today, we hear the prophet Isaiah speaking God's word boldly  
 to King Hezekiah and the people of Judah...  
 and to you and me:

*Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,  
 to the house of the God of Jacob;  
 that he may teach us his ways  
 and that we may walk in his paths.*

Only then, in the presence of God's blessing and love,  
 can the great hope of Advent be fulfilled—  
 the great *Day of the Lord* when  
*they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks;  
 nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
 neither shall they learn war any more.*

Until that day  
 when God will establish his universal reign of peace,  
 we await the fulfillment of that promise  
 in confidence...and hope.