

**“United in Hope”**  
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**Readings:**

**Isaiah 61:1-3**

**Luke 4:16-21**

**1. A DIVIDED PEOPLE**

- Isaiah 61 emerges when the people of Israel reunite after years of separation.
- They were all Israelites, but they lived very different lives.
  - Some were exiles, and taken to Babylon.
    - There, far from the promised land and without a sanctuary, they needed to revise their theology.
    - Previously, they believed that God was always on the side of the victorious: "If God is for us, we will never lose."
      - But they lost.
      - They lost the war, the land, the sanctuary.
    - And they discovered something painful but also liberator:
      - God is also present in the pain of the defeated.
    - Without a sanctuary, they needed practices that could be carried out anywhere.

- Therefore, the practice of circumcision and the observance of the Sabbath were intensified, preserving the identity of the people.
- They learned to worship without an altar, without sacrifices, without Jerusalem.
  - God was with them even in captivity.
- Some were not exiled: the remnants of Judah.
  - They remained on their land after the defeat, witnessing the destruction of the sanctuary and interpreting it all as divine punishment.
  - They lived with guilt and pain,
    - But hope was also born:
    - God would send a powerful Messiah, a king like David, someone who would restore the dignity of the people.
- When exiles and survivors reunite, tensions arise.
  - New practices and interpretations from the exiles sounded like impurities to those who remained;
  - The survivors wanted to restore everything to how it was before, including rebuilding the sanctuary.
  - And then differences of opinion, theology, culture, and expectations turned into walls.

- Today is no different. Just look around:
  - Threats of tariffs, wars breaking out, growing prejudice, xenophobia, heated debates, social media inflaming everything.
    - Divisions caused by differences.
  - Like Israel, our differences can divide us and undermine hope.
    - How many relationships, families, churches, and nations are broken up by disagreements that could be resolved with compassion and empathy?
- And it is in this scenario of divisions that the prophecy says:
  - "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me."

## **2. DIFFERENCES OR HOPE?**

- The prophecy foretells that God would raise up an anointed one, a Messiah.
  - Anointing was simply the application of oil to the head, symbolizing total consecration.
    - The symbolism represents the oil penetrating the skin and reaching the spirit.
    - A beautiful image!
  - God prepares each layer of the anointed one for a special mission.
- And to whom would the anointed one's mission be?
  - The text answers:

- for the brokenhearted, the captives, the prisoners, those who mourn, and those who are afflicted in spirit.
  - In other words, everyone who was suffering, without distinction.
- The anointed one proclaims the “acceptable year of the Lord,”
  - This is a reference to the Jubilee Year:
    - There was a countdown in which every 50th year:
      - the debts were cancelled,
      - The lost lands were returned to their original owners.
      - the freed slaves
      - It was a "reset" that gave everyone the possibility of a new beginning.
        - The Messiah would come to provide a new beginning.
- The Messiah would come to liberate, to restore dignity, to heal wounds, to unite what was separated.
  - The Messiah would come to propose that, in him, all who were divided would be reunited.
    - What is most valuable:
      - The divisions;
      - Or union in the Messiah?
- Disagreements will always exist:
  - political, liturgical, theological, and cultural differences

- But none of them is greater than the Messiah.
- And the question remains:
  - As God's people, what do we show the world?
    - Our differences or our hope?
- On this Advent morning, we are invited to light the light of hope, even in a world that insists on dividing us.

### **3. A HOPE THAT UNITES US**

- The Messiah does not come to say who is right or wrong.
  - He comes to join us.
- The prophecy says that he would bring good news to the brokenhearted, freedom to the captives, comfort to those who mourn, joy instead of sorrow, praise instead of a spirit of despair, a crown instead of ashes.
  - The Messiah rekindles hope.
- Differences have enormous power:
  - to divide.
- But hope has greater power:
  - bind.
- Throughout the years, all churches have faced discussions due to differing opinions:
  - Using drums or not,
  - hymns or contemporary songs,
  - printed or projected liturgy,
  - In addition to so many doctrinal differences.
- These differences and discussions are normal.
  - The problem arises when they become walls.
  - When differences create divisions, the priority ceases to be the hope generated by the Messiah.

- Israel had to choose:
  - differences or hope.
- We've all had to choose between one or the other before:
  - To value what separates or to value what unites.
- But the decision isn't just about the past.
  - It's a choice for today and for tomorrow.
- Every Sunday, when we get together to worship God, it's an answer to that. We're saying:
  - "Yes, we are different. But the Messiah is greater."
  - It's worth prioritizing hope.
  - And that's what makes us one people.
- The prophecy has been fulfilled.
  - The Messiah came, and He was more than we expected:
    - not just a great ruler, but the very Son of God.
  - He is the bridge between exiles and remnants, between the strong and the weak, between different people who become family.
- Today, on the first Sunday of Advent, the lit candle reminds us of that hope that transcends divisions and illuminates our hearts.

## **CONCLUSION**

- What is more valuable: what separates or what unites?
  - We place more value on what separates us when we put our opinions and preferences at the center.

- And when they are at the center, Christ is not.
- We value what unites us more when we make room for the Messiah to act:
  - To bring good news, freedom, comfort, joy, and to restore dignity.
    - Even if things don't always go the way we want them to.
- Sometimes we think we know what's best, but others may disagree.
  - Therefore, before deciding solely based on our own point of view, we should look to the Messiah:
    - the only one who unites a divided people.
- When we value Him more than our differences:
  - We can all hear good news;
  - We are all free.
  - We all find comfort,
    - happiness
    - and dignity.
- Because the Spirit of the Lord is upon Him.
  - And He anointed us with hope, a hope that does not divide, but unites.
- Amen.