

Promises made

1. There is something about Christmas that brings a sense of hope and wonder, a feeling of excitement and joy, even for those who aren't necessarily religious. It isn't just Christmas morning, but the entire season, that bring so much promise. It is kind of strange that during a time of year where the weather begins being at its worst, our spirits and our hopes reach their best. We even ask for the bad weather every Christmas- we *dream* of it.
2. Christmas is a time of promises kept.
 - a. But before we can talk about the kept promises, we must talk about the promises made.
3. There are dozens of OT prophecies that point to the coming of Jesus, or to something about he and his life. Indeed, depending on how you apply prophecies, there are well over one hundred. The most obvious of these prophecies are often intertwined within prophecies of destruction or punishment for Israel.
 - a. God would send a prophet such as Isaiah or Jeremiah to tell his people of impending punishment for their unfaithfulness. However, he wouldn't let his people be without hope. He wasn't trying to demoralize them. He was disciplining them in order to bring them back to himself.
 - b. Because of this, the messages of doom and gloom would often be followed with messages of hope, of a time when God would restore his people and bring a chosen one who would provide for their sins, allowing them to reap the full benefits of their return.
4. Isaiah 40 is one of those prophecies. After having warned earlier of a coming punishment that would drive the people from the land, God spoke through Isaiah about a day when things would be better, when God himself would provide for them again.
5. In verses 9-11, he tells of a time when God would come to them and gather them all back to himself.
 - a. Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!"¹⁰ Behold, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.¹¹ He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.
6. This was a great promise of hope for Israel. It meant that even though they were about to be punished, when that punishment arrived, they knew that their God was not done with them and would deliver them in the future.

Promises kept

1. I did say that Christmas is a time of promises kept. God did deliver his people back to Jerusalem and Judah. They didn't stay in exile forever. Yet that wasn't the fulfillment of the prophecy. The people returned, but things weren't much better. Faithfulness was still a struggle for them, and invasions from the outside did not cease.
2. The fulfillment of God's promise was something so much bigger. It began with him sending his Son to take on human flesh and dwell among his people. That baby grew up

and described himself as the Good Shepherd, and indeed he did fulfill the role of the loving and good shepherd who tends and cares for the flock. It is hard to read the promise in Isaiah 40:11 and not think of Jesus describing himself as the Good Shepherd.

3. He promised to come be with his people, and he did so in Jesus, Immanuel, God with us. God promised to deliver his people. The deliverance he gave them was not from a foreign enemy, but from their own sins. He promised to restore his relationship to his people, which he did with the blood of his Son in order to reconcile his people back to himself, tearing down the veil that separated God from man because of sin.
4. I said that Christmas is a time of hope and expectation. Who doesn't love seeing the wonder and excitement of a child waiting for his Christmas presents? All through Advent, which the culture views as the Christmas season, that hope builds within our children. And then, all at once, on Christmas morning, those hopes are fulfilled as they tear open their presents.
5. That is what Advent and Christmas are for us. Advent leads us to the hope that God will fulfill all of his promises, and then Christmas morning we are reminded that in Christ, he has.