

The Advent Calendar

Wonder

It was like being in captivity, even though they were home. The enemy, seen and unseen, made them cower behind their barriers and their walls. They couldn't travel freely. They were kept from their families and friends. They weren't sure if there was freedom in their future or just more of the same. Death seemed to stalk the innocent and the aged alike. Today's pandemic isn't all that different from the Israelites who'd been relegated to the ruins of Jerusalem after the Babylonian army had sacked the city. And yet there was a hope ... a hope that God would rescue them. A hope for a messiah sent to release the prisoners.

Isaiah 61:1-4

1. Biblically, _____ were thought to be _____ thus the "Heavenly Host" is the starry sky *and* the angels we have heard on high.
2. God promises a _____ of favor, but only a _____ of vengeance.
3. The prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled over 500 years later with the _____.
4. The church is Jesus' plan to ensure the _____ continues to be _____.

My Count Me In! Commitment

- I'll be "here" next Sunday
- I'll invite a friend
- invest in my city this year by _____
- I'll engage the Digging Deeper Study this week

Additional Notes

Digging Deeper

Week of December 20, 2020
The Advent Calendar: Wonder

Scripture: Isaiah 61:1–4

Introduction: There are two kinds of wonder: the wonder we feel when we experience one of the great and mysterious joys of life, like the birth of a baby, and then there's the wonderment that comes with pondering the unfathomable mysteries of life, like where's God when your church is closed, your extended family is unavailable, all your favorite haunts are either closed or restricted, and you're afraid to venture out lest you find yourself accosted by an unmasked bandit? The COVID Crisis and the Babylon exile of Judah are perhaps more similar than we'd expect.

1. Read Isaiah 61:1–4. According to the Lord, what is the good news for the poor, the brokenhearted, the captive, the prisoner, the mourner, and the grief stricken?
2. Dr. Bill suggested that the primary good news for the poor was that opportunities for gainful and sustainable employment would become available because of the restoration of the city. How is this different from how you've seen "good news for the poor" programs and ministries you've seen in the past?
3. It is likely that by the time this passage was written, the Israelites in Babylon had been officially released by the conqueror Cyrus the Great of Persia. However, after seventy years of exile, few Israelites chose to relocate. Why do you think this might be?
4. Read Nehemiah 11:1–2. The book of Nehemiah documents the restoration of the city walls. However, the state of the city was in such a state of disrepair that few wanted to live in the inner city. What was Nehemiah's solution?
5. Why do you think it was important that the inner city be re-inhabited by people of means?
6. Read Luke 4:14–21. What do you think Jesus meant when he said that this passage had been fulfilled?
7. The Greek word for "fulfilled" in this passage is in the *perfect* tense, that is, Jesus was saying these words were completely fulfilled and would remain fulfilled for all time. What part do you think the church plays in Jesus' pronouncement?

Next Week: On the Third Day of Christmas. The holiday season is nearly over. Is there really a place for Christmas all year round?