

HOPE NEEDS COURAGE

We continue our 5 week message series (preaching series) called

CHRISTMAS IS COMING!!! What are you hoping for?

Last weekend we reflected on Advent as a real time of conversion, renewal and to have real hope in Jesus. There are so many challenges during this season that it can diminish this sense of hope.

The weather, Christmas shopping, dinners, socials or maybe missing a loved one or feeling isolated and alone. As much as this season is a blessing and a grace to prepare for Christmas, it can be a very difficult time!! Hope needs courage in the midst of this journey so that we can truly see the grace and light of this most sacred and holy season!!

THE PROPHET ISAIAH

There are so many wonderful examples of hope in the Scriptures and during the Advent season there are three particular ones — from the Old Testament we see Isaiah, who like all the prophets, is called to be a ray of light and hope for the people in the midst of darkness. *"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light."* (Isaiah 9:2)

Being a messenger for God is not an easy thing to do. The qualifications for this job is a little different than you would think. The Old Testament prophets were not great scholars, wise judges or even very talented. Often they were reluctant, felt inadequate, and were afraid. Yet God used them to share the Good News. Isaiah didn't think he was holy enough to speak for God, he thought he was too sinful to be called on this sacred mission. Sound familiar?

One common trait of all the prophets, including Isaiah, was that they finally trusted and loved God. They ultimately realized that they needed to surrender to the grace

and power of the Heavenly Father, they had the courage to give up control and place themselves completely in the hands of God. Have you ever done the trust game where you fall backwards hoping the person behind you will catch you before you crash to the ground? Isaiah and all the prophets were able to do this. We too are called to do the same and realize that God will give us the wisdom, words and strength to fulfill His will.

JOHN THE BAPTIST

John the Baptist is the last of the line of Old Testament prophets who had the honour and privilege of presenting Jesus to the world. This voice crying out in the wilderness also had courage to speak out calling people to change their lives and seek reconciliation.

John had the courage to be the only voice of hope and conversion despite the fact that many did not listen. Sometimes being called by the Lord to share the Good News means that we may at times need to stand alone and be that voice of hope and love in a world that isn't listening.

This is where it is very difficult to live out the life of a faithful and loving disciple. Being a messenger for God does not always offer us peace, joy and satisfaction. It often will bring conflict, isolation and suffering. Yet in the midst of that chaos there is also light, grace and hope. We too are called to be like John the Baptist who can clearly exclaim, *"Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"* (John 1:29)

MARY—THE MOTHER OF GOD

Mary, the mother of Jesus, is the greatest example of courage in the Scriptures. This young woman said "Yes" to God without question or hesitation. Her fiat was a total submission and surrender to the

Father in Heaven because of her deep love and faith in God.

We can sometimes forget that Mary was as young as 16 when she accepted the call and gave birth to Jesus. The challenges of not knowing how things would unfold called for a daily "yes" to God. From having shepherds and kings visit her newborn to escaping to Egypt for fear of Herod, the life of the Holy Family was truly a challenge. Eventually, Mary had to witness all her friends abandoning her son at the darkest hour, and then witness her son's death on the cross. That "yes" she lived out each day needed courage and love. What an amazing sign of love, dedication, sacrifice and grace she has offered to us.



COURAGEOUS FAITH TODAY

We too are called to respond "yes" to the Lord's call in our lives. Mary was able to trust God because she knew him through faith and prayer.

In order for us to know him and trust him, we too need prayer, the sacraments and reflection on the scriptures to dialogue with the divine. We also have to look at our faith heroes over the centuries who are a constant sign of hope, love, faith and courage.

The courage we need is to place our lives in God's hands trusting that he will guide us to the light. That is true hope fulfilled!!!

