

**St. Peter Evangelical Lutheran Church + Modesto, California**  
**Midweek Advent Worship + December 11, 2002**

Sermon by Pastor Jonathan Micheel

*Shalom Aleychem*  
“Peace be with you!”

**Isaiah 9:6**

***For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (NIV)***

*Shalom Aleychem!* That’s Hebrew for “Peace be with you!” and that is my “season’s greeting” for you this evening.

My name is Isaiah. I was born about 760 years before Jesus was born. I was one of the prophets of Old Testament times, author of the book that bears my name. The book is named after me, but it was really God who gave me the words to write.

My father’s name was Amoz (with a z at the end, not an s like the prophet Amos). You don’t know much about my father, but he was an important man. We were part of the royal family, and so throughout my life I had access to the royal court, to the king’s presence. God sometimes used that position to bring messages through me to the most powerful people in the land.

I was not destined to be a king, however, but a prophet. A prophet is one who proclaims God’s word, and that is the task to which I was called. Your pastors and teachers today act as God’s prophets, speaking God’s word to you.

I know the word “prophesy” to most people of your day means “to foretell something that’s going to happen in the future.” Often what I and the other prophets proclaimed had to do with that—proclaiming God’s plan for the future, like when the Messiah would come. That’s probably why the word “prophesy” came to mean “to tell what is going to happen in the future.” I can’t change your language, but I hope that when you hear about God’s prophets you don’t think about just the future, but also the present and what God is saying to you right now. A prophet’s task is to speak his word clearly, to (as you say) “tell it like it is.”

I began to prophesy in the year that King Uzziah of Judah died. I remember it vividly. The Lord gave me an extraordinary vision. I saw myself lifted up to heaven, to the throne room—not the throne room of the king of Judah, but the throne room of God himself. My ears still ring with the sound of the angel choir. They sang, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of armies! The whole earth is full of his glory!” The angels flew around, humbly covering their faces and feet in the presence of the Almighty. The experience was staggering. I was stunned. And terrified. I cried out, “Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.” (Isaiah 6:5) Seeing God’s burning holiness made me aware of who I was—more keenly aware than I ever had been before: a sinner.

You people today don’t take sin very seriously. Instead, you like to say, “It feels right; how can it be wrong?” or “This may be wrong for you, but it’s not wrong for me.” Sometimes you also say, “I try to do my best,” while shrugging off many of the things you do and say and think in your hearts, even though these things are an affront to God’s threefold holiness.

But this is nothing new. The people of my age didn't take sin seriously either. We lived in a prosperous time. Many of us, to one degree or another, forgot about God. At the time I began to speak my prophecies the situation was bad and getting worse. People were still carrying on as if everything between them and the Lord were just fine. They were terribly wrong. I told them bluntly that the Lord hated their church services. He despised their offerings. Their songs and prayers were loathsome to him. Why? Because they were trying to ignore their sin. Instead of confessing it, they were pretending it wasn't there, and they believed the Lord was dumb enough to not notice their charade.

I began this evening with the greeting *Shalom Aleychem*, "Peace to you." What I must sadly say is that war, not peace, is what all of us should be experiencing—war with God. He is holy; we are unclean. He demands righteousness; we are unrighteous. War, not peace, is what we all deserve from God. And be sure of this: God wins that war.

Much of my work as a prophet was to "tell it like it is" when it came to people's sin. I told people that the Lord would not ignore their refusal to repent. He would bring terrible judgment on them. But—praise the Lord!—that was not the only kind of message he gave me to proclaim.

Through me, the Lord began giving his people hints about his Anointed One, the Messiah (or Christ, as you know him). He told how Messiah would be born miraculously, of a virgin! He would be called Immanuel, which is Hebrew for "God with us." Can you imagine? The eternal Son of God in human flesh and blood. The Lord of all being born, living here among us!

Through this one baby, God would bring to an end the warfare between him and us. God would bring us peace. That's why I wrote this in my book: For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Sar-shalom (Prince of Peace). (Isaiah 9:6)

"But how?" I wondered. How would God bring about peace? He would have to take away the sin that caused the war between him and people. That's exactly what he promised to do.

That brings me to one of my best known prophecies. It's the favorite chapter of many Christians, for it seizes their attention with its imagery that is graphic, heart wrenching and at the same time immensely comforting. You believers today often read this part of my prophecy on the day you call Good Friday.

This section of my book, as well as many others, is unusual. In this famous chapter, I speak of the work that the Prince of Peace would do over 700 years in my future. Yet when I write about his work, I write as if it's already done! Your Bible teachers today call this way of speaking the "prophetic perfect". When a prophet says something that he is perfectly confident will happen, he speaks as if it's already as good as done. For example, if you were perfectly confident that this coming Christmas would be a happy one for you, you could say, already now in the beginning of your month of December, "I *had* a happy Christmas." I know this may sound odd to you, but this is a way that I and other prophets sometimes spoke to express our certainty that what the Lord promised surely would happen.

The Prince of Peace, this child that was to be born of a virgin, would take the guilt and punishment of you and me onto himself. There was no doubt; it was as good as done when the Lord foretold it through me. This is what the Lord said through me: But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:5,6)

The punishment that brought us peace was upon him... This is why Immanuel, the Messiah, the Christ, could be called the Prince of Peace. By taking our guilt and punishment

onto himself, he would release us from it. He would let his Father go to war with him instead of us! By doing that, he would bring us pardon and peace.

I know you are eager for Christmas to arrive. How could you not be? I longed to see the things that you see: how the Prince of Peace would be born, how he would suffer as a lamb led to the slaughter, how he would again see the light of life. My wish for you this evening is this: spend some time this Advent season thinking about the war caused by your sins, the war between you and the Lord. Then, with your whole self, joy in the peace brought by the Christ child.

Because of him, I can give you this greeting and know it will be true: Peace be with you!  
*Shalom Aleychem! Amen.*