

**I used to read the political editorials in the paper.**

**I found that by the end of the column I was often very angry at some group of people.**

**The authors were experts at just hitting that nerve that would stir your emotions.**

**This is the same tactic that politicians used this year to get people stirred up against each other.**

**The news media and newspapers have continued to fan the fire of hatred of our political foes.**

**I am amazed at the raw anger that still exists over the recent presidential election.**

**As I mentioned a few weeks ago, this country is in need of reconciliation.**

**To do that, we must prepare our hearts for the coming of hope, peace, and love.**

**God sends his incarnate son to fill your heart that you might live in peace with each other and love your neighbor.**

**In today's poetic reading from Isaiah, God promises that a prince of peace will soon come to bring about the Kingdom of God.**

**In this kingdom, "the wolf shall live with the lamb and the lion shall eat straw like an ox. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain for the earth will be with the knowledge of the Lord. On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him and his dwelling shall be glorious" (Isaiah 11).**

**Advent is a time of waiting in all the chaos and the change, yearning that the promise of the love and peace of God up in heaven will become incarnate in this world.**

**Christmas is the fulfillment of God's promise to bring the peace and love of God on earth by showing us how we can live in the Kingdom of God, right here, right now through the incarnation of Jesus Christ.**

**We gather here today for precisely this reason. When we are brought into the purpose and presence of the Lord, we are made holy in the Lord.**

**Each of you has been washed in the eschatological waters of baptism. You have entered into the death of Christ by giving up your old self and being raised up with Christ in this promise of peace and love.**

**Our kids will pray this advent season as they place a piece of straw in a manger. We need to empty ourselves before Christ can fill our hearts with the peace that passes all understanding.**

**John the Baptist says, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near...I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Matthew 3:2, 11).**

**Matthew and Isaiah both give us the vision of one who is coming to straighten out this chaos and confusion. Through relationship with God, God’s love, peace and hope will flow like a green shoot growing out of a dead stump.**

**In the time of Isaiah, the people of Israel hoped for a king that would lead them back to the path of righteousness.**

**The expectation of a messiah was defined by the cultural expectations of a great king that would protect them from outside armies.**

**But scripture is more like poetry than a roadmap and if we look deeper, we realize that God’s love is offered freely, but we must be willing to see that God’s truth is eternal and it is often us that needs to change our perceptions.**

**It is in this action of turning from our selfish past to a self giving future that the Kingdom of God is made incarnate once again in us.**

**As we wade through those baptismal waters, we experience ontological change.**

**As we live out our baptismal covenant we yearn for the peace of God’s love.**

**God promises to everyone that this poem, this dream, this vision can become a reality in our life if we are willing to turn.**

**The law was a roadmap to make the exact rules that would bring the people of God to this place of holiness.**

**Unfortunately prophets such as Isaiah were telling the people that it is not what is on the outside that is important, but what is on the inside.**

**Prophets later came like John the Baptist, who said, “Repent, for the Kingdom of God has come near.”**

**To repent means “to turn to God.”**

**The Gospel of Matthew portrays the birth of Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of Israel’s history.**

**God comes to every people in every time to bring us to wholeness.**

**The stories of God’s interaction with all the characters in the Old Testament are not just connected, but are fulfilled in the incarnation of the Holy Spirit in Mary’s womb and the birth of Jesus.**

**Poem after poem, parable after parable, we hear stories of fallible human beings that don’t rationally understand what God is doing.**

**God doesn’t always change the chaos, but walks with us through it.**

**The incarnate Holy Spirit brings Emmanuel into the womb of Mary to show God’s love for us through God made flesh.**

**Through the incarnate Christ, God’s love burns deep inside us in a way that brings error into truth, sin into righteousness and death into life.**

**The story doesn’t present a rational argument, but shows God’s love for us and the willingness of human beings to be part of that love.**

**The image of a shoot coming out of a dead stump shows us that when we have God’s love on the inside, nothing in this temporal world can overcome us. “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” Romans 8:38-39).**

**Most Christians await the coming birth of Christ in Bethlehem with all the cultural expectations that we have come to know.**

**God's love comes to us not as a mighty king, but through a fragile child born in a poor manger.**

**God is made flesh in Jesus Christ.**

**The Old Testament is not fulfilled through the rational expectation of humanity, but through a love so great that it defies explanation.**

**When we experience the grace of God we are changed on the inside.**

**I hope that you will open your mind and prepare your heart to wait expectantly to experience the eternal.**

**Because when you open your heart to God's plan, you join Abraham, the disciples, Joseph and Mary, the saints and martyrs and all the company of heaven.**

**The hidden reality in the poetry of Isaiah is that the root coming from the dead tree is actually coming to you and I.**

**The Living God comes into our reality and burns the incarnate fire of God's love in our hearts.**

**Let us await the coming again of the incarnate Holy Spirit, both in the womb of Mary, and in unexpected places like you and me. Amen.**