

The words of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah...

*Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. Isaiah 7:14 NRSV*

*For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this. Isaiah 9:6-7 NRSV*

Those are favorite verses at this season and often read early in December

With the newly decorated Meeting House and our anticipation of Christmas in a few weeks

We read these verses with a light heart and the joy of anticipation

It is the promise of peace and hope—the coming of Christmas—the birth of Jesus

Yet we forget that these words were given some 7 or 800 years before the birth of Jesus

They were not written at a time when Judah enjoyed peace and goodness in the land

These words were written at a difficult time in the life of Judah and Jerusalem

They faced war as they are surrounded by hostile enemies

There is a severe shortage of water and ultimately food

They were terrified that Judah as they knew it would be no more

In fact, it's not long before Assyria conquered Israel, then Judah is exiled to Babylon

Today we live in the paradox of the joy of Christmas and the despair all around us

I announced the collection of needed items for the Central American asylum seekers

FCNL has gathered this weekend to lobby congress to save the SNAP program

We face global warming, sustained wars, lack of affordable health care, homelessness...

More than ever, we need the prophetic message of Isaiah—of hope, peace, and promise

The words of Isaiah are a prophetic message to the people

First of all, a message of presence: *Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. Isaiah 7:14 NRSV*

Immanuel means "God with us"—no matter how difficult things get, God is with us

I think that more than anything—this is what I need—God with me all the time

And I'm convinced it is true—God never leaves us—and is most present in hard times

We continue with another prophetic message in Isaiah 9:6-7

A child is born, named *Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace*

Isaiah reassures them that God's authority will settle on them

This is a message or promise of hope and peace

Hope—not the wishes and dreams that flit through our lives

Hope is trusting that even in the midst of our broken world God can transform our world

...even as we face the worst of the worst

It is the hope of transformation as we partner with God in the here and now

Following the Leadings, trusting that we can find way forward

It is a transformation to peace, justice, and righteousness

Every time we follow the Leadings and enact peace and justice

We make real this transformation that God is doing in our midst

We enact what God is doing

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Early Quakers had a prophetic message for their time—they spoke clearly and prophetically

They persisted in knowing that God speaks directly to all people and that we can hear and follow

They also enacted their prophetic message—living out their Leadings to confront societal wrongs

They faced the brokenness around them, doing what they could to bring about transformation

Believing God speaks to everyone—they opened up worship for all to speak a message

Finding themselves in prison—they worked to change prisons from the inside out

They found practical ways to confront inequality

They chose integrity as a lifestyle—enacting fair pricing with set prices for everyone

They chose peace and living in such a way as to take away the occasion of all war

They paid a high price for their prophetic actions, but it transformed their world

What is the prophetic message needed in our time? In 2018?

What is our prophetic message to each other? To the city? To the world?

What does God want to say through us to bring about hope and transformation in our world today?