

Rev. Dr. Yugo Suzuki's Sermon

12/12/2010 **"Be Strong, Do not Fear" Isaiah 35: 4-7**

The prophet Isaiah prophesies the coming of the Messiah. It was 500 years prior to the birth of Jesus.

The coming Messiah, says Isaiah, will strengthen the weak hands and make firm the feeble knees. He calls out to the faint hearted, "Be strong. Do not Fear."

The Messiah will "open the eyes of the blind and make the ears of the deaf unstopped." He will empower "the lame to leap like a deer and the tongue of the speechless to sing for joy."

So for the prophet Isaiah, the Messiah is a healing, encouraging, and empowering one.

Profound though it is, however, Isaiah's understanding of the Messiah is not completely free from the old image of a vengeful king. This is obvious in his words, "He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you."

Isaiah's idea of the coming Messiah is a healing, encouraging, and empowering one. But it is plagued with the residues of a vengeful and angry king whose intention is the salvation of Israel, and Israel alone.

The Christian gospel proclaims that God completed Isaiah's proclamation of a healing, reconciling Messiah by purifying it of the vengeful picture of the coming Messiah.

What is the healing and reconciling Messiah in the mind of God? It takes the form of the baby in the manger surrounded by the domestic animals, the foreign wise men, the poor shepherds, and the young carpenter father and his teen-age wife.

Why does the Savior have to be the baby in the manger? Because we humans do not have to be afraid of him.

Why was he not surrounded by worldly glory and splendor? Because power creates division between the powerful and the weak. Because wealth creates division between the rich and the poor. Nothing in this world can make our human life truly human.

But in God's idea of the Savior, there are no walls and barriers between the Christ child and us humans. Anyone can approach the baby Jesus without fear and trembling.

After all, the lowly people like the wise men and the shepherds and even animals were welcome as they were, all of them, with no exception.

The imagery of the infant Jesus sleeping in the manger is essential to Christian faith. It symbolizes God's intention that we all be given access to the Messiah. We are invited into his domain as we are.

Christmas reveals God's amazing love for us. It reveals God's unfathomable compassion for us.

As Paul states in his letter to the Romans, "Nothing, absolutely nothing, hardship, distress, persecution, famine, or nakedness, or sword, even death will be able to separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ, our Savior."

Therefore, "Be strong. Do not Fear." Thanks be to God.