

Our readings today give us different views of Advent

Isaiah anticipates the fulfillment

This is the things of Christmas cards

The wolf and the lamb together

The baby playing by the cobra's den

A glorious dwelling on the Lord's mountain

In the Gospel, John the Baptist points to the path

It is one of repentance

And not just in words

But in words that lead to action

He calls the Pharisees and Sadducees a brood of vipers

He is a voice crying out of the desert

Wearing camel's hair

Eating locusts and wild honey

He speaks of a winnowing fan and chaff being burnt away

And St Paul tells us all of this is for our instruction

To give us hope

Hope for the day of Christ's second coming

When he will reign as king over all

Jews and gentiles alike

Advent continues to be a time of active waiting

Like the people Isaiah was writing to

They had experienced King David

A righteous, just king

Not perfect, but he tried

And now they were experiencing a succession of kings

Each one worse than the one before

King Ahaz is the one ruling at this time

And he had a choice to make

Isaiah told him if he would remain faithful to YAHWEH

He would be blessed

Judah would be triumphant over her enemies

But Ahaz refused

He made a pact with Assyria

A pagan nation

And this pact called for the surrender of their religion

Ahaz and Judah had to worship the gods of Assyria

Ahaz even had to sacrifice his own son

They were at risk of losing their soul

But even though they had abandoned God

God would not abandon them

Through Isaiah, they were promised a messiah

From the stump of Jesse

Seemingly dead

There would come a shoot

The scene Isaiah describes is partially fulfilled at the birth of Christ

It will be fulfilled in its totality at the second coming

The people of Judah needed something to hope in

We need someone to hope in

Isaiah supplies both

But this comes at a cost

It is not paid with money

It is paid with the heart

What John the Baptist calls a *mentonia*

A total conversion

Of mind, body and soul

A complete turning of our heart and soul to God

For that to happen

We need to experience the desert

**We need to be emptied of the things of the world that have hold
of our hearts**

Even good things

If they have hold of our heart

Our priorities are upside down

John speaks out of the wilderness

Not a pleasant place

It is a desert

Wild animals

Thieves and lawless live there

And John's words are not of peace

You brood of vipers

Who warned you to escape?

John warns them against a cheap religion and presumption

They would have to show their conversion through their works

Having Abraham as their father would not be enough

John told them the one coming after him would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire

To the repentant

The fire of God's love

A fire of purification and ultimate glory

To the hard-hearted

It is a fire that burns up chaff

A fire that destroys

These messages are still needed today

Because we are not yet home

The message of Isaiah

To coming of the kingdom

The time of peace

The fulfillment of hope

Alongside the message of conversion

Mentenioia

True repentance that produces fruit

A repentance that is a call to action

A call to service

We are living a second Advent

Waiting for Christ's return

The message for the first Advent is still needed

The temptations we face are the same they faced

Hypocrisy, power-mongering, presumption

Sins of the flesh, pride and greed

The list is as long as our arm

We are part of the royal house of David

Our roots are the roots of the Tree of Jesse

St Paul tells us Christ's kingdom is meant for all mankind

Jews and gentiles

He urges us to glorify God with one voice

To be prepared

Ahaz lost his throne

He lost his inheritance because of self-interest

More interested in preserving his life in this world

He lost his faith and his country

This same temptation is rampant in our world today

We will never have utopia in this world

But that is not our mission

Our mission is building God's kingdom in our world

As best we can

In our families

In our parish

In our cities and states

But it all begins at home

With a conversion of heart

Living this mentenoia

Hoping in the fulfillment of God's promise

Actively waiting during this advent season

Calling out with one voice

Maranatha

Come, Lord Jesus