

Advent 2015 Part 1

Today is the first Sunday of Advent. I want to take a moment and explain the meaning of Advent and why we feel this is important in the life of our church. The word Advent comes from the Latin word *adventus* which simply means “coming.” We use the word in English to refer to the coming, the arrival of something or someone. For instance, we would say, “with the advent of the iphone people have immediate access to information.” We are saying “with the arrival, the coming of the iphone...”

When we refer to Advent in the spiritual sense we are talking about the coming of Jesus, specifically about his nativity, his birth. What do you do when you anticipate a birth? You prepare. You prepare your house, getting the nursery decorated. You prepare yourself, getting ready for a new responsibility, a lifestyle change. You get rid of things that might be harmful to the baby. You prepare, setting your own needs and wants aside so you can focus on caring for the baby.

Advent is a season of preparation as we ready our hearts and lives for the arrival of Jesus. Our focus is not only on his First Advent, his coming as a baby in Bethlehem, but we also focus on his Second Advent, his second coming when he returns as the Conquering and Triumphant King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Advent is more than preparing to celebrate Jesus’ birthday, it is preparing our hearts in anticipation of his return.

Advent focuses on the past and the future. We affirm that Jesus has come, born of a virgin in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago. We affirm that Jesus will come again, this time not as a baby but coming in power and glory. We also affirm that in between these two Advents, one past and one future, Jesus is present in the world today in His church. That places a responsibility upon us to live as faithful followers of Christ. Knowing that Jesus was born to be Savior of the world, we share that good news with all that will listen. “Christ has come, repent, believe and be saved.” Knowing that Jesus is coming again, we purify our hearts and live holy lives, obedient to the Lord, anticipating his return. And again we share this good news, “Christ is coming, prepare your heart for his return, repent, believe and be saved.”

Are you ready to welcome him or is there sin in your life that would make Jesus and you feel uncomfortable? Are there things that need to go as we welcome Jesus into our life? Like parents preparing for the arrival of a new born with all of the changes that come, let’s prepare ourselves for his arrival by setting our own needs and wants aside and focusing on Jesus. Don’t

just prepare your house for Christmas with decorations, prepare your heart for his advent, his arrival.

As we prepare to celebrate his arrival, his birth, hear the word of the prophet Isaiah, **A voice of one calling: “In the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.” Isaiah 40:3-5**

And from the gospel of Matthew, let’s read aloud together: **In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: “A voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’ Matthew 3:1-3**

As we light the Advent candle this morning, let’s take a moment to examine and prepare our hearts for his coming. Prepare the way for the Lord and his work in your life. Let us confess our sins and repent, let us turn to the Lord with our whole heart and live our lives to his glory.

“Heavenly Father, we turn our hearts toward you today in repentance and faith. We humbly ask for your forgiveness, confessing our sins to you. Forgive us for all we have done that displeased you, words we’ve spoken that harmed others and grieved you, thoughts we had that were darkened by lust, envy, selfishness and greed. Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, forgive us our sins and have mercy on us. Help us as we prepare our hearts in remembrance of your birth. Come Lord Jesus and be born in us today. As we light this Advent candle and its light is cast among us, may the light of your grace and mercy dispel the darkness of any and all sin in our lives. Let your light shine brightly in us and through us as we prepare our hearts to celebrate your birth. And by your grace may our hearts be equally prepared for your second coming when you come to judge the living and the dead. Because our sins have been forgiven by your atoning sacrifice, because our hope is in you and your saving grace alone, we can pray with the words of John the Revelator, “Even so, come Lord Jesus.” In Jesus name. Amen.

The Christmas Story According to Jesus Christ

Have you ever read the Christmas story according to Jesus? Not the account given in

Luke's gospel or in Matthew's gospel, but the account given by Jesus himself? You won't find it in the gospels. His story, his version is found in the Old Testament in the fortieth psalm and is then repeated in the New Testament book of Hebrews. Turn with me to Hebrews 10 and let's look at this passage of Scripture. (As you do, let me credit the late Dr. James Montgomery Boice for the idea of this passage being the Christmas story according to Jesus.)

Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, 'Here I am – it is written about me in the scroll – I have come to do your will, O God.'" Hebrews 10:5-7

We don't know who the author of Hebrews is or was. We know he was writing to Jewish followers of Jesus who were being pressured to forsake Jesus and return to a strict practice of Judaism. The author is making the point that the Old Testament sacrifice of animals was not enough, it was not adequate to save a person from their sin. Only the literal, bodily sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross could save us from our sins. The writer of Hebrews recognizes that the words of David in Psalm 40 actually are testifying of Jesus Christ. The writer does what you hear me do quite often in trying to explain a Scripture, he is saying, "It's like Jesus, when he came into the world was saying, 'You weren't pleased with constant burnt offerings offered by disobedient people. Those sacrifices could only do so much. Instead, you wanted a perfect, sinless sacrifice from one who was completely devoted to doing your will and that's me. Here I am. I have come to do your will.'" So if this is the Christmas story according to Jesus Christ, what is it he wants us to see and hear? First of all,

Jesus came into this world for a purpose. When babies are born we immediately start thinking and talking about what they will become. Dads go out and buy baseball gloves or a football for their newborn son. They dress the baby in camo or sadly put little OU jerseys on them. Parents immediately start trying to point their child toward a purpose. "Maybe you'll be president. Maybe you'll be a doctor and discover a cure for cancer." The wise parent knows a child must be taught their purpose and destiny from God's word. But Jesus was different. Before he was born, he had a purpose. From before the world was created, Jesus had a purpose. He came into the world with a specific, divinely appointed purpose. He said, "I have come to do your will, O God." And what was that will? It was God's will that Jesus be our Savior. The angel told Joseph they were to name the baby Jesus because "he will save his people from their

sins.” His destiny was to save us. How would he fulfill that destiny and provide salvation and forgiveness of sins for us all? **Jesus was born to die!**

It is kind of the dark side of Christmas isn't it? We focus on the sweet baby born in the manger. Even the secular world that knows nothing about the bible or salvation uses that theme of a baby being born. They see it as a sign of hopefulness for the future. “See, a baby is born and that means the whole human race will keep on growing and evolving. There is hope for the world.” What they don't see is that the only reason for the hope associated with the birth of this baby boy was not that he would live, but that he would die as the substitute and sacrifice for our sins. When Jesus said, “I have come to do your will” he is saying, “I have come in flesh, the eternal Son of God, in order to die for the sins of the world. The other sacrifices offered in the Old Testament were inadequate to save the people from their sins. This is why I have come. This is the will of the Father I have come to do. This is the purpose for which I came into the world.”

Notice, **It's not enough to find your purpose, you have to be able to fulfill your purpose.** Don't believe me? Watch American Idol. There are people that feel they have found their purpose. “I was born to sing and entertain people. My Mom says I sing like Whitney Houston.” Right! But Momma doesn't know! That girl can't sing! It's not enough to find your purpose, you have to be able to fulfill your purpose. You must have the power to fulfill your purpose. **Jesus was the only one with the power to fulfill His purpose: Our salvation!**

Jesus came to die as the sinless substitute and sacrifice for our sins. He alone was able to do that because he alone was qualified. To put it in common terms, we have sinned and messed up, big time. Ladies, forgive my use of the word “man” to refer to the world, but “humankind” seems awkward to me. Man is the one who wronged God and therefore man is the one who has to make amends, to make the wrong right. The problem is, we don't have the power, the will, or the resources needed to redeem ourselves. We can't save ourselves, only God who has both the will and power and resources can save us. Salvation can only be achieved by one who is both God and man, namely, by Christ. He is fully God and fully man and he alone can fulfill this purpose to bear the penalty for our sins and provide salvation.

James Boice tells a story that Harry Ironside, a preacher from the last century, often told. I don't know if this really happened or not, but Ironside told about a young man who was a soldier in the Russian army. Apparently his father was a friend of the Czar Nicholas I and so the

young man was given a rather responsible position as the paymaster in one of the barracks. He was responsible for handling the money and making sure the soldiers were paid each month. The young man meant well, but having access to all that money proved to be too great a temptation. "His character was not up to his responsibility." He started gambling and ended up losing not only all of his own money, but he stole a great deal of the government's money as well. He kept thinking he could pay it back but then he received word that a representative of the Czar would be coming to check the records, basically auditing the books. He knew he would be found out and would be disgraced. He knew the truth would disgrace his father as well.

The evening before the Czar's representative was supposed to arrive the young soldier sat down at his desk and totaled up the huge amount he owed. He compared that to the little bit of money he had left and he knew he was in big trouble. There was no way he could repay the debt he owed. At the bottom of the ledger where he had totaled up the amount of money he owed he wrote, "**A great debt! Who can pay?**" In despair, he decided there was nothing left to do but to take his own life. He got out his service revolver and laid it on the desk in front of him. While he sat thinking it over, he fell asleep.

While he was asleep and unbeknownst to everyone, Czar Nicholas I paid a surprise visit to the barracks. Seeing a light in the young man's room he looked in and recognized him as the son of his friend. He looked on the desk and saw the ledger book lying open and realized what had happened. He was about to awaken the young man and have him arrested when he saw the words that had been written at the bottom of the ledger, "A great debt! Who can pay?" For whatever reason, instead of waking the young man, Nicholas reached over, picked up the pen and wrote one word at the very bottom of the ledger and walked out.

Sometime during the night the young man woke up. Still thinking he had no alternative he reached for his gun when he saw that someone had written something on the ledger. There, underneath the words he had written earlier, "A great debt! Who can pay?" was one word, the word the Czar had written: "**Nicholas.**"

He couldn't understand how it got there. He realized Nicholas must have come by and found him asleep. He also realized that the Czar must know everything since he had seen the ledger and yet he was willing to forgive him. The young man trusted in the word of the Czar and the next morning a messenger arrived from the palace with exactly the amount of money needed to repay the missing funds. Only the Czar could pay and that's what the Czar did. Boice wrote,

“In the same way only the Lord Jesus Christ was able to pay our debt to God. We look at the moral requirement of God’s righteousness spelled out in his law. We compare it with our own tawdry performance and we ask the question: **‘A great debt to God! Who can pay?’** But then the Lord Jesus Christ steps forward and signs His name to our ledger: **‘Jesus Christ.’** Only Jesus can pay, and he does.”

That’s what Christmas is all about. That is the Christmas story according to Jesus Christ. Jesus came to pay the debt we owed, a debt that only He could pay! No wonder the bible says **“Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!” 2 Corinthians 9:15** Jesus paid my debt! No wonder the angel said to the shepherds on the night of his birth, **“I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you: he is Christ the Lord.” Luke 2:10-11.** A great debt we owed and Jesus paid it all!

The third thing we notice from the Christmas story according to Jesus, **Jesus willingly paid the debt.** There was no reluctance in Jesus in obeying the will of the Father. Although he prayed in the garden, “if it be possible, let this cup pass from me” he went on to say, “nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done.”

Psalms 40:8 that is being quoted in the passage in Hebrews 10 reads, **“I desire to do your will, O my God.” Psalm 40:8** The word translated desire can also be translated as “delight.” “I delight to do your will O God.” Jesus found his delight, his satisfaction, his fulfillment, his joy in obeying His Heavenly Father. What a lesson for us. Obedience has a pleasure, a delight all its’ own! I pray we can learn that lesson well.

The final thing we learn from the Christmas story according to Jesus is found in Hebrews 10:7. **“Then I said, ‘Here I am.’” Hebrews 10:7.** When the Lord says “Here I am” he is speaking in the present tense. This is the good news of Christmas, the good news of the incarnation, that God has come down to us. The prophet Isaiah said the coming Messiah would be called “Immanuel”, which means “God with us.” The Christmas story according to Jesus can be summed up in these three words, “Here I am.” Jesus is saying “Here I am. Not only have I come to be with you, to be among you, but I have come to never depart from you again.”

“Here I am.” We aren’t talking just about something that happened 2,000 years ago, we are talking about something that is happening at this very moment in time. The Jesus who was born in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago is still alive, still being born in the heart and life of each person who will believe in him and call upon him for salvation. He comes again and again by

his Holy Spirit to save, to offer hope, to redeem us from our sins.

“Here I am.” That is the Christmas story according to Jesus Christ. Here I am, in the midst of terror strikes and crazy politics, in the midst of fear and anxiety. Here I am in the midst of disease and heartbreak, in the midst of death and grief. Here I am, bringing hope and life to all who will call upon me. Jesus said, “Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Matthew 28:20.

The Christmas story, the story of a baby born in Bethlehem, that’s just part of the story. The story is still being written, still being told. He is still here, this moment, to save you and make you whole. “Here I am.” What good news.

One of the carols we sing at this season is *O Little Town of Bethlehem*. One stanza reads,
**“How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His heaven.
No ear may hear His coming but in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive Him still, the dear Christ enters in.”**

It is true for all of us. If you will seek him and call upon him, the dear Christ will enter into your heart and life. He will do what only he is qualified to do. He will save you from your sins and give you a new life. Eternal life. He is here to do that for you today. This is the good news, the Christmas story according to Jesus Christ!