

## Sermon followed by Service

November 27, 2022

Isaiah 2:1-5

“Preposterous! You gotta be kidding me!” Were you thinking it? With the family gathered around the table telling their stories, did they have you thinking: “Preposterous! You gotta be kidding me”?

In our lesson today, Isaiah says things that sound preposterous. Isaiah sees the mountain of the Lord’s temple raised up to be chief, some would say highest, of all the mountains. If you’ve seen the temple mount, if you know the lay of the land around Jerusalem, you might think: “You gotta be kidding. The temple mount isn’t even the highest hill in Jerusalem.” Jerusalem has higher hills; Israel has higher mountains; there are mountains in the Appalachians that would dwarf the temple mount; mountains in the Rockies that dwarf the Appalachians, mountains in the Himalayas that dwarf the Rockies. But Isaiah sees the temple mount raised up as chief, some would say highest, of all the mountains.

Then Isaiah sees “all nations,” people from around the world streaming up to the mountain of the temple. That’s an odd picture, isn’t it? A stream flowing up a mountain? What’s more odd, more unbelievable, is the picture of all nations streaming up, flowing up the mountain. Why are they streaming up the mountain? Isaiah sees and he hears: Many peoples will come and say, **“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.”** People from around the world want to go up the mountain, to Jerusalem, to the temple of the Lord, to be taught by the Lord, so they can walk with the Lord.

I wonder if Isaiah thought: “Preposterous! You gotta be kidding!” To get a sense of just how preposterous this sounds, let’s go back a chapter - Isaiah 1. Isaiah is setting us up to appreciate what he says in his next 65 chapters. In chapter 1, Isaiah sees Jerusalem, God’s city, the capital of God’s people; God calls his Jerusalem a harlot, a prostitute, a whore, full of murderers, cheats, and thieves. God sees their rulers and leaders, their officials and leading citizens, not as leaders with him, but as rebels against him; not ruling with justice, but taking bribes in cahoots with the cheats and the thieves. And it wasn’t just the ruling class; God sees his people rebelling against him, corrupt, rotting. They have forsaken him, spurned him, turned their backs and despised the Holy One of Israel - even as they go to temple and pretend to follow the Lord, even as they bring their sacrifices and pretend to honor the Lord. But God sees what’s in their hearts, and he says he can’t stand their “evil assemblies”; and their sacrifices, their offerings, are meaningless because they have no heart for God.

God saw it, and Isaiah saw it. So when God gave Isaiah a picture of peoples and nations from the around the world streaming up to the temple to be taught by God, to walk with God, what did Isaiah think? Was it - “You gotta be kidding! People from around the world coming to the temple to be taught by God, to walk with God? You gotta be kidding!” I can imagine Isaiah thinking: “God’s own people in Jerusalem can’t be bothered ... God’s own people aren’t wanting to be taught by God or to walk with God. So why would the nations around the world want to be taught by God and to walk with God? You gotta be kidding!” Or did Isaiah see something completely believable and understandable and reasonable? - God’s judgment on his fakes and pretenders with God taking his promise and finding someone else who would actually want to follow him. “If my own

people don't want to listen and walk with me, I'll find someone else who will listen and walk with me."

Back to Isaiah's vision. It gets even more unbelievable, more preposterous. In this new world where nations stream up to God, God's Word goes out; he judges; he settles disputes between peoples and nations. He brings a peace, a peace so complete people 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."**

Hard to imagine, isn't it? And if we lived in the world of Isaiah we would think it impossible to imagine; in Isaiah's world someone was always fighting someone else; in Isaiah's world someone was always getting stepped on and pushed around by someone bigger. Sometimes Judah was the bigger; most of the time Judah was getting stepped on or in danger of getting stepped on. So, no more war? - "Preposterous! You gotta be kidding."

Hard to imagine, isn't it? What if Isaiah were writing today? What do you think he'd see and say? Instead of **"the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as chief,"** I imagine Isaiah would see and say: "I see the church of Jesus Christ established as chief in all the world. I see people from all over streaming in, streaming up into church as the most important place they can be; I see people streaming into church as the most important life they can live. And I hear people from all over calling each other, inviting each other: 'Let's go up to church. He will teach us his ways, so we can walk in his paths.'"

When you see that picture - peoples from around the world streaming up into church for worship and Bible Study - what do you

think? “Beautiful”? Or “Preposterous! You gotta be kidding!”? What do we see here at St. John? People streaming in? Or people going with the flow of the world? What do we hear? People calling, inviting to Bible Class: “the Lord will teach us so we can walk in his ways”? Or people week after week in a hurry to get out the door? This picture that God has for his church - people streaming in to church as the most important life they can live, people inviting each other in to learn the ways of the Lord - do you see yourself as part of that picture? Or do you find yourself thinking: “That’s really not me, just doesn’t fit what I’ve got going”? This picture of the church that Isaiah has for us, it can be easy to think “Preposterous! You gotta be kidding!” And that’s really sad, isn’t it?

When Isaiah saw this vision of the church, he had to know just how preposterous, how completely unbelievable this picture is, right? So what did he say? “**Come, O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the LORD.**” You have to admire Isaiah’s audacity, his boldness with the impossible, don’t you? How could Isaiah be so audaciously preposterous? He knew he was telling the truth. He knew most people wouldn’t want to be part of that truth. But he knew he was telling the truth and - by God’s grace - some people would want to hear God’s truth and walk the ways of God.

And so Isaiah preached the preposterous. A virgin would conceive and would give birth to a son - Immanuel, God with Us, God himself. Born into a world of darkness and death, he would be God’s forever King to bring us light and life. Born into a world of corruption and deceit, he would work God’s justice and judgment. Born into a world of sin and guilt, he would take our place; the Holy One of Israel would have his Servant Son take our place as guilty. And so the Son of God would become the Lamb of God and take our place as cursed and crushed by God, sacrificed by God as a guilt

offering for people who denied him and refused him. It sounds preposterous, doesn't it? Isaiah gets more preposterous. That One cursed and crushed by God, his life poured out into death, he would live. And he does live! He lives to judge you "forgiven." He lives to safeguard you with his peace. He lives to disarm you with his peace. He lives to raise up his church as chief, and to invite you in to walk in the ways of the Lord.

How could Isaiah be so bold? How could Isaiah make such preposterous promises? I'll use his words: "The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this!"

What do you think of that? We could say: "Preposterous!" Or we could join Isaiah streaming up the mountain: "Come, let us walk in the light of the LORD." Amen!

November 26 & 27, 2022

**SERVICE OF THE WORD**

**IN OUR WORLD TODAY ...** we hear a hope (or hopelessness) that someone will come and somehow make life right in our broken world.

**IN OUR WORSHIP TODAY ...** we know that Someone has already come to set us right by God and that he will return to make life right for us. We prepare to celebrate that first coming, and we especially prepare for his return in this church season we call Advent (from the Latin for coming).

**OPENING HYMN**

*“Lift Up Your Heads, You Mighty Gates”*

**Hymn 305**

Lift up your heads, you mighty gates! Behold, the King of glory waits.  
The King of kings is drawing near; the Savior of the world is here.  
Life and salvation he will bring; therefore rejoice and gladly sing.  
To God the Father raise your joyful songs of praise.

The King is born in poverty, his chariot is humility,  
his kingly crown is holiness, his scepter, pity in distress.  
The end of all our woe he brings; therefore the earth is glad and sings.  
To Christ the Savior raise your grateful hymns of praise.

How blest the land, the city blest, where Christ the ruler is confessed!  
O peaceful hearts and happy homes to whom this King in triumph comes!  
The cloudless sun of joy is he who comes to set his people free.  
To God the Spirit raise your happy shouts of praise.

Fling wide the gates; prepare your heart to be a temple set apart  
from earthly use for heav'n's employ,  
adorned with prayer and love and joy.  
So shall your Sov'reign enter in and new and nobler life begin.  
To God alone be praise for word and deed and grace!

Redeemer, come! I open wide my heart to you; here, Lord, abide!  
O enter with your saving grace; show me your kind and friendly face.  
Your Holy Spirit guide us on until our glorious goal is won.  
Eternal praise and fame we offer to your name.

#### INVOCATION

- M: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you.
- C: **And also with you.**

#### + CONFESSION OF SINS AND ABSOLUTION +

- M: We have come into the presence of God, who created us to love and serve him as his dear children. But we have disobeyed him and deserve only his wrath and punishment. Therefore, let us confess our sins to him and plead for his mercy.
- C: **Merciful Father in heaven, I am altogether sinful from birth. In countless ways I have sinned against you and do not deserve to be called your child. But trusting in Jesus, my Savior, I pray: Have mercy on me according to your unfailing love. Cleanse me from my sin, and take away my guilt.**
- M: God, our heavenly Father, has forgiven all your sins. By the perfect life and innocent death of our Lord Jesus Christ, he has removed your guilt forever. You are his own dear child. May God give you strength to live according to his will.
- C: **Amen.**

#### PRAYER OF THE DAY

Stir up your power, O Lord, and come. Protect us by your strength, and save us from the threatening dangers of our sins; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.  
**Amen.**

**FIRST READING**

*Isaiah 2:1-5*

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

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.

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.

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.

Come, descendants of Jacob,

let us walk in the light of the LORD.

The Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**



Wel-come the King of glo - ry, each tribe and na - tion!  
He is the LORD Al-might - y, bring-ing sal - va - tion.

The earth is the LORD's, and every- / thing in it,  
the world, and all who / live in it;  
for he founded it / on the seas  
and established it on the / waters.

Who may ascend the mountain / of the LORD?

Who may stand in his / holy place?

The one who has clean hands and a / pure heart,

they will receive blessing from God their / Savior. *Refrain*

Lift up your heads, you gates; be lifted up, you / ancient doors,  
that the King of glory / may come in.

Who is this King of / glory?

The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in / battle.

Lift up your heads, you gates; lift them up, you / ancient doors,  
that the King of glory / may come in.

Who is he, this King of / glory?

The LORD Almighty—he is the King of / glory.

**Glor**y be to the Father and / to the Son

and to the Holy / Spirit,

as it was in the be- / ginning,

is now, and will be forever. / Amen. *Refrain*

**READING***Hebrews 12:14–24*

Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. Even though he sought the blessing with tears, he could not change what he had done.

You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death." The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear."

But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

The Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

**GOSPEL ACCLAMATION***Philippians 2:10*

Alleluia! At the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth. Alleluia!

**GOSPEL***Matthew 21:1–11*

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her.

Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”

This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

“Say to Daughter Zion,  
‘See, your king comes to you,  
gentle and riding on a donkey,  
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’ ”

The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

“Hosanna to the Son of David!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?”

The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

**Praise be to you, O Christ!**

#### **APOSTLES’ CREED**

**I believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY

*"The King of Glory Comes"*

Hymn 548

*Refrain*

The King of glory comes; the nation rejoices.  
Open the gates before him; lift up your voices.

Who is the King of glory? How shall we call him?  
He is Immanuel, the promised of ages. *Refrain*

In all of Galilee, in city or village,  
he goes among his people, curing their illness. *Refrain*

He gave his life for us, the pledge of salvation;  
he took upon himself the sin of the nations. *Refrain*

He conquered sin and death; he truly has risen,  
and he will share with us his heavenly vision. *Refrain*

SERMON

HYMN

*"Let Us Ever Walk with Jesus"*

Hymn 704

Let us ever walk with Jesus, follow his example pure,  
flee the world which would deceive us and to sin our souls allure.  
Ever in his footsteps treading, body here, yet soul above,  
full of faith and hope and love, let us do the Father's bidding.  
Faithful Lord, abide with me; Savior, lead; I follow thee.

Let us suffer here with Jesus, to his image e'er conform;  
heaven's glory soon will please us, sunshine follow on the storm.  
Though we sow in tears of sorrow, we shall reap in heav'nly joy,  
and the fears that now annoy shall be laughter on the morrow.  
Christ, I suffer here with thee; there, O share thy joy with me.

Let us also die with Jesus; his death from the second death,  
from our soul's destruction, frees us, quickens us with life's glad breath.  
Let us mortify, while living, flesh and blood and die to sin,  
and the grave that shuts us in shall but prove the gate to heaven.  
Jesus, here I die to thee, there to live eternally.

Let us gladly live with Jesus; since he's risen from the dead,  
death and grave must soon release us. Jesus, thou art now our head.  
We are truly thine own members, where thou livest, there live we;  
take and own us constantly, faithful Friend, as thy dear brethren.  
Jesus, here I live to thee, also there eternally.

### PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

M: Lord God, our maker and preserver, we praise and thank you for all that  
you give us day after day.

C: **We are not worthy of all the mercies you show us.**

M: You have given us your precious Word to nourish our souls and to protect  
us from the temptations of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature.

C: **We thank you for those who teach and preach your saving truth at this  
place and everywhere. Grant them a rich measure of patience, wisdom,  
and love.**

M: Heavenly Father, we pray that you shield us from every kind of danger:  
sudden catastrophe, terrors of crime, and the pain of disease. Watch over  
those who travel by land, sea, and air. Keep our loved ones from whatever  
perils may threaten them.

C: **Heal those who are sick, cheer those who are sad, calm those who are  
distressed, and comfort all who are old and infirm.**

M: Bless our land, our people, and those who hold offices of high trust. Keep  
our government and schools upright and strong for the advancement of  
good citizenship and useful vocations, that we may enjoy your gifts of  
peace, security, and well-being.

**C: Grant your blessing to every nation on earth. Where there are wars, may there be peace. Where there is hatred, let it be healed. Where there is poverty, danger, or disaster, come with your almighty power to help and restore.**

*Special prayers and intercessions may follow.*

M: Hear us, Lord, as we bring to you our private petitions.

*Silent prayer.*

M: We bring these requests before you in the name of Jesus our Lord, and ask you to hear us. Take all that we have, our bodies and minds, our time and skills, our ministries and offerings, and use them to your glory.

**C: We give ourselves to you that we may serve you in whatever way is pleasing in your sight. Amen.**

#### LORD'S PRAYER

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.**

#### CLOSING PRAYER

M: O Lord God, our heavenly Father, pour out the Holy Spirit on your faithful people. Keep us strong in your grace and truth, protect and comfort us in all temptation, and bestow on us your saving peace, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

## BLESSING

M: Brothers and sisters, go in peace. Live in harmony with one another.  
Serve the Lord with gladness.

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace. **Amen.**

## CLOSING HYMN

*"The Advent of Our King"*

Hymn 309

The advent of our King our prayers must now employ,  
and we must hymns of welcome sing in strains of holy joy.

The everlasting Son, in flesh content to be,  
himself a servant's form puts on to set his servants free.

O Zion's daughter, rise to meet your lowly King,  
nor let a faithless heart despise the peace he comes to bring.

As judge, on clouds of light, he soon will come again  
and his true members all unite with him in heav'n to reign.

Before the dawning day let sin's dark deeds be gone,  
the old self all be put away, the new self now put on.

All glory to the Son, who comes to set us free,  
with Father, Spirit, ever one through all eternity.

## OFFERING

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## **Visit to Kenya and Ethiopia**

Along with Rev. Larry Schlomer, WELS World Missions administrator, and Missionary Howard Mohlke, head of the WELS One Africa Team, I was privileged to visit two of our sister synods in Africa in October. The experience is one I will never forget.

The first visit took place in Nairobi, Kenya. There we were greeted at the airport by representatives of the Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ–Kenya (LCMC–Kenya). The LCMC–Kenya was received into fellowship with WELS at our synod convention in 2019.

We had the opportunity to worship in the new partially constructed church building (made possible by the generous support of WELS members). We spent the next two days attending the synod convention of the LCMC–Kenya. The faith, zeal, and commitment of the pastors and laypeople attending the convention were truly moving. In the days after the convention, we visited several congregations where members themselves are erecting new church buildings.

Later in the week we traveled to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. There we were greeted by Dr. Kebede Yigezu, the president of the Lutheran Church of Ethiopia (LCE). The LCE is also a relatively new sister synod of WELS, with fellowship declared at our synod convention in 2017.

One of the priorities of the LCE is Christian education on all levels. In a building in Bishoftu (also made possible by the generous gifts of WELS members), Dr. Kebede operates a school where three levels of theological training take place. We were privileged to attend the graduation of four men who had completed their training in one of the levels and are now ready to begin seminary training.

With his emphasis on Christian education, Dr. Kebede also has permission from the local government in Dukem to operate a Lutheran elementary school there. It will have an enrollment of 900 by next year. We visited the school at the start of the school day and were impressed by the enthusiasm of the students and the commitment of the teachers.

God is blessing the gospel ministries of these two growing sister synods. Your prayers and offerings have been a special blessing to them.



## **Growth and partnership in Indonesia**

In July 2022, WELS Friendly Counselor Rev. Gregory Bey made his first visit to Indonesia since the pandemic began. Bey attended the convention of WELS' sister synod in Indonesia, Gereja Lutheran Indonesia (GLI). GLI currently has about 1,650 members in 29 congregations served by 30 pastors and 5 vicars.

The GLI convention was held on the new seminary campus on the island of Java. Construction of this seminary, called Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Lutheran (STTL), was completed in 2021. Seminary classes are taught by Indonesian pastors with support from Bey. The seminary currently has 27 students, many of whom are graduates of a Lutheran high school that was established in July 2018.

“Walking through the new campus evoked emotions of exhilaration and excitement coupled with thankfulness to God for this beautiful blessing,” says Bey. “But it was interacting with the students, staff, and faculty that brought to mind these words of St. Paul: ‘Entrust the things you heard from me, in the presence of many witnesses, to faithful men who will also be able to teach others’ ” (2 Timothy 2:2 Evangelical Heritage Version).

Bey concludes: “God-willing, STTL will produce a steady stream of qualified national pastors for many years to come.”

GLI continues to grow in number and maturity. In 2015, a plan was set in motion to transition a significant amount of financial support from WELS to GLI. Pastor salaries for men in established congregations will, prayerfully, be fully supported by local members by 2025. In some cases, GLI pastors may need to serve as “tent ministers” who support themselves with secular jobs. WELS would continue to provide funding for seminary professors and possibly the synod chairman. Savings could then be used to support building projects for existing churches as well as exploratory work in new regions. This is a huge step toward self-sufficiency and independence as a stand-alone church body.

WELS' Asia One Team is in the process of calling for a full-time friendly counselor to support and advise the work in Indonesia. Bey has been filling the role on a quarter-time basis since he retired from full-time work in 2019.

Learn more at [wels.net/indonesia](https://wels.net/indonesia).