

Advent 2014

We Believe Part 6

Today is the first Sunday of Advent 2014. 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. Advent is then a holy season of the church as we prepare for and anticipate the birth, the arrival of Jesus. 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.

That’s what we do in a spiritual sense as we anticipate the coming of Jesus. We prepare our hearts, readying a place for him to live. We prepare ourselves. Are we ready to welcome him or is there sin in our life that would make Jesus and us feel uncomfortable? Are there things that need to go as we welcome Jesus permanently into our life? Advent is a time of reflection and repentance as we ready our heart and life for the lifestyle change that comes with Jesus in our house, heart and in our life. We prepare ourselves for his arrival by setting our own needs and wants aside so we may focus on Jesus. I suggest we do that this Advent. Don’t just prepare your house for Christmas with decorations, prepare your heart for his advent, his arrival.

As we prepare for 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, **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

John told those who came to hear him to repent, to confess their sins and to **“Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.”** In other words, live so there is evidence of a changed life. As we light the Advent candle this morning, let’s take a moment to examine and prepare our hearts for his coming. If needed, let’s confess our sins and repent to the Lord and then, let’s purpose in our hearts to “produce fruit in keeping with repentance.” Let’s live with evidence.

“Heavenly Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, 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 those things we have done that have 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. We prepare our hearts for your birth. Come Lord Jesus and be pleased to be born in us. 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. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

We Believe Part 6

We are going to continue our We Believe series of messages during Advent. We are using the Apostle’s Creed as the framework for our study. Since our children are joining us today for Family Day I thought we would read the entire Creed together. I’m using a slightly different version than what we’ve been reading. Let’s read together. **We believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. We believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day He rose again. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy, apostolic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.**

When you stop to think about what we believe, that God became a man, born of the virgin Mary, that Jesus was both God and man, that He lived a sinless life and died on the cross as our substitute, taking our place and bearing the punishment for our sins, then he rose from the dead and ascended into heaven and from there he will come again. That's an amazing story isn't it? An amazing claim for a boy from Nazareth, known around town as the son of a carpenter. Just how reliable is our claim that Jesus is truly the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God, our Savior and Lord? Upon what do we base our claim and our belief? Let me tell you why I believe.

We have the testimony of the Old Testament and the prophets. D. James Kennedy wrote, "There are 333 prophecies in the Old Testament that deal with the promised Messiah and of those 333 texts, 456 specific details of His life and coming are indeed delineated for us...The Messianic prophecies of Scripture are amazingly clear. Listen to only a few of them: that the seed of the woman - a reference to the Virgin birth since there is no other such reference in all of the Bible [we think of the seed of man, not seed of woman, but this was a unique birth through a virgin]- would destroy the seed of the serpent. That He would come from the line of Abraham. That he would be from the house of David. That He would be called Immanuel. That He would have a forerunner who would proclaim His coming. That He would be born in Bethlehem Ephratah of Judea not Bethlehem Zebulun of Israel. That He would be worshipped by wise men giving gifts. That Bethlehem would suffer a massacre of infants upon the king's hearing of Jesus' birth. That he would be called a Nazarene and would come out of Egypt.. The list could go on and on - 456 specific details from the prophecies."

Consider as an example these two verses from the prophet Isaiah. **"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign; The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel."** Isaiah 7:14. (God with us).

"In the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan -[notice the specific location of his ministry] The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned...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." Isaiah 9:1-2, 6-7. What evidence do we have that Jesus is the son of God? I believe because...

We have the testimony of the New Testament writers. Matthew testifies that Jesus is the Christ, the promised Messiah. Over and over he quotes the Old Testament, clearly showing that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies and the law. Eleven times we hear Matthew say something like, **“...this took place to fulfill what the Lord said through the prophet.” Matthew 1:22**

Mark presents Jesus as the Suffering Servant of the Lord who dies for the sins of his people. Mark testified that Jesus said, **“...the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Mark 10:45.**

Luke, a doctor and the only Gentile contributor to the New Testament, presents Jesus as the Savior of the world. It was Luke who tells us about the old saint, Simeon, who gathered the infant Jesus into his arms and praised God and said **“...now dismiss your servant in peace for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.” Luke 2:29-32.**

John declares Jesus to be the Word made flesh. What was John’s purpose in writing his gospel? He tells us: **“Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” John 20:30-31.**

Peter declares **“We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory saying, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’ We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.” 2 Peter 1:16-18.** Peter was an eyewitness.

In his sermon on the day of Pentecost Peter said, **“...let all Israel be assured of this, God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” Acts 2:36**

Paul the apostle declared, **“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus; who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross. Therefore God exalted him to the highest place**

and gave him the name that is above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.” Phil. 2:5-11. This is reliable, first hand, eye witness testimony. This we believe. In addition...

We have the testimony of his forerunner, John the Baptist. “The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! ...I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God.’ John 1:29-30, 34. That’s pretty definitive testimony. What evidence do we have as to both his humanity and divinity?

We have the testimony of the angel Gabriel. Luke 1:26-35. He declared Jesus to be the Son of the Most High, conceived by the Holy Spirit but born of the Virgin Mary.

We have the testimony of evil spirits. Luke 4:33-35; 41. They cried out “we know who you are, the Holy One of God.” Jesus would not accept their testimony and commanded them to be quiet, but the forces of hell knew who he was and trembled.

We have the testimony of Jesus himself. Jesus declared “**I and the Father are one.**” **John 10:30.** John said of Jesus “he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.” Jesus identified himself as:

The Living Water - John 4:10

The Bread of Life - John 6:35

The Light of the World - John 8:12

The Resurrection and the Life - John 11:25

The Way, the Truth and the Life - John 14:6

If anyone referred to themselves in this fashion, we would say they were crazy. But Jesus wasn’t crazy and he wasn’t a liar. He was speaking the truth and we know it and believe!

Remember his conversation with the men on the road to Emmaus, after his resurrection? Not knowing who he was, they told him about the crucifixion of Jesus and how they had hoped he was the Messiah. Jesus said to them, “Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” Luke writes, “**And then beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.**” **Luke 24:27.** All the scriptures speak of Jesus! But did Jesus really say he was Messiah and the Son of God?

The Samaritan woman at Jacob's well said to Jesus, **“I know that Messiah (called Christ) is coming. When he comes he will explain everything to us.’ Then Jesus declared, ‘I who speak to you am he.”** John 4:25-26. Jesus knew who he was and testified of it.

The elders and the chief priests at his trial asked **“Are you then the Son of God?”** Jesus replied **“You are right in saying I am.”** Luke 22:70. He told them **“...from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God.”** The elders said **“Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips.”** If that isn't evidence enough...

We have the testimony of God the Father. At his baptism and on the mount of transfiguration we have the testimony of God himself declaring **“You are my Son whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”** Luke 3:22 and Matthew 17:5.

We have the testimony of miracles, signs and wonders. Peter declared **“Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.”** Acts 2:22. Jesus said **“Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.”** John 14:11. What evidence do we have that Jesus was the Son of God? The miracles confirm he was who he said he was.

We have the testimony of his resurrection from the dead. Peter again in his sermon at Pentecost declared **“God has raised this Jesus to life and we are all witnesses of the fact.”** Acts 2:32. Peter is standing with the disciples and perhaps others that were in the upper room at Pentecost telling the crowd, **“we are all witnesses of his resurrection.”**

We even have the testimony of the Roman soldier who oversaw Jesus' death by crucifixion. Standing at the cross the centurion declared **“Surely this man was the Son of God.”**

We have plenty of testimony. He was and is everything we believe he is. **He is God's promised Messiah.** He was and is the fulfillment of every Old Testament prophecy concerning the coming of the Messiah. He was the fulfillment of the Jewish law. He completed it and accomplished it. Jesus was the Messiah and fulfilled the role of prophet, priest and king.

He is the only way to the Father. God desires us to be in a right relationship with himself, but our natural state is one of sin and fallenness. We are cut off from life in God and exposed to his judgment. But the good news is that can all be changed. Jesus declared **“I am the way and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me.”** John 14:6.

There is no other way to come to the Father but through Jesus Christ. He is the only door, the only way.

He is the only hope for this world. He is the only hope for each one of us. **The Apostle Paul said of us that at one time we were “separate from Christ...without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.” Ephesians 2:12-13.**

We were made to live with hope. And hopelessness is hell. That’s what hell is - a place of no hope. But there is hope for all of us today. It is found in Jesus Christ. You don’t have to live without hope. Jesus, the One who is everything we have said he is, can do everything you need him to do in your life. He will save you, forgive you and give you hope.

I didn’t make all this up. There is credible evidence that what we believe, what I’ve shared with you today is the truth. And if it is indeed the truth, then we really do have cause for hope don’t we? Jesus is real and what he has told us is real and forgiveness of sins is real and eternal life is real and heaven is real and hope is real!

We believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, our Lord. He is the only way to God, the only hope in this life and in this world. And Jesus stands before you, offering you life and hope and help and peace. But you have to decide - who is he in my life? Is he your Savior? Is he Lord of your life? Or have you tried to just think of him as a baby in a manger that doesn’t really have much to do with your life? Take him from the manger and the nativity scene and put him in your heart and your life. Make him your Savior and Lord today.

The Savior is waiting to enter your heart, why don’t you let him come in.