

The day is dawning!
Tomorrow will be my Dancing Day!

Fourth Sunday of Advent
December 20, 2025

When will our deliverer come; the one promised by the prophet Isaiah, the Psalmist, and in Matthew's Gospel?

The prophet Isaiah spoke to the nation of Israel; to a people who had been brutalized and decimated at the hands two mighty foreign kings. It was indeed a dark time. And yet it was also a time of hope, when Isaiah promised that their pain would be like the pains that precede birth, as deliverance was coming. In that long ago time, the prophet proclaimed: "Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son and shall name him Immanuel, meaning, God is with us!" Isaiah proclaimed a coming day when the nation of Israel would be freed from their foreign oppressors.

You and I live in a time not much different than theirs, with brutality seen everywhere around our borders, and brutality right within our midst. But the hope promised by Isaiah is our hope as well, for our pains are also those that proceed birth. Because our deliver has coming and is coming.

Isaiah proclaimed a coming deliverer, a mighty king who would be named Immanuel, God is with us. The Psalmist also picked up this theme. He wrote: "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel...You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth...Stir up your might, and come to save us! Restore us,

O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.” The Psalmist cried out three times for salvation.

Save us, deliver us, restore us, we all cry. The Gospel of Matthew tells us of a young girl named Mary who was found to be pregnant from the Holy Spirit. A shocking story, in fulfillment of the prophet’s words that a virgin would become pregnant and give birth to a son, and he would be named Emmanuel, God is with us.

The scriptures today speak to us of one who was coming to save us. But this word salvation may not mean what you think it does. It’s an English word that has lost much of its original meaning. We often think of salvation as going to heaven when we die. But in the original Hebrew and Greek, the word penned in parchment in Isaiah and the Psalms and Matthew meant something very different than going to heaven.

Maybe the word freedom might be a better English word. But even this word could be problematic for us as Americans. We often refer to freedom as the security to live as we want to live in society, and to worship as we please. But this is not what this Greek word means. A much better word might be deliverance or liberation. These words refer to being released or freed from things that tend to hold us back or hinder us from obtaining our whole potential as children of God – sins, yes. But also, insecurities and guilt and the ghosts we carry around with us from our past and in our present; character flaws and personality quirks.

Jesus, who was fully human just like us, grew up in a society and family where he too had to face his own imperfections and ghosts and quirks; things that held him back intellectually, emotionally, socially, and psychologically. But unlike us, Jesus found his full liberation. He may have found it during his forty days of fasting in the wilderness, his times of intimate prayer alone with his Father, and through the challenges of life and ministry. In all these experiences Jesus became our greatest example of a whole, completely integrated human being, someone who experienced the entire fullness of the love and Oneness of God, and Oneness with all of creation.

And having experienced his own deliverance and liberation, he focused his entire earthly ministry on proclaiming and demonstrating and bringing about deliverance and liberation in the lives of others, through his teaching and healing ministry. He summed up this entire ministry one day in his hometown synagogue when he opened the Isaiah scroll and read: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has...sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed.” Yes, his ministry would be a ministry of deliverance and liberation for all.

My dear siblings in Christ, on this final Sunday in Advent, our deliverer and liberator, the one Isaiah spoke of, Immanuel, God with us, the one who walked this earth two thousand years ago, is coming on Christmas Eve, and indeed, he has already come.

There is an old 19th Century English Carol that looked forward in anticipation of that babe in the manger. It was titled: “Today Shall be my Dancing Day.” Our choir will be singing two verses of this carol in just a couple of hours. The lyrics speak as Christ in the first person just before his birth, saying that “Today Shall be my Dancing Day.” In the carol, Christ speaks of “my true love,” referring to you and me; to his church, His true love. But not just his church, all of humanity and all of creation is his true love. Remember John 3:16? For God so loved the world. The lyrics reference to the “dance” refers to what this life of liberation and deliverance looks like; a life in union with God through Jesus Christ.

I’m going to read the first two stanzas of this old Carol. But first I will pause for a moment of silence:

TOMORROW SHALL BE MY DANCING DAY!

(SILENCE)

Tomorrow shall be my dancing day;
 I would my true love did so chance
 To see the legend of my play,
 To call my true love to my dance;

(Chorus)

Sing, oh! my love, oh! my love, my love, my love,
 This have I done for my true love

Then was I born of a virgin pure,
 Of her I took fleshly substance

Thus was I knit to man's nature
To call my true love to my dance. (Chorus)

In a manger laid, and wrapped I was
So very poor, this was my chance
Betwixt an ox and a silly poor ass
To call my true love to my dance. (Chorus)

Christ Jesus calls out to you and me, pleading with us to find full deliverance. He might just speak words something like this: “Oh, my, true love! Look at my life. I have loved and lived and suffered and laughed – and yes, Oh, HAVE I DANCED! None have danced as I have danced, this glorious liberating dance meant for all the beautiful Children of God!

Sing, oh! my love, oh! my love, my love, my love, This have I done for my true love. When the Son has set you free, you are truly free! I am calling you my true love, to my dance!