

Advent 2014

Today is the third Sunday of Advent. You notice that the third candle is pink or rose colored. Some churches fast during Advent as a time of spiritual preparation for the birth of the Messiah, but on the third Sunday they break the fast as a sign of anticipating the great joy that is to come with the birth of the Lord. We light this candle rejoicing because our waiting will not be in vain. In spite of all we may see around us, in spite of trouble or injustice, lack or pain, there is good news – Jesus is coming.

Hear the word of the Lord from the prophet Isaiah: “Comfort, comfort my people says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins....You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, ‘Here is your God!’ See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. He tends his flock like a shepherd. He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.” Isaiah 40:1-2, 9-11. It is comforting news for us all. Now let’s read responsively,

Reader: Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, ‘My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God?’

Congregation: Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.

Reader: He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.

Congregation: Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall;

All: But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”

Heavenly Father, as we light the Advent candle this morning we are reminded of your faithfulness. You always keep your word to us and you are here among us to comfort and encourage us. Regardless of what we may be facing, we are comforted by your abiding presence. The prophet said to announce to the people, “Here is your God.” We announce today, “Here is our God, with us, among us, come to save us and to comfort us.” How thankful we are.

We are reminded that even though we may grow tired and weary, you don't. You have an endless supply of strength and power and mercy, so today we place our hope in the Lord. Come Lord Jesus and renew our strength. Enable us by your mercy that we will continue to run and not grow weary. We will walk and not be faint for the Lord our God is with us. Hallelujah. Amen.

We Believe Part 8

We continue focusing on what we believe about Jesus as part of our We Believe sermon series on the Apostles' Creed and as part of Advent. **"We believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary."**

As we continue focusing upon Jesus, you will recall we pointed out that the word Christ is actually a title. "The Christ" is another way of saying "the Messiah" which is another way of saying "the Anointed One." In the Old Testament there were three roles or offices in Jewish life for which the person was especially anointed: **Prophet, Priest and King**. Jesus fulfilled all three roles in a way no other person ever could. I want us to look at Jesus in his fulfillment of those three roles. In each role we learn more about who he is and what he has done.

Prophet. We don't talk much about modern day prophets, but simply stated, in the bible, **A prophet is a person who speaks for God. He carries a message from God to the people, often declaring, "thus saith the Lord."**

In Deuteronomy 18 God told Moses, **"I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth and he will tell them everything I command him."** Deuteronomy 18:18.

Perhaps we don't think of Jesus as a prophet, but his first century audience did. **"When the chief priest and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them. They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet."** Matthew 21:45-46

After Jesus raised the widow's son from the dead, the bible says **"They were all filled with awe and praised God. 'A great prophet has appeared among us,' they said."** Luke 7:16

After the miracle of the loaves and fishes when 5,000 people were fed, the people began to say of Jesus, **"Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world."** John 6:14

The people saw the signs and wonders Jesus did and remembering Deuteronomy 18, they believed he was the one anointed to be a prophet like Moses. In fact, Jesus appears to refer to himself as a prophet when he said, **“I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day – for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!” Luke 13:33**

The point is, Jesus understood the nature and calling of a prophet. A prophet was to proclaim God’s word and God’s message to the people, to say only what God the Father was saying and that is exactly what Jesus did. But Jesus spoke differently than any other prophet. While the Old Testament prophets said, “thus says the Lord,” Jesus said, “You have heard it said...but I say unto you...” When Jesus finished speaking the bible says **“The crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.” Matthew 7:28-29.**

Jesus said, **“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” Matthew 28:18** . He had authority because **Jesus wasn’t simply speaking the words of God, he was The Word of God!** He was the word in flesh appearing according to John 1:1.

The first century readers of John’s gospel understood what he meant when he said “the Word was God” and “the Word became flesh.” They had this concept of the Word of God as the creative, controlling mind and will of God. What happens when God speaks a word? The thing he speaks is accomplished, instantly. “‘Let there be light’ and there was light.” He creates and accomplishes with his word. It was God’s plan, purpose and will, spoken, and it came to be.

The Word made flesh is God’s plan, purpose, will, nature, character, salvation, all sustaining life, redemption, fleshed out and coming to be among us. It is not just hearing his word, like we hear the word of the prophet, but in Christ we see the embodiment of the Word. In Christ it is not simply “hear the word of the Lord”, it is “behold the word of the Lord.” In the Scripture we have the revelation of God’s will spoken through the words of the prophet. But in Jesus we have the full revelation of God’s will alive, in the flesh. The prophets said, “Thus says the Lord, ‘this is the truth, listen and follow it’”. Jesus said, “I am the truth. Follow me.”

He was the prophet like no other who came so we could know The Word of God. John said, **“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it and we proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and has appeared to us.” 1 John**

1:1-2. Jesus isn't just telling us about life, He is the life and he offers, Life, himself, to all who will receive him and believe in Him.

Jesus, by his life proclaims to us the extraordinary love of God; that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him would not perish but have everlasting life. Whoever has the Son of God has life. He came to tell us and show us that if we believe in him, even if we die, we shall live. He spoke the word prophetically, "I am the resurrection and the life" and then to show us the word, he said "Lazarus, come forth" and raised Lazarus from the dead! He came to assure us of hope, of life, of peace, that we would never be alone. The Word that was with God in the beginning has come to be with us. What a Word!

Jesus fulfilled the role of the ultimate prophet. He also fulfilled the role of the ultimate priest. **A priest is one who acts in behalf of others. Both a prophet and a priest stand between God and man. The prophet represents God to us, a priest represents us to God.** A prophet delivers the word of God from the top down, from God to man. The priest delivers the sacrifice to God, from bottom to top, from man to God. A priest is a mediator. Once again, Jesus is a priest beyond any other. The sacrifice he offers is his own flesh and blood on our behalf to the Father.

The fact that Jesus is both the priest and himself the sacrifice makes it clear that he is unlike any other priest. In the Old Testament the priests had to first offer a sacrifice for themselves because they too were sinners. Only then could they offer sacrifices on behalf of the people. But Jesus had no sin. He was the perfect priest and sacrifice. Look what the writer of Hebrews says regarding Jesus. **"Such a high priest meets our need – one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself."**
Hebrews 7:26-27

Jesus as the sinless high priest offered himself as the sinless sacrifice to atone for our sins. We said last week the animal sacrifices were inadequate to atone for the sins of humanity, but the sacrifice of Jesus' own blood was perfect, complete and eternal. The bible says, **"But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God...because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy..."** Hebrews 10:12-13.

As the prophet Jesus both speaks the word of God and is the Word of God. As our high priest he not only presents the sacrifice that atones for our sins, Jesus IS the sacrifice that atones for our sins. By his sacrifice he makes us holy! Complete! Redeemed! What a priest!

Another way Jesus fulfills his priestly role is by interceding for us in prayer. We know he interceded for his disciples. He told Peter, “I have prayed for you that your faith won’t fail.” Luke 22:32. Jesus even interceded for us in what we call his high priestly prayer. **“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message...” John 17:20.** Jesus was praying for us then and he is still interceding in our behalf. The writer of Hebrews says of Jesus, **“Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.” Hebrews 7:25** How comforting to know that Jesus, our high priest, is interceding for us in prayer.

His role as an intercessor also carries with it the idea of Jesus as our advocate and mediator. We could think of him as an attorney that pleads our case, that interprets our prayers correctly and then speaks to the Father in our defense. More good news – Jesus our high priest and advocate and mediator will never resign from our case. He will never give up on us. We won’t have to start over trying to explain ourselves to a new priest. The bible tells us that earthly priests have to relinquish their office because of death, **“...but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood.” Hebrews 7:24** He is always there to help us, to intercede for us, to save us. He is the ultimate prophet and priest, and finally,

Jesus is the ultimate King. Throughout the Scripture we see this theme of the kingdom of God and of the one who would rule and reign as king. Remember the word of the prophet Isaiah, **“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.” Isaiah 9:6-7**

Concerning Jesus the angel Gabriel told Mary, **“The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.” Luke 1:32-33**

On Palm Sunday as Jesus entered Jerusalem, the people recognized him as the Messiah,

the anointed one who they believed would be king. They cried, **“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” Luke 19:38**

It is at the end of the New Testament in the book of Revelation that John sees the heavens opened and Jesus wearing a robe with this name written on it, **“King of Kings and Lord of Lords.” Revelation 19:16** The sovereign of sovereigns and the supreme Lord over all lords.

Jesus is the king of kings in our lives and in the kingdom of heaven. He is king and ruler of our lives, the head of the church. We bow before him in reverence, acknowledging his kingship, his lordship, his sovereign authority over our lives. We are subjects of the great King. But by his grace he also calls us sons and daughters as well as servants and citizens of His heavenly realm.

The point is, he rules and reigns and our lives are to be subject to him, to his calling, to his plans and purpose. We are not our own, the bible tells us, we have been bought with a price. We are citizens of the kingdom of our God. We live according to his laws and not our own. We have dual citizenship as we recognize Jesus as our king. We are to obey the laws of the land, but when they come into conflict with the laws of heaven and of our king, we must obey God and not man. It is to the King of Kings that we owe our allegiance, our life, our all.

The bible tells us the day will come when Jesus will rule and reign as king of kings over the whole earth. It is on that day that justice and righteousness will prevail. God said through the prophet Jeremiah, **“The days are coming when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land...this is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness.” Jeremiah 23:5-6**

We live in a world where justice is often denied, where sin and unrighteousness prevail but a day is coming when Jesus, the King of Kings will make things right. He will govern with justice and righteousness and wisdom and we will live in peace! We pray for the coming of that day!

Well, what does all of this mean for us? Since Jesus is our prophet, priest and king, and since we are his children, we have a role to play in this. We may not be prophets, but we are to speak prophetically. We can share the word of God with all that will listen. We have an obligation to proclaim the truth about God as Jesus did, both in our words and in our actions.

We are all priests in one sense. The bible says, **“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood...” 1 Peter 2:9**. We are part of a royal priesthood. As priests, what kind of

sacrifices do we make? The apostle Paul writes, **“I urge you, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.” Romans 12:1.** We offer ourselves as a living sacrifice to God, to live our lives in obedience to Him, living a holy life that is pleasing to God. That’s not all. **“Through Jesus Christ, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.” Hebrews 13:15-16**

We present ourselves to God as a sacrifice. We offer praise and honor to God. We confess his name as Lord of our lives. We do good to others and share willingly and generously with others and God is pleased with such sacrifices.

We aren’t kings, but the day will come when by his grace, we will rule and reign with him. As the elders in heaven sing and worship the Lord they say, **“You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God and they will reign on the earth.” Revelation 5:9-10.**

Prophet, priest and king. This is the one who was born of a virgin, who lived a sinless life, who willingly gave himself for us by dying on the cross. This is the one who rose from the dead, ascended into heaven and is coming again. This is the one who calls us to life. This is the one who calls us to come and follow him, to live and serve as prophet’s priests and servants of the King! Let’s surrender our lives to Him today.

One last thing the priest was to do was to bless the people and bestow the Lord’s name upon them. **“The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious unto you, the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.” Numbers 6:24-26**