



Jesus the King: Hope for the nations

Main verse:

Five hundred years before Jesus was born the Prophet Isaiah wrote of One who would deliver the world:

¹ "Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations.

² He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets.

³ A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he has brought justice through to victory...

⁴ In his name the nations will put their hope." (Isaiah 42:1-4)

Today our world bears little resemblance to a world ordered by God. We can't be but troubled, indeed frightened, as we watch the news each night.

The horror of the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas-led Palestinian militant groups in and around the Gaza Strip, with the continuing escalation of death and devastation as the two political powers seek the control the area. This is the world we wake to each morning.

Whilst I confess, I have little understanding of what is going on, I do believe the more we see on our televisions, the more our hope wavers.

- How can this crisis possibly be resolved?
- Is it even *possible* for these two nations to live in peace with each other?

Where do we place our hope, when our world seems to be crumbling right before our eyes? That is what I'd like us to consider this morning.

During the week I was sent an informal documentary – more a video blog really – prepared by an American couple, Sergio and Rhonda, who, as soon as news broke of the war between Israel and Hamas, they knew they had to be with their family and friends in Israel.

As frightening as the prospect of such a trip evokes, making the trip was fraught with difficulties, as one would imagine.

It was all but impossible to even get a flight to Tel Aviv as most airlines had cancelled their flights. Finally, they managed to catch a commercial flight, which took an indirect route to Tel Aviv via Ben Gurion Airport, 20 miles from Tel Aviv, so as to avoid rockets and missiles coming from Gaza.

We might ask, why would a young couple take such a risk to enter Israel's war zone?

It is because they are a unique couple: an Israeli Messianic Jew married to a Palestinian Arab – and they are both Christians. They believed God had called them to make the trip, therefore, they put their trust in God.

Video 1 | An Mural showing Israeli history

As they arrived at the erringly deserted Ben Gurion Airport, they were immediately struck by a huge mural, 50m long and 5m high, titled “Am Yisrael Chai”, meaning “The People of Israel Live”, celebrating 4000 years of Jewish history.

The mural tells the story of the Jewish people, starting with the creation of Adam to the formation of the nation of Israel, its exile, the rise of Zionism and the establishment of the modern state. It continues through the story of the State of Israel in its 75 years of existence, its development, wars, innovations, landscapes, leaders, scientists and thinker. The couple marvelled at such an accomplishment.

Yet, as Sergio and Rhonda studied the Mural more closely, they noticed the most significant Jewish man of all times was glaringly missing.

No mention of the birth of Jesus was portrayed in the Mural.

There was, however, the image of a Rabbi, standing in the temple with a baby in his arms. According to the artist it was included to represent the Jewish ritual of circumcision.

So, the couple pondered, “Had Jesus purposefully been omitted? Or, might it be possible that the artist actually portrayed an image that would be significant to a Christian?”

Of course, we can’t be sure but the image certainly matches with when Jesus birth occurs in Isarel’s story.

In Genesis 12:1-3 God promises Abraham that from him all the nations of the world would be blessed.

God told Moses that one day a great prophet would come who would be unlike any other prophet before him.

God promised David a son who would reign on his throne forever.

God spoke through Isaiah and promised that a son would be born of a virgin, and that his name would be called Immanuel—God with us.

Still later Micah predicted that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.

Generation after generation, the Jews waited in heightened expectation for the coming of the Messiah.

Then, the day came when a young couple from the tiny village of Nazareth brought their baby son to the temple as was the custom of the Law, a Rabbi named Simeon took the baby into his arms and praised God, saying,

*“... my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:
a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.”*
(Luke 2:30-32)

Was this what the artist of the artist had cleverly included in his portrayal of Israel’s history?

An image of Simeon, who had waited all his life “for the consolation of Israel” (Luke 2: 25), what Isaiah had prophesied centuries earlier:

- ¹ *“Here is my servant whom I have chosen,
the one I love, in whom I delight;
I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations.*
- ² *He will not quarrel or cry out;
no one will hear his voice in the streets.*
- ³ *A bruised reed he will not break,
and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out,*

till he has brought justice through to victory.

⁴ *In his name the nations will put their hope."*

(Isaiah 42:1-2 and quoted later in Matthew 12:18-21)

"In his name the nations will put their hope."

Today we light the first candle of Advent, a candle representing hope.

Centuries ago, Isaiah looked to the future, with eyes of faith, and saw the coming of Jesus, the hope of the nations.

He saw this child as the fulfillment of all the hopes and dreams of the Jewish people across the centuries.

And in the full knowledge of all these prophecies, the Apostle Paul calls all God's people, both Jews and Gentiles, to put their hope in Jesus, drawing from Isaiah 11: 10:

"The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; in him the Gentiles will hope."

Our hope is in the perfect "root of Jesse," that is, Jesus Christ, God who became human and dwelt among us.

We have hope because Jesus took upon himself the punishment for our sins, the guilty sentence that was ours, the death sentence we deserved.

However, death could not hold him down. Through the power of the Spirit of God, Jesus was raised from the dead, and became the One who gives eternal life to all who trust in him. Jesus opens the way for us to have a relationship with our heavenly Father.

This is why Jesus is the hope for the nations.

How does this hope play out in war-torn countries like Israel and Gaza?

A snippet from Sergio and Rhonda's story shows a very real way.

Video 2 | Entitled: Worshipping in a war zone

When their son and daughter married, their families – one Israeli and the other Palestinian – recognised the oneness of those in Christ and they are now able to worship as one through their faith in Jesus Christ.

In a few weeks' time we'll be singing the well-known Christmas Carol "*O Little Town of Bethlehem*". There is one line that stands out:

*"Yet in the dark street shineth, the Everlasting Light
the hopes and fears of all the years are met in Thee tonight."*

During Advent we'll sing lots of songs which voice the cries of the prophets.

We'll be invited to join in their hopes for a world restored – where broken hearts are mended, prisoners released, the oppressed brought good news, the dispossessed returned to their land.

And at Christmas, we hear how God enters into this messiness of life, in Jesus, to bring this eternal plan to pass.

So rather than just looking at the first candle of Advent, a candle of Hope, perhaps we can see *ourselves* as a candle of hope in the world.

Let us lift the light of Hope high so that others may see it and respond. **Amen.**