

**St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church-WELS  
Midweek Advent Vesper #1.**

**November 30, 2011 Isaiah 40:1,2 ESV**

Comfort for God's People

<sup>1</sup> Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. <sup>2</sup> Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.



People of God – rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

It was on the news the other day – a man rescued after 8 hours of being in quicksand! *Quicksand!* When I was really little – I watched a TV program called *Lassie!* Lassie was a collie – a wonderful dog with a really long and pointy nose – and beautiful long golden and white fur and a very big – very furry tail. Every week Lassie would rescue someone. 226 episodes Lassie usually rescued Timmy Martin. And though the catch phrase *Timmy's in the well* became very popular that's about the only place Lassie did **not** rescue him from. Timmy never fell into a well. What really scared me – though – was the episode when Timmy fell into quicksand. It was horrible. TV back then was black and white – more accurately all different shades of brown. And this quicksand was like really watery oatmeal and there was no escape! I was afraid this was the one time Lassie wouldn't get help in time. And I was afraid it was only a matter of time before I would be walking in northern Illinois – when I would fall into quicksand – and we didn't have a dog! I don't think we have to worry about *literal* quicksand – but the quicksand of sin is a danger not just to our body but to our immortal soul. This Advent Season – when the world tries so very hard to distract us from the reason for this season God's Word reminds us again and again:

**Jesus Is Our Comfort**

- 1. He gives us peace**
- 2. He gives us forgiveness**

The part of God's Word we are concentrating on is from the scroll of the Prophet Isaiah. With Jesus' permission we are going to work through chapter 40 for three Wednesdays – as we prepare our hearts to celebrate Christmas. We read from Isaiah all the time. Last year we read from Isaiah 25 Sundays – almost half the year we read from Isaiah. This new church year – we will read from Isaiah for the first three Sundays of Advent. We will read from Isaiah – with Jesus' permission some 17 times this year. That's more times from Isaiah than any other Old Testament book. You have heard lots of sermons from Isaiah. Isaiah begins with the words, **"The vision – the revelation – the pulling back of the curtain – concerning Judah and Jerusalem –** that is the Southern Kingdom – **that Isaiah son of Amoz saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.** That's an 81 year stretch! Remember Uzziah? Sure you do! Uzziah was the King who thought it would be great to be the one who burned the incense in the Temple. How wonderful to wave the censer – and to smell that wonderful smell of incense and spice burning! The, "Get out of my way! Don't you know who I am? I'm the King!" Was met with looks of holy awe and fear as the priests who tried to block the King – saw the leprosy – snow white – begin on the King's forehead and spread! Uzziah and his son Jotham – Ahaz and his son Good King Hezekiah were all Kings of Judah – Kings in the south – in the capital of Jerusalem! Their earthly rule was the historical backdrop to the law and gospel

ministry of Isaiah in the south – Amos in the north. There was a Mrs. Isaiah. She was a prophetess. That means she would teach God’s Word like *Advent by Candle Light!* Isaiah and Mrs. Isaiah had two sons. Their Heavenly Father picked their names. Their firstborn son was named *Shear-Jashub* which means “a remnant will return!” That’s law and gospel. A remnant will return means not everyone will survive. Not everyone will return. But a remnant will! The LORD always preserves his remnant – his handful of faithful believers – His Church – and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it! Isaiah and Mrs. Isaiah had a second son. Our Heavenly Father said, “Name him *Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz* which means “quick to plunder – swift to spoil!” This, too, is law and gospel. It’s the law – if you are the one being pillaged and plundered. It’s Gospel if the battle belongs to the LORD – and you plunder and spoil the enemies of your faith! It’s a two edged sword – the sword of the Spirit!

The scroll of the prophet Isaiah is 66 chapters long. Chapters 1 through 39 are mostly although not completely Law! Chapters 40 through 66 are mostly although not completely Gospel! President John Braun from Trinity wrote the *Peoples Bible Commentary Isaiah 40 to 66*. We are at the second part – the *Gospel* part. It’s easy to remember that – because chapter 40 begins with the words, <sup>1</sup> **Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.** <sup>2</sup> **Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended,** Comfort! Comfort! Say it twice! It’s just the opposite of what you hear when you listen to the world which talks forever about trouble and unrest! The Stock Market us up 300 and then it’s down 300 – then it’s up 400+. The price of a barrel of oil or a gallon of gas – where are they going? Is Iran going to launch a nuclear attack on Israel or will there be a preemptive strike by Israel? Is the Muslim Brotherhood going to take over Egypt? Who is going to take over Lybia? What are you going to buy for Christmas for the people you love? How are you going to get the house cleaned and decorated – the cookies baked the tree trimmed – the lights outside – the Christmas cards addressed? And how are you going to pay for it all? And what about the lumps and bumps – the aches and pains – the tumors and the dementia in the hearts and minds and lives of the people we love? There are so many things to think about – when you wake up at 2 or 3 in the morning – how can you ever fall back to sleep?

Yet here is God’s Word saying, <sup>1</sup> **Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.** <sup>2</sup> **Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended.** The war is over! The war between rebellious people and their Holy Heavenly Father is over! Jesus died on a Friday afternoon to bring that war to a forever end. When Jesus said, “**It is finished!**” – that was it! Every sin that had ever been committed and every sin that will be committed up to the moment Judgment Day begins – were all washed away! When we understand and appreciate peace with God – then and only then – will there be peace between people. Let there be peace on earth – and let it begin with me! That means husbands and wives are patient with each other. Practical example – putting up the Christmas tree! This has got to be one of the devil’s favorite things – watching people become angry – putting up this symbol of Christmas. As you probably know – the Schultz family has a 20 year tradition of going to a tree farm to cut down a Frasier Fir for our family Christmas tree. This year we went past a family – holding their Christmas tree over their heads – for the picture on their Christmas card! Nice! We were barely into the rows of Frasiers – calling out a warning, “Stump!” – whenever we came near one – when along came another extended family. A Grandpa with white hair – cursing and cursing again! Obscenities from the Grandpa! The problem – the main problem is not the fact that there are little children who will hear him – or that there are ladies who will hear him. It’s not that a minister will hear him. The problem is – his Heavenly Father hears him! Dr. Becker used to remind us – the fact that he doesn’t mean it – doesn’t even realize he’s doing it – doesn’t excuse it. It only makes it

worse! If you are going to call down eternal destruction on anyone or anything – you had better mean it with every fiber of your being! Anything less – is blasphemy of the most terrible kind! Patience that cooperates with your spouse when you put the tree in the stand – and string the lights and put on the ornaments – and is the one who is quick to crawl under the tree to water it – or drive to the Hardware store to get a fuse – so the lights will go on around the garage door! These weeks before Christmas we have a priceless opportunity to show our family and all the people around us – that we understand the ultimate meaning and reason for this time – to give glory to the Son of God – born of a Virgin – born in poverty – born one of us – to save us from our sins.

**She has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.** There was a man who – back in the 1940s--some 60 years ago – stole somewhere between \$20 and \$30 from a *Sears' Store* cash register. He took the money and stuffed it in his pocket and kept it! Maybe he was desperate – maybe he was just weak. But he took the money – and spent it. And for the last 60 years it has been eating away at him – bothering his conscience – making him feel guilty and ashamed for 60 years. Finally – just the other day – this little grandpa took an envelope and put in it – a \$100 bill – the original \$20 to \$30 he took – plus interest – and a hand written note that says – “I took this money from a Sears' cash register. I am returning it with interest. Please put it in the theft recovery fund!” How sad to spend 60 years feeling guilty and ashamed from something you do so long ago. God's Word tells us – King David wrote some 3,000 years ago – as Pastor Gartner read: **The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who hear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him!** Psalm 103:8-13

**She has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.** The days between Thanksgiving and New Year's are days of stress for a lot of people! If you watch TV or read the papers or listen to the radio they keep telling us – these next few weeks we should be so happy our cheeks will hurt from smiling so much! Watch TV and it looks like lots of people are putting those ginormous ribbons on very expensive cars in the driveway! They make it look like everyone is buying a new flat screen LCD/LED TV with \$200 a pair 3-D glasses! That husbands and boyfriends are buying their sweet heart a dazzling diamond! That everyone is going to have one of those tablets – so they can surf the Internet and play video games and watch TV and movies all on demand! That we will be feasting with all our best friends and relatives – and everything will be wonderful! And then people look at their own lives – and it's not nearly so glorious! It's difficult to pay all the bills – much less buy presents that literally cost thousands of dollars. It's these next few weeks when people sometimes become painfully aware all the troubles they have – in their marriages and in their families. And when they feel guilty and ashamed and to blame – they come to the brink of despair! This is especially when we need to remember the amazing grace of our Heavenly Father. How can you explain his unfailing love? It's like double forgiveness for all your sins. How many sins have you done? If you do 3 sins a day – one in the morning – one in the afternoon and one in the evening – that's over 1,000 sins a year. If I only did a thousand sins a year – I would have over 60,000 sins in my lifetime! If the truth be told – I would do 100 sins in a day – just the thoughts that come to my mind – the good things I should do – and don't do. In a lifetime – it must be a million sins – times 7 billion people alive right now! As staggering as that amount must be – there is twice that much forgiveness! There is not just a lot of forgiveness – there is twice as much forgiveness – a

surplus—far more forgiveness than we could ever use up. So rest assured Jesus loves you! Don't be worried and don't be scared. Be comforted with this: *Jesus loves you very much!*