

The GIFTS of CHRISTMAS

First Presbyterian Church of Bakersfield
2024 Advent Sermon Series Study Guide

ADVENT SERMON SERIES 2024	PASSAGE	TITLE
Week One 12/01	Isaiah 65:17-25	The Gift of Eternal Life
Week Two 12//08	Isaiah 2:1-5	The Gift of Peace with God
Week Three 12/15	Isaiah 9:2-7	The Gift of a Good King
Week Four 12/22	Isaiah 54:4-10	The Gift of Saving Love
Christmas Eve 12/24	Isaiah 7:14	The Gift of God Himself

**Note: There is no study guide for the Christmas Eve passage. Merry Christmas!*

Week One: The Gift of Eternal Life

OPENING

- If you have a hobby that involves making something, what is it you make? Why do you pursue this hobby?
- Note: Each of the four Advent Bible studies will be the Old Testament book of Isaiah. The Bible Project has two helpful overview videos. As an optional introduction to the book, if you have time, you can watch them from these links: [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#).

STUDY

- Before reading the passage, identify who is speaking these words. Now read Isaiah 65:17-25 aloud as a group.
- What is God creating? Notice all the features of the new heaven and earth. Which ones appeal to you most strongly and why?
- Why do you think it's important that the "former things" are forgotten? Which of the former things would you have difficulty letting go of (forgetting)?
- How does Isaiah describe God's relationship with His people in the new heaven and new earth? v18-19 and v24-25
- How is this picture of the new heaven and the new earth hopeful or useful or encouraging to you today?
- Who is responsible for ensuring the gifts of a new heaven and new earth come about and what feelings and words of praise does it evoke in you?

PRAY

- Pray together for this prophecy to be realized.

Isaiah 65:17-25 (NIV)

New Heavens and a New Earth

17 "See, I will create
new heavens and a new earth.
The former things will not be remembered,
nor will they come to mind.

18 But be glad and rejoice forever
in what I will create,
for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight
and its people a joy.

19 I will rejoice over Jerusalem
and take delight in my people;
the sound of weeping and of crying
will be heard in it no more.

20 "Never again will there be in it
an infant who lives but a few days,
or an old man who does not live out his years;
the one who dies at a hundred
will be thought a mere child;
the one who fails to reach* a hundred
will be considered accursed.

21 They will build houses and dwell in them;
they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

22 No longer will they build houses and others
live in them,

or plant and others eat.
For as the days of a tree,
so will be the days of my people;
my chosen ones will long enjoy
the work of their hands.

23 They will not labor in vain,
nor will they bear children doomed to
misfortune;

for they will be a people blessed by the Lord,
they and their descendants with them.

24 Before they call I will answer;
while they are still speaking I will hear.

25 The wolf and the lamb will feed together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox,
and dust will be the serpent's food.

They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,"
says the Lord.

Footnote...

*Isaiah 65:20 Or the sinner who reaches

Week Two: The Gift of Peace with God

OPENING

- If you could start by eliminating only one evil situation in the world, where would you start? Why would bringing peace to that place be important to you?

STUDY

- Read Isaiah 2:1-5.
- Notice that the heading of Isaiah 2 says the chapter describes what Isaiah "saw". What do you see in your mind's eye as you read this passage?
- What or where is the "house of the God of Jacob"? What do the people receive there? Is this gift restricted to that location? Explain.
- What role(s) will God play among the nations? In what ways do you see this prophecy being fulfilled in our time?
- What might be a modern day example of 'beating swords into plowshares'?
- Why do you think plowshares and pruning hooks are used to describe a change in attitude towards war and aggression? Do these references remind you of any other passages of Scripture?
- Notice that v5 is an invitation. How does this invitation include you and me? How might accepting that invitation change the way you walk through this next week, month, year?

PRAY

- Pray together, asking God for the gift of peace as we learn to walk in his light!

Isaiah 2:1-5 (NIV)

The Mountain of the Lord

1 This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem:

2 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.*

3 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.

4 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.

5 Come, descendants of Jacob,

let us walk in the light of the Lord.

Week Three: The Gift of a Good King

OPEN

- If you are able to watch this Youtube clip of Handel's rendition of Isaiah 9:6&7 [[at Handel's Messiah - Isaiah 9:6](#)], (3mins 50secs) please do so after reading the whole passage aloud (Isaiah 9:1-10). What does the music tell you personally about this passage? (There is no wrong answer here!)

STUDY

- Who are the people referred to in verses 1-5, to whom the prophecy was given? Talk with your group about how these verses might apply to you all, too.
- Describe the Child in v6-7? What do His titles and names tell us about His power and influence? Who do you know who might fit this description?
- How is the kingdom in this passage different from an earthly kingdom? We've just elected a new President. What can v6&7 teach us about the earthly role of a leader?
- According to the last part of v7, what accomplishes the sweeping change described in this passage and why is that important?
- In v8-10, what is the people's reaction to the prophetic message? What have they put their faith in?
- In v10, we read the assertions of Israel against the prophet's message. What might be a modern day way of saying this?
- What warning and what hope do you find in this passage for the church today? How about for you personally, especially as Christmas approaches?

PRAY

- This passage might stir up a lot of different responses. You might find it helpful to replay the video clip from Handel's Messiah before you close with prayer.

Isaiah 9:1-10 (NIV)

1 Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan—

*2 The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep darkness
a light has dawned.*

*3 You have enlarged the nation
and increased their joy;
they rejoice before you
as people rejoice at the harvest,
as warriors rejoice
when dividing the plunder.*

*4 For as in the day of Midian's defeat,
you have shattered
the yoke that burdens them,
the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor.*

*5 Every warrior's boot used in battle
and every garment rolled in blood
will be destined for burning,
will be fuel for the fire.*

*6 For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.*

*And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

*7 Of the greatness of his government and peace
there will be no end.*

*He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.*

*The zeal of the Lord Almighty
will accomplish this.*

*8 The Lord has sent a message against Jacob;
it will fall on Israel.*

*9 All the people will know it—
Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria—
who say with pride
and arrogance of heart,*

*10 "The bricks have fallen down,
but we will rebuild with dressed stone;
the fig trees have been felled,
but we will replace them with cedars."*

Week Four: The Gift of Saving Love

OPEN

- What is one thing you are hoping for this Christmas? (it can be tangible or intangible)

STUDY

- Who is the "you" of this passage. There may be more than one possible answer, but keep in mind the context of the book of Isaiah.
- What causes are suggested for the shame, humiliation and disgrace mentioned in verse 4? Are these causes relevant or evident today in our world?
- What reasons does Isaiah give for forgetting shame in vv5-6.
- How did God abandon His people, as mentioned in v7? Have you ever felt abandoned by God? If so, explain what that was like.
- What does v8 tell us about those times when we have felt forgotten or abandoned by God? In what ways have you felt His compassion?
- In v9, God reminds Isaiah of the Flood. What signal did God give Noah to remind him of His saving love for humankind? [See Genesis 8.] Why does Isaiah bring it up here?
- What do we learn about God from this passage? Why is it important for us to know this?
- How do you see the good news of the Christmas story in this passage?

PRAY

- Pray in thanksgiving for the gift of saving love from our compassionate God!

Isaiah 54:4-10 (NIV)

4 *"Do not be afraid; you will not be put to shame.*

Do not fear disgrace; you will not be humiliated.

You will forget the shame of your youth and remember no more the reproach of your widowhood.

5 *For your Maker is your husband—the Lord Almighty is his name—the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth.*

6 *The Lord will call you back as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit—*

a wife who married young, only to be rejected," says your God.

7 *"For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back.*

8 *In a surge of anger I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you," says the Lord your Redeemer.*

9 *"To me this is like the days of Noah, when I swore that the waters of Noah would never again cover the earth. So now I have sworn not to be angry with you,*

never to rebuke you again.

10 *Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken*

nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the Lord, who has compassion on you.