

**One Little Light**  
**A Sermon for Baptist Church**  
**Bob Stillerman**  
**Isaiah 2:1-5**  
**November 27, 2016**

Advent is the audacious story of one pink candle.

One. That's it. But it's burning bright. And that one bright light will change the world.

Many, many moons ago, the people of Israel demanded a king. Samuel was leery: "A king will only disappoint you. It's God's world, don't you know?" But still the people insisted, and God told Samuel: "Tell them: 'have at it!'"

It turns out that Samuel was right. Before too long, one kingdom had split into two: Samaria in the North and Judah in the South. And when the monarchs of these two kingdoms were not seeking to grab power from their subjects, or from one another, they were seeking to take it from Damascus and other neighboring tribes. And at the same time, these kings were doing their best not to be swallowed up and annexed by super powers like Assyria and Egypt.

In today's lection, the king of Samaria, the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and the King of Damascus, make a pact to impede Assyria's aggression. The two kings also urge King Ahaz of Judah, the Southern Kingdom of Israel, to join this pact. Ahaz thinks about it, but declines: "You two provide plenty of buffer for me – fight your own battles."

In response, Damascus and Samaria invade Judah. And holed up in his castle, King Ahaz seeks the counsel of the Prophet Isaiah. "What should I do?" he asks.

I think Ahaz was looking for the easy way out: "Tell me it's okay to make a pact with Assyria. They'll demolish my present enemies, I'll pay a tribute, and we'll all go on about our business."

Isaiah doesn't bite. He has another suggestion for the young King:

I will not counsel you on the ways of a world that is broken, nor will I recommend solutions that only prolong the inevitable, or repeat a cycle of past mistakes.

YHWH is my God. And ever since the days of Joshua, YHWH has told us that we have a responsibility to live in covenant with our Creator – And should we choose to keep that covenant, we need not fear for our security.

But you still seek another way. You seem to think that alliances with foreign powers will make you stronger; you seem to think that mercy and justice and kindness are instruments of vulnerability; you seem to think that might is the only form of right.

But I'm urging you to see differently. Look hard. Long long. Look far. For beyond that wall, beyond those armies, beyond the horizon is another world: God's world. It's a city that sits high atop a mountain.

And on that mountain, all the nations of the world will gather, and praise God together. And God will be their judge, not a nasty, finger-pointing, wand-zapping judge, but a wise one, a teacher, an arbiter. God will be like Deborah, sitting under a tree – a judge who makes righteous decisions, but also listens to the grievances of her people.

When this day comes, there will be no need of weapons – when all people live under the auspices of God’s justice, weapons are fruitless.

Ahaz, look to this light. God’s world is coming. You just have to see it, and when you do, walk towards it!”

The prophecy foretold, Isaiah, our little pink candle was silent. Would that Ahaz had heeded such counsel. He paid tribute to Assyria, his enemies were dismantled, and Judah remained relatively unscathed. But not without future damage. Assyria would continue to lord its power of Judah in the next century.

But still, one pink candle, one audacious voice, helped changed the world. Ahaz’s son Hezekiah would heed Isaiah’s counsel, and under his reforms, Judah turned once more to the worship of YHWH. And even in the siege of his city, Hezekiah chose to listen to Isaiah’s voice – he chose to believe that somewhere out on the horizon, God’s world was still coming. He looked to the light of a little candle.

Throughout the centuries, God’s work has been made manifest by little candles who chose to shine brightly in the darkest of situations. Isaiah’s flame ensured that another would burn brightly: Seven hundred years later, an unwed teenage mother, and her little child would respond to God’s call. They too would choose to see the promise of God’s future.

So here we are today: one tiny candle stands alone. Over the next few weeks, four more will join it. And in twenty-eight days, perhaps a hundred more in this room.

And I think the question for us this season, Sardis Baptist Church, is this: Will we choose to hold a candle high, and walk in the light of the Lord? And will we choose to know that our singular light can help transform a broken present into God’s bright future?

At the completion of *The Hobbit*, Gandolph tells Bilbo:

Surely you don’t disbelieve the prophecies, because you had a hand in bringing them about yourself? You don’t really suppose, do you, that all your adventures and escapes were managed by mere luck, just for your sole benefit?

Friends, in the season of Advent, we will hear the ancient prophecies. We should not be surprised to learn that we too are part of making God’s future a reality.

Our journey starts when we choose to hold high our little candles.

This Little Light of Mine, I’m gonna let it shine, let it shine, let it shine, let it shine!