

The First Sunday in Advent
November 27-28, 2010
Isaiah 2:1-5

“The New Age”

The Thanksgiving feast is now history, and people are headed full-steam into Christmas. If you happened to be out and about on the day after Thanksgiving – Black Friday – then you know that folks are hunting for bargains, now more than ever with the on-going economic slump we’re in. Merchants factored all of this into their planning. This year, Black Friday sales started the week before Thanksgiving, and stores opened up earlier than ever for the biggest shopping day of the year – some even the night before. And yes, my family was one of those out looking for deals. We stopped in at a bookstore and in looking around, there is a whole section devoted to “New Age.” You’ve probably seen this yourself. We hear this phrase thrown around a lot, but what does “New Age” mean exactly? New Age is sort of an umbrella term for wide-ranging personal beliefs and practices influenced by Eastern religions, paganism, and spiritism. For example, New Age believers hold that the universe, life, and matter are not created by God, but are God. God is the impersonal life force, consciousness, reality, and truth within all people and all matter. God is all and all is God. New Age teaches that there is no such thing as sin, or evil, or Satan. There is only forgetfulness and ignorance. Salvation is achieved when people become one with the impersonal life force. Many New Age adherents believe in reincarnation - a continuous cycle of re-birth after death (see www.beliefnet.com). If all of this sounds weird, it is! These teachings and beliefs are polar opposites of Biblical and historical Christian belief. And yet, many people in our culture would say they agree more with the principles of New Age, and not with those of Christianity. Here’s a radical thought: understood properly, we are New Age believers! Let me explain: the vision of Isaiah found in today’s Old Testament lesson (Isaiah 2:1-5) points ahead to a grand and glorious new age when people will stream to God’s holy mountain to learn God’s ways. This new age will be an age of peace when weapons of war will be transformed into agricultural implements. In this new age, God himself will judge between nations. On this First Sunday in Advent, the theme for this message, based on the prophet Isaiah’s vision, is entitled, “The New Age.” May the Lord’s rich blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word, for Jesus’ sake.

Chapter 2 in Isaiah begins a section (chapters 2-4) that contrasts the ideal Israel God desires and the historical reality of God’s people in Judah and Jerusalem, which was far from God’s ideal. There is this back-and-forth between ideal and reality. The very next verses which follow today’s lesson tell how God is justified in withholding his favor from a people who have rejected him. They can only be restored by God’s mercy and forgiveness after the hammer of God’s righteous judgment has come down on them. And if that was true for God’s people then, it is true today as well. The message of God’s undeserved love and grace means nothing until we are first brought low and convicted of our sin against God – the evil we have done and the good we have left undone. The people of Isaiah’s day – God’s chosen people! – were involved in all sorts of bizarre worship practices that did not come from the Lord God: child sacrifice, cult prostitutes, worshiping other gods. I see many parallels between their culture and our own. Our culture seems very eager to embrace all sorts of bizarre practices that have nothing to do with Scripture, but come out of Eastern mysticism, paganism, and spiritism. Such things have seeped into the fabric of our society, and into the lives of God’s people. And to challenge these things, to speak against them, is to run the risk

of being labeled intolerant, close-minded, and a bigot. For the sake of God's new age, are we willing to take that risk? In our tolerant, so called open-minded culture, are we willing to speak the truth – God's truth?

Today as we enter into the season of Advent, we begin a new church year – a new age, if you will. The church year follows the life of Jesus: his birth; his life and ministry; his suffering, death, and resurrection; his ascension into heaven; the coming of the Holy Spirit and our response to his redeeming work; and his promise to come again. The plaques on the balcony wall tell the story of the church year, and I would encourage you spend some time looking at these after the service. It is in Jesus that God's new age has broken into our confused and sin-filled world. Jesus is the fulfillment of all that God looked for but never received from his chosen people. In Jesus, who is true God and true man, the ideal meets the reality; they are one and the same. Over against the false teachings of the New Age movement that says God is an impersonal and unknown life force, there is Jesus, who is the very image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15). Through his sacrificial death upon the cross as payment for all our sins, we can be sure that God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love (Psalm 145:8). God's new age centers in Jesus, who is the promised Messiah, the anointed One. He is God's on Wisdom we look to "that he may teach us his ways, and that we may walk in his paths" (Isaiah 2:3). He is the Judge of all who "shall judge between the nations" (Isaiah 2:4). He is the Prince of Peace who calls us to beat our "swords into plowshares, and our spears into pruning hooks" (Isaiah 2:5).

In Jesus our Advent Lord, God's new age has broken into our world and our lives. And we now await the fulfillment of what he came to do in his first Advent as we wait and watch for his second Advent. "O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!" (Isaiah 2:5). Amen. Come quickly, Lord Jesus. Amen.