The readings from Isaiah for this week and last week reflect the tense and dangerous decades before the fall of the Kingdom of Israel. As you may recall from what I shared last week: this was a time of conflict between kingdoms, within and without the tribes of Israel. The conflicts were between Judah and Israel; and with their aggressor to the north, Assyria. Not unlike today, there are alliances between countries that would seem to be natural enemies, and conflict with those whom one would hope would be at peace. What seems to be holding true is that “misery acquaints a man with strange bedfellows.” (Shakespeare - The Tempest) As in Shakespeare’s time, politicians form peculiar associations so as to achieve short-term gains. Sadly this arrangement led to the downfall of Israel, 20 years after Ahaz courted Assyria in order to secure his own personal situation as King of Judah. I fear that we today may also be courting disaster when “… we place our trust in princes, in human beings, who cannot save.” (Psalm 146:3 [NIV]) Shouldn’t we rather be relying on God and the values espoused by our faith.

At this time of year, when we celebrate the Incarnation, (as well as the Second Coming) we should be ever more mindful that we, as believers, place our trust in the Word, that was with God in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be God, world without end. (Cf. John 1:1) Battles rage
today, in places like Aleppo, Syria; Juarez, Chihuahua; and Grozny, Chechnya. In places like these, Isaiah promised that the uniforms soaked in blood, and the boots that trample the innocent will be burned as fuel for flames. (Cf Isaiah 9:4) …meaning that all vestiges of war will be destroyed so that the reign of peace and justice may commence. And who will usher in this reign of God? …the Prince of Peace? A child born to us, a Son given us… an infant born in a stable, wrapped in swaddling, and lying in a feeding trough for cattle. Do we believe this prophecy? If so, why after two millennia do the wars still rage and the innocent suffer? Do we truly understand what prophecy is?

Prophecy isn’t telling the future, prophecy is telling the truth. If peace is to reign, then we need to place our trust in God’s truth and not in our own politics of power and influence. Like Mary and Joseph, we need to say ‘yes’ to God so as to bring Christ into the world. If peace is to reign we need to do the work of Jesus, to bring a justice that establishes right relationships and seeks the good for all people. We must demand that world leaders (beginning with our own elected officials) act with righteousness, looking out for the needs of all, especially the poor and dispossessed. We must live up to our own prophetic call (received at baptism) and be the voice for the voiceless, the healer of the broken, the protectors of widows, orphans, and life at all stages. Our standard for excellence on the international stage must be based on justice for all especially the most vulnerable. We need to care for all of God’s children regardless of race, religion, or national origin. This begins with our own county taking the high ground when it comes to leadership in justice among nations. We need to truly become ‘one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for ALL.’

The challenge question for us today is, ‘Are we ready to put aside our short term desires, so that we can work to usher in the Kingdom of God here on earth?’ ‘Are we ready to pick up our cross and follow Jesus?’ ‘Are we ready to lay down our lives for others and for the good of all?’