



Though we don't get the Hallmark Channel, their ads would suggest that this is the season for people to fall in love, to find joy . . .

-- . . . and to wear red and green sweaters.

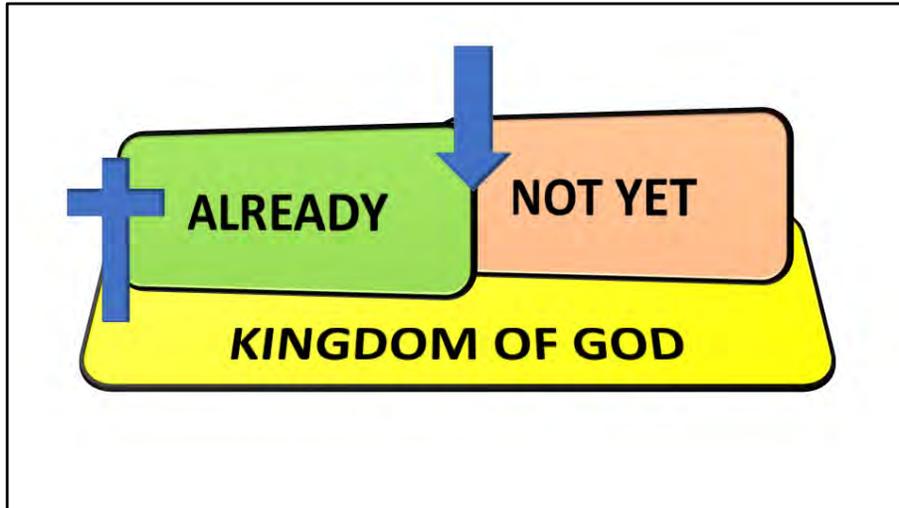
TR: But so many find that all the bright colors of this time of year can't take away . . .



. . . our blues.

- I recently read that 2/3 of folks “can hardly stand going to family holiday gatherings because one or more of their relatives will do something offensive.” (Crucial Accountability, p. 4)**
- For so many, the holidays remind them of loved ones they’ve lost.**
- Or dreams of having their own family around the tree, a dream that life has seemingly cut down.**
- What do we do with these unfulfilled expectations?**
- Even as believers, many will hit a struggle point when looking up to God seems futile . . . He didn’t answer our prayers before, why would He now?**
- How can we experience true joy and peace?**

TR: Part of the answer comes from one of the top insights into God's Word that I received during my seminary days. It was the idea of . . .



READ SLIDE

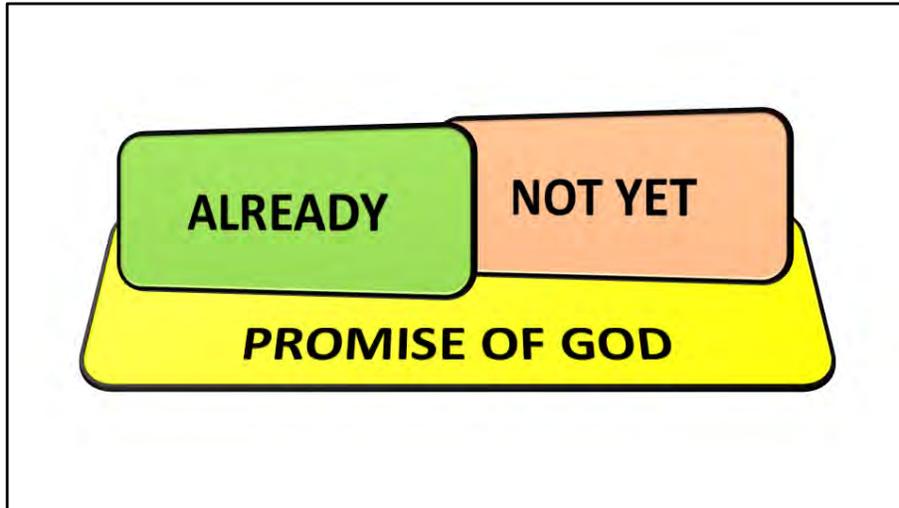
-- George Ladd showed that Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom of God was that it was both . . . already here, breaking in and through . . .

-- . . . BUT not yet here in its fulness.

-- Since those days at TEDS, I've seen folks who focus only on the already . . . over-realized eschatology . . . they believe everything promised is for now

-- . . . and those who key into the not yet . . . under-realized . . . who are never disappointed because all the promises are for then.

TR: But this tension is not just about the kingdom of God . . . it also is about so many of the . . .

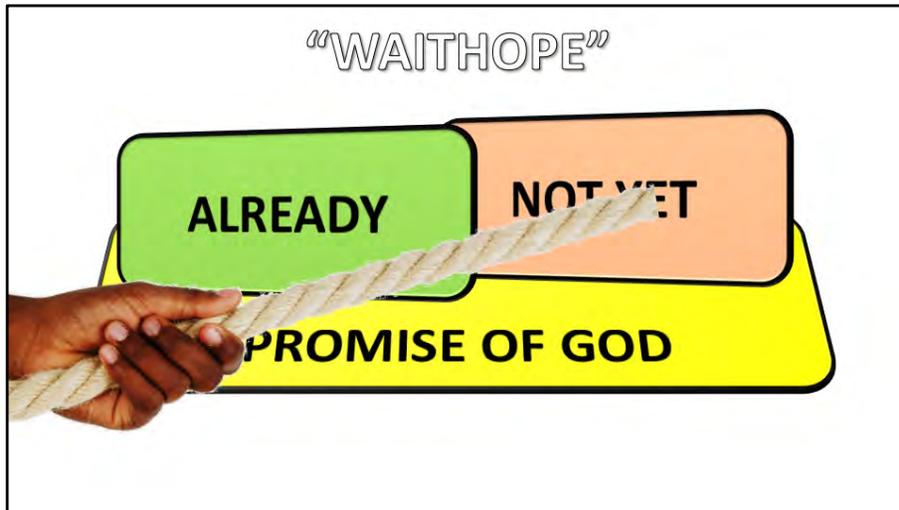


... promises of God.

-- For example: Healing but not resurrection body

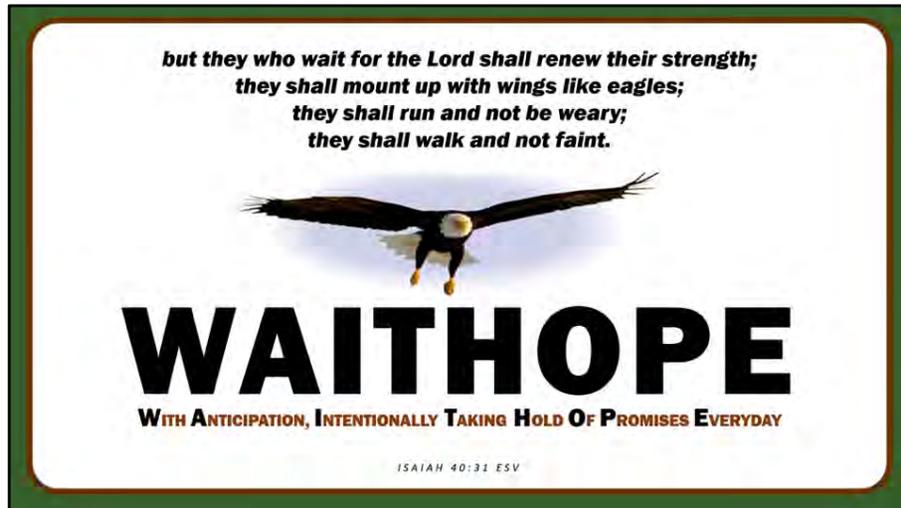
-- Beating the blues will require more than another Hallmark movie.

TR: What are we to do? We must ...



... wait hope.

TR: It was a word I made up and introduced to you a few weeks ago.



Tied to Isaiah 40's "but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength" passage.

TR: Do you remember what the letters stand for?



Waiting on the Lord is not a matter of impatiently dilly-dallying when we think God is late or slow in fulfilling His promises.

TR: Rather, it means . . .



READ SLIDE

TR: With a sense of expectancy . . . we . . .



READ SLIDE

TR: This doesn't happen by accident. With anticipation, intentionally . . .



READ SLIDE

- This is where the imagery of taking hold of the rope tied to the NOT YET comes in.
- Promises that have been given but not FULLY fulfilled, we take hold of them.

TR: For those who are truly waiting on the Lord, we do this . . .



READ SLIDE

-- Waiting on God isn't about a passing fling or sporadic thought . . . it is about a lifestyle.

-- Waiting on the Lord, rejoicing in the **ALREADY** and taking hold by faith of the **NOT YET** is what will keep us at peace when our immature expectations of Christmas are shaken apart by hard circumstances.

TR: What a promise our theme verse for the next few weeks gives us . . .

Isaiah 26:3-4

You keep him in perfect peace
whose mind is stayed on you,
because he trusts in you.

⁴ Trust in the LORD forever,
for the LORD God
is an everlasting rock.

ESV

READ SLIDE

-- Today, I want to take you into another passage written by Isaiah,

-- . . . one that is often quoted around Christmas.

-- But, first the context. Because the original hearers needed to see the up-close, almost already fulfillment of God's promise . . .

-- . . . AND the not yet fulfillment that was 700 years away . . . and even more.

TR: Please turn with me to Isaiah 7

Isaiah 7:3 p. 636

And say to him, '**Be careful, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint** because of these two smoldering stumps of firebrands, at the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria and the son of Remaliah.

ESV

READ SLIDE

-- There is a king who is shaking in his boots because of two kings who are threatening to take over his kingdom with their fierce anger.

TR: In verse 5 we read . . .

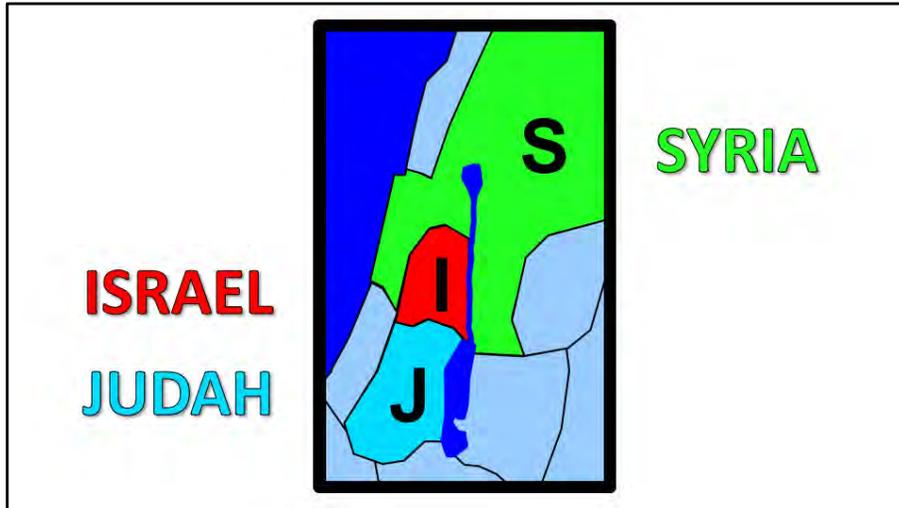
Isaiah 7:5-6

Because Syria, with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, has devised evil against you, saying, "**Let us go up against Judah and terrify it,** and let us conquer it for ourselves, and set up the son of Tabeel as king in the midst of it,"

ESV

READ SLIDE

TR: King Ahaz is terrified. His situation is dire.



On this map you can see his kingdom, Judah, and above it, Israel (the Northern Kingdom) and Syria as well.

TR: Perhaps you or someone you know feels that way right now . . . surrounded and hounded. Or perhaps . . .



- . . . you feel like the earth is giving way beneath you.**
- Like the recent earthquake in Alaska, the road you counted on to take you to happiness is now a shambles.**

 - What are we to do when the foundations of our joy and peace seem to crumble?**
 - What are we to do when those that are against us seem so much stronger than we are?**
 - What are we to do when we don't know what to do, nor do we have the strength to do it, nor the encouragement and care we need?**
- TR: As Isaiah the prophet said to this evil king, we need to . . .**

MIND OUR MINDS

READ SLIDE

- We can say we are part of the people of God.
- We can even act spiritual like Ahaz did when he said he didn't want to test God by asking for a sign.

TR: But when the pressure is on and life is shaking all around us . . . Isaiah says . . .

Isaiah 7:9b

**If you are not firm in faith,
you will not be firm at all.**

ESV

READ SLIDE

-- This is a word play: “Hold God in doubt – not hold out” OR
“Unsure – Insecure”

-- Ahaz had refused a sign but God gives him one anyway.

TR: Through Isaiah, God says . . .

Isaiah 7:13-14

And he said, "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. **Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.**

ESV

READ SLIDE

- Immanuel . . . God with us.
- Isn't that what we celebrate at Christmas?
- How was this to be a sign to Ahaz?

TR: Because there was an ALREADY and a NOT YET component to the prophecy.

Isaiah 8:3-4

And I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. Then the Lord said to me, "**Call his name Maher-shalal-hash-baz**; for before the boy knows how to cry 'My father' or 'My mother,' the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be carried away before the king of Assyria."

ESV

Down in chapter 8 we read . . . READ SLIDE

-- "Swift is the booty, speedy is the prey."

-- Ahaz is promised that this little one will not yet be able to talk and the two smoldering firebrands who be ground out under the boot of the king of Assyria.

-- Some may be struggling with the history and going . . . help me now, this Christmas.

-- Hang in there. The exhortation to Ahaz and the people, and Isaiah himself, is tied to this promise and the need to **WAITHOPE**.

TR: Down to verse 11

Isaiah 8:11-13

For the LORD spoke thus to me with his strong hand upon me, and warned me not to walk in the way of this people, saying: "Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and **do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. But the LORD of hosts, him you shall honor as holy.** Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread."

ESV

READ SLIDE

-- Even as our stock markets are driven by the winds of conspiracy theories, so our lives can easily be caught up in fear and dread.

-- God does want us to fear and dread, but in the sense of the reverent awe before Yahweh, the captain of the armies of heaven, the Holy One.

TR: Isaiah is told to **WAITHOPE** to the near fulfillment of the prophecy of a child . . . Maher . . . but then chapter 9 shows us that there is also a distant, fulfillment.

Isaiah 9:1

But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, **but in the latter time he has made glorious** the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, **Galilee of the nations.**

ESV

READ SLIDE

- Galilee, in Isaiah's day part of Syria and a Northern Kingdom away from Judah.
- A land held in contempt as the backwoods, at least in Jesus day.

TR: Why will there be no gloom? No anguish? What will happen in "the latter time?"

Isaiah 9:2-3

The people who walked in darkness **have seen a great light**; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its **joy**; they **rejoice** before you as with **joy** at the harvest, as they are **glad** when they divide the spoil.

ESV

READ SLIDE

TR: Verse 4

Isaiah 9:4-5

For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken **as on the day of Midian**. For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire.

ESV

READ SLIDE

- As on the day of Midian . . . when fearful Gideon needed sign and after sign to trust God and lead the people against their oppressors.
 - When a huge army was whittled down to 300 men whose tactic was have torches and shouting.
 - When God won the victory!

 - As happy as people are when there is a full harvest or a rousing victory, so it shall be in the latter time.
- TR: What is God's answer to everything that terrorizes us? What light provides such joy and gladness? . . . a Child.**

Isaiah 9:6

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

ESV

FOR . . . READ SLIDE

-- The child that would be born was Maher . . . but he was only a portent of the ultimate fulfillment of the Messiah, Jesus, our Immanuel.

TR: Peace and joy were available to Ahaz, Isaiah, and the people living in darkness . . . if the WAITHOPED. If they . . .

Isaiah 26:3-4

You keep him in perfect peace
whose mind is stayed on you,
because he trusts in you.

⁴ Trust in the LORD forever,
for the LORD God
is an everlasting rock.

ESV

READ SLIDE

TR: Picture an immovable mountain, with a small, flat plateau. It is on this spot that we must stay. We can have peace and joy, even this Christmas, if we keep our mind stayed on God and specifically the child that would be born.

Alfred = *good counselor*

Richard = *powerful ruler*

Audrey = *noble strength*

William = *resolute protector*

Frederick = *ruler of peace*

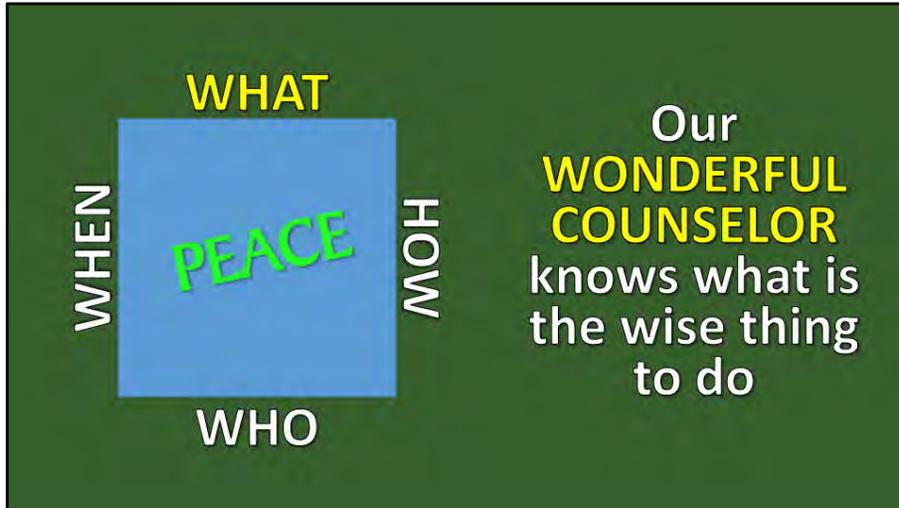
**A child who wasn't merely human, but God Himself.
-- His name would be . . . READ SLIDE**

TR: If we keep our mind stayed on Him, we will be kept in perfect peace. If we trust in the LORD by staying on the plateau summit of the mountain.



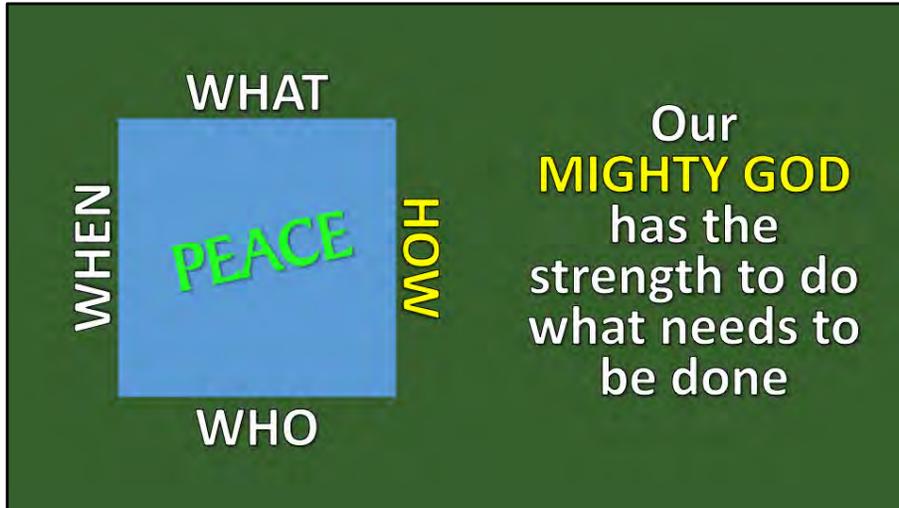
**Looking from the top down, here is our plateau.
-- Here is where we can find peace when everything seems shakey.**

TR: A mind stayed on the Messiah intentionally takes hold of the promise that He will be . . .



... our wonderful counselor.
-- READ SLIDE

TR: Not only that, He is . . .



READ SLIDE

-- **HOW** is what needs to be done going to get done? By our **Mighty God**.

TR: Our Messiah is the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, and . . .



READ SLIDE

- Jesus is not the Father in the Trinity, but He is promised to be fatherly to us forever and ever . . .
- . . . faithful and lovingly taking care of us and watching over us, even as a good, good father does.

TR: We can experience peace when our minds are stayed on . . .



READ SLIDE

TR: This Prince's reign, His government and the peace that comes with His rule will never end.

Isaiah 9:7

Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

ESV

READ SLIDE

- The fulfillment, that Isaiah intended, included Maher, but also Messiah.
- Ahaz was given a sign, but chapter 9 makes clear that what was expected of the child is far bigger than Maher could ever be . . . he was not of the line of David.

TR: This week, I felt overwhelmed by my inadequacies. As I worked on leading our staff through Vision 2022 development, I felt undone. I did not feel smart enough, strong enough, caring enough, persevering enough. I was feeling beyond the help of a Hallmark moment.



And, for a number of hours, I was scrambling looking for peace . . . even while trying to prepare this message on the Prince of Peace.

-- Then I realized that I was not **WAITHOPING** . . . I was not keeping my mind stayed on Him . . . on the plateau of the everlasting Rock.

-- In the midst of my frustrations and fears, I started **INTENTIONALLY** taking hold of the promises of these four titles of our Savior . . .

TR: And this song came to mind . . .

**His oath, His covenant, His blood
Support me in the whelming flood;
When all around my soul gives way,
He then is all my Hope and Stay.
On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand**

READ SLIDE

TR: Jesus told us to build on the rock, and not on . . .



. . . the sinking sand.

-- Some of you may say, “But, I’m too weak to even do that. I can’t take hold of the rope of the promises of God.”

TR: Another Christmas passage comes to mind, written around the same time as Isaiah wrote . . .

Micah 5:1-2 p. 866

But you, **O Bethlehem Ephrathah,**
who are too little to be among the clans
of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
one who is to be ruler in Israel,
whose coming forth is from of old,
from ancient days.

ESV

Micah the prophet says . . . READ SLIDE

-- The enemy is all around, where will help come from?

TR: From a two-bit town called Bethlehem. A ruler will come,
One Who has been spoken of from ancient days . . .

Micah 5:4-5a

And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.

And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth.

⁵ **And he shall be their peace.**

ESV

READ SLIDE

- Even in our weakness, God can work.
 - Isaiah wrote of despised Galilee. Micah of the little town of Bethlehem.
 - And the promise to all who would take hold of the promise, who would stand on the rock . . . was and is peace.
- TR: As the Apostle said in the New Testament . . .

2 Corinthians 12:8-9

Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. ⁹But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, **for my power is made perfect in weakness.**" Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

ESV

READ SLIDE

-- Some of us are struggling because all of the promises of God are not **ALREADY . . .** but may I encourage you to join me in taking hold of the **NOT YET** by minding our minds.

TR: When we are tempted to put our heads in our hands and worry about **HOW** is this ever going to work out, **WHO** is going to carry me through this, **WHEN** is this going to be over, and **WHAT** am I supposed to do next . . .

Isaiah 26:3-4

**You keep him in perfect peace
whose mind is stayed on you,
because he trusts in you.**

**⁴ Trust in the LORD forever,
for the LORD God
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ESV

Picture climbing to the top of the mountain, with its small, flat plateau.

-- Resist letting our minds run down hill.

-- Ask for the Holy Spirit to help us mind our minds and set them on Jesus, our Prince of Peace.

Even now, will you do that with me . . . (pray through the four titles)