

FBC Service Advent 1 Sunday November 27 2022 Luke 2:22-38 A Thrill of Hope

Here we are, the last Sunday of November, the beginning of the season known as Advent. Although I didn't grow up in a church that celebrated Advent, I've learned to love the attitude and heart behind Advent since I came to First Baptist.

It's a season that has been observed by the church, in one form or another, for more than 1600 years. This morning Brad and Wendy lit the first candle on the advent wreath, known as the candle of Hope.

Today we'll begin a five part series of messages dealing with the season of Advent; we'll look at Hope, Peace, Joy, Love, and conclude with a Christmas Eve message, dealing with Christ.

It's our goal to rediscover the Hope, Peace, Joy, Love, and Christ of Christmas.

This is a season of hope. Advent is all about hope. The word Advent means "coming" or "arrival," and the season is traditionally a time of expectation, waiting, and anticipation.

Advent is not just an extension of Christmas, it's a season that links the past, present, and future. Advent offers us the opportunity to share in the ancient longing for the coming of the Messiah, to celebrate His birth, and to be alert for His second coming.

It's a season of expectation and preparation, an opportunity to align ourselves with God's presence more than just the busy season of presents.

So wherever you are on your level of 2022 spiritual journey, I pray this season of Advent will be meaningful for you.

In these difficult times, we need hope, real hope. Hope makes the difference between making it or not.

But while we may know when Advent is, we aren't always sure exactly what it's all about. Advent means "The coming or arrival of something awaited or momentous." That definition immediately raises a number of questions.

What is it that arrives during this Advent season? What is coming? What momentous event do we await? Why do we need to spend four weeks waiting for one day?

On the other hand, why start waiting now when Christmas decorations have been up in stores and carols have been playing at the mall for some time already?

Our first Advent candle represents **Hope**.

Hope is an important theme relating to Christmas, and especially relating to the Advent season leading up to Christmas. Our world is in desperate need of hope.

Many people today live without hope or have given up hope. But Christ came at Christmas to bring us hope, and that is what we want to see in the Scriptures this morning.

So we begin with the idea of hope and promise. These are such appropriate ideas as we're in the midst of the Black Friday/cyber-Monday onslaught.

It's a good question, isn't it? If Jesus were born today, would it be any different than it was 2,000 years ago? We like to think the answer is yes, that we would be ready, that we wouldn't make the mistake of turning the Son of God away.

There would be room in our inn, we confidently say. We'd find room, or make room, but we'd be ready if Jesus were born here in Petrolia.

But is that the truth? Are we any more prepared for the coming of Christ than they were in Bethlehem?

It seems when you read the Bible that most people weren't prepared for his coming. Herod certainly wasn't, nor were the scribes.

The rich and powerful of Bethlehem (assuming there were such) don't seem to have paid any attention to the young couple from Nazareth. The rulers of the world never knew he was born. Many never knew he lived or died.

By the standards of the world, his birth was only a slight blip on the radar of history, a peasant child born to peasant parents. In Rome they paid no attention; in Athens and Alexandria no one took note. In China and India no one knew a thing.

For the most part Phillips Brooks had it right: **"How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given."** He came silently, quietly (as quietly as a newborn baby boy ever arrives), without fuss or ruckus, without making a stir or announcing his presence.

He came in the same way all babies come, and most of the world paid no attention. The Apostle John put it this way: *"He was in the world, and although the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him."*

He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him." (John 1:10-11) His own what? His own world, his own people, his own nation. The very people who should have been happiest to see him, instead paid no attention at all.

But that's not the whole story. While it is true that the nation as a whole was not ready for his birth, there were some who were ready.

Luke tells the story of one man who deep within his breast beat a thrill of hope. His name is Simeon. He had been waiting for years in hope to see the Messiah, and when he meets the baby Jesus, he knows his long wait is finally over.

These verses show clearly that Jesus was born into a God-fearing, law-abiding home. Our Lord was not born into an upper-class home. He was not born into a comfortable middle-class home. He was born into a loving, godly home that would at best be considered lower middle-class. Jesus knew poverty and hardship from the very beginning.

As Mary and Joseph came into the Temple precincts, there was nothing outwardly to distinguish them, no marks or signs that indicated they were anything other than another poor young couple coming with their newborn son.

At this point Simeon enters the story. Aside from what we're told in Luke 2, we know nothing about him. We don't know his background, his hometown, his education, or even his occupation. We assume he was a priest—although the text doesn't explicitly say so.

We also assume he was an older man—but even that is not a certain fact. He simply appears on the stage of history as a bit player in the drama surrounding the birth of Christ. After his part is over, he fades from the scene, never to be heard from again.

Here comes Mary, here comes Joseph, and here comes Simeon. He has never seen them before, they have never seen him before. But a divinely-planned encounter is about to take place. Luke tells the story this way:

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. (Luke 2:25-26)

What a promise that was. If Simeon is now an old man, as verse 29 indicates, then he's been waiting in the Temple for many years. Day by day he had prayed for the Lord's Christ to finally appear.

Year after year his prayers were to no avail. As he grew older, his anticipation grew stronger because he knew he couldn't live forever.

Can you imagine the scene? Early every morning Simeon goes to the Temple, watching and waiting with hope for the Messiah to come. How would he know him? What should he look for? Did he know to look for a baby? Or was he looking for a teenager or a strong young man?

Day by day he kept watch over the throngs coming into the Temple. Each time a young couple came in with a baby, he whispered, "Is that the one?" If he saw a fine looking teenager, he would say, "Is that the one, Lord, or is it someone else?"

Each day he watched, and hoped, and questioned. Each day the answer came back, time and again, "No, that's not the one. Keep looking. Keep watching. Keep hoping."

Here comes Mary holding the baby in her arms with Joseph by her side. Jesus is only forty days old. Never was there a more unlikely couple.

He is a poor carpenter from Nazareth, she is a peasant girl carrying a little baby boy. They are obviously from the country. They obviously don't have much money. If you were people-watching, you wouldn't give them a second glance.

Not educated. Not part of the intelligentsia. Not from the upper-crust. And here they are in Jerusalem, timidly walking onto the Temple courts. When Simeon sees them, he asks his question for

the 10,000th time, “Is this the one?” And his heart leaps with a thrill of hope as the Holy Spirit says, “Yes.”

The long days of hopeful waiting are finally over. The Lord’s Christ is before him. Here is the One for whom the nation has been waiting and hoping for. He walks over, introduces himself, and I can hear him say, “Do you mind if I hold your baby?”

As Mary gives the infant Jesus to Simeon, the thought hits him, “I’m holding the salvation of the world in my arms.”

And he breaks out into a song of praise, a song that’s so beautiful that it has come down through the centuries to us as the final and climactic song of Christmas. The song is called the *Nunc Dimittis*, the title being taken from the first two words of the Latin translation of Simeon’s words.

What follows is first the song (vv. 29-32) and then a personal word of prophetic blessing to Mary (vv. 34-35). The song goes like this:

Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, 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.

Simeon’s first thought is that he’s now ready to die. The word “dismiss” is a military word, used to describe a sentinel who has stood watch during the long hours of the night. Now at last, he knows his work is done, and he goes to his commanding officer to be dismissed.

The long wait is over, the years of anticipation have been fulfilled, his sentry duty is finished, for he has seen and personally held “the Lord’s Christ.”

Sometimes we hear stories of terminally ill patients who say, “Doctor, I’d like to stay alive until Easter.” Then when Easter comes, they quietly slip away. Or they say, “I’d like to stay alive until my granddaughter gets married.”

They live long enough to see her down the aisle, and then they are gone. Doctors see it happen all the time. Once the goal is reached, life is complete and death comes quickly.

That’s exactly how Simeon feels. He won’t live to see the Lord grow up. He won’t witness any of his great miracles. He won’t see Jesus walk on water, feed the 5,000 or raise the dead. Simeon will be long gone when Jesus stands before Pilate.

The crucifixion is hidden to him, as is the resurrection. But it doesn’t matter that he won’t see the end, because Simeon has seen the beginning, and that is enough.

In the words that follow Simeon tells us a number of important things about who Jesus is. Simeon calls him “the glory of Israel.” In this baby, Simeon sees the fulfillment of all the hopes and dreams of the Jewish people across the centuries.

To call Jesus “the glory of Israel” takes us back to the time of Abraham, when the Lord said, *“I will make your name great, and make of you a great nation, and through you all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.”*

After that came the reaffirmation to Isaac, and then to Jacob. Still later God told Moses that one day a great prophet would come who would be unlike any other prophet before him. Still later God promised David a son who would reign on his throne forever.

Still later God spoke through Isaiah and promised that a son would be born of a virgin, and that his name would be called Immanuel—God With Us. Still later, Micah predicted that Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.

For generations the promises were repeated—from father to son, from mother to daughter, from family to family, from the older to the younger, and Jewish children were taught to pray for the Messiah’s appearance.

By the time you get to the first century, you have all these centuries of expectation built up. While it is true that many people were not looking, it’s also true that some were aware that something was up and that God was beginning to stir the pot of history.

Now after all these years, all God’s promises are coming true. That’s what Simeon means when he calls Jesus “the glory of Israel.” As the song says, **“the hopes and fears of all the years are met in Thee tonight.”**

But Simeon explicitly says that this baby will not only be the glory of his own people Israel. He will also be the light of revelation for the Gentiles.

He’s not just for Israel. He didn’t come just for their benefit. He came to shine a light of the revelation of God into every nation, every tribe, every kindred and every tongue. The Jews couldn’t say, “He belongs to us and you can’t have him.”

Nor could they say, “You have to become a Jew to enjoy Messiah’s benefits.” No! Doubtless that’s what some Jews expected. But Simeon’s words explode forever that narrow nationalism.

He’s the Saviour of the whole world, rich and poor, young and old, black and white, Jew and Gentile, Canadian and Japanese, healthy and handicapped.

All people are included in his coming. He didn’t come for a small group. He came for the whole wide world. “Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight.”

In all of this, Simeon is telling us something crucial. By sending his Son to the earth, he’s not only fulfilling his promises to the nation. He’s also bringing to the world a Saviour for all people everywhere.

There is yet another thing that Simeon says. The story continues in verses 33-35:

The child's father and mother marvelled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

Here is the final thing Simeon says about Jesus. **He is the Great Divider of Men.** What a thing to say about a tiny baby. "Mary, I know you're happy now, but you will weep later."

I think we can all agree that if you're a parent, the worst thing that can happen to you is to see your children suffer? Most of us will do anything to spare our children needless pain. We'll gladly suffer ourselves if it will make the way easier for our children.

Simeon is saying, "Mary, they're going to touch this child, and you won't be able to do anything about it. And you'll have to stand by helplessly and watch it happen."

Down the road it all came true. In the end hatred took full control and they arrested Jesus and put him on trial.

They beat him within an inch of his life. After the trial, he was condemned to die. Mary stood by the cross and watched her son die an agonizing, brutal death.

Mary stood by her son, unable to staunch the flow of blood, unable to wipe his brow, unable to hold his hand. It all happened exactly as Simeon had predicted. **Above the cradle stands the cross.** This little baby was born to die.

It's popular in Canada to sit on the fence regarding the person of Jesus Christ. It's popular to call him a good teacher, a good person, a great moral example, and so on. **Simeon is saying you can't do that.** You have to make up your mind about Jesus.

If he's the Son of God, then the only possible response is to bow down and worship him! Call him L

This Advent season, look for hope in the birth of Jesus. Draw hope from God's faithfulness in His long-awaited promise of the Messiah. Focus on the hope we have in Jesus. In the midst of whatever life is throwing at you, you can experience the hope of God and the strength to take the next step.

Hope is dawning. Christ is coming. Let's welcome Him into our hearts, and live every day in a season of expectation and hope. **Simeon felt that pulsating thrill of hope.**

God's story of His love for us has always been filled with great hope and an amazing promise, all wrapped up in the indescribable gift of Jesus.

Prayer: Father, we thank you that you didn't do what you could have done. You didn't leave us alone in our sins. You could have forgotten us, and written us off as hopeless. But you didn't leave us alone. You came for us! And you found us. You sent Jesus to rescue us. Thank you for coming for us, that we might be safe now and saved forever—in this life and in the life to come. We thank you in Jesus' name, **Amen.**