

Advent 2020 Week One:
Thankful for Hope in Our Uncertainties
Sunday, November 29, 2020

“Today is the first Sunday of Advent. The Advent season comprises the four weeks before Christmas. It is an old tradition dating at least as far back as the 400’s when the early church observed a period of preparation leading up to Christmas. Advent is a time when we prepare our hearts and our minds for the coming of God’s Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. The word “Advent” means “to come,” and the Advent season focuses on remembering Christ’s first coming at Christmas and then also anticipating Christ’s second coming and soon return”. (Ray Fowler)

This Advent season we will be sharing a series of messages exploring the various themes represented by the five candles. The Key Concepts are HOPE, PEACE, JOY, LOVE, and the fifth candle is the Christ Candle that brings all the previous 4 together into ONE.

This year our Advent themes
(adapted from Outreach.com 2020 Advent Theme)

Rediscovering Thankfulness This Christmas
Season

Week 1: Finding Hope in Our Uncertainties
Week 2: Finding Peace in Our Struggles
Week 3: Finding Joy in Our Discouragements
Week 4: Finding Love in Our Differences
Week 5: Finding Christ in Our World

I want to introduce you to a song that will be used each week of this series each week that reinforces the theme. (It is an adaption from the song “ My Heart is Filled With Thankfulness. Words and music by Keith Getty/Stuart Townend. 2003 ThankYou Music.)

This week I will sing all the verses as an intro, but the words will be on the screen and you are welcome to join me as I sing each verse as it is simple and designed to be sung congregationally.

MY HEART IS FILLED WITH THANKFULNESS

Week 1: HOPE

My heart is filled with thankfulness To Christ Who brings me **HOPE**
In all of life’s uncertainties, His promises are sure.
In Christ I find the strength to wait, and pow’r to stay the course;
Sustaining me with arms of love and crowning me with grace

Week 2: PEACE

My heart is filled with thankfulness To Christ Who Brings me **PEACE**
In all our struggles gives us strength, and causes fears to fly.
Whose ev’ry promise is enough for ev’ry step I take;
Sustaining me with arms of love and crowning me with grace

Week 3: JOY

My heart is filled with thankfulness To Christ Who Brings me **JOY**
In all of my discouragements, His presence is enough.
I celebrate the blessed Christ, and know for sure He is,
Sustaining me with arms of love and crowning me with grace.

Week 4: LOVE

My heart is filled with thankfulness To Christ Who Brings me **LOVE**
Whose presence brings me **Hope** and **Peace**, and fills my life with **Joy**
For ev’ry day I have on earth Is showered in His **Love**
So I will give my life, my all To love and follow Him
Oh to love and follow Him

As is our tradition we will ask a member to come and light the 1st Candle and read a scripture and lead us in a prayer.

The 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 you hope, and that is what we want to see in the Scriptures this morning.

Today we light the 1st Candle of the Advent Season. This candle represents HOPE. Hope that is found in Jesus Christ.

ADVENT CANDLE READING & LIGHTING BY CHURCH MEMBER:

Isaiah 7:14... *“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and He will be called ‘Emmanuel’.”*

Prayer: Heavenly Father, Advent is a time for remembering and reflecting on the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Father, I pray that you will turn our hearts toward you as Christmas approaches. Let us not get caught up in the hustle and bustle of the season this year and miss the chance to celebrate the gifts of hope, peace, joy, love, that you sent to us on that first Christmas. May we rediscover thankfulness this Christmas season. Even in the midst of our uncertainties, we Hope in You.

Thank you, Father, for your immeasurable gift. In Jesus’ precious name, we pray. Amen

MESSAGE:

(Adapted from Ray Fowler)

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Website: <http://www.rayfowler.org>

<http://www.rayfowler.org/sermons/five-candles-at-christmas/advent-candle-of-hope/>

My actual message will be loosely based off the following material. But I am including his exact message as a resource.

We are going to look at three aspects of hope this morning relating to Christ and Christmas.

1) Hope in Christ gets you through the waiting.

Lamentation 3:22-26...²² *Because of the LORD’s faithful love we do not perish, for His mercies never end.* ²³ *They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness!* ²⁴ *I say: The LORD is my portion, therefore I will put my hope in Him.* ²⁵ *The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, to the person who seeks Him.* ²⁶ *It is good to wait quietly for deliverance from the LORD.*

2) Hope in Christ helps you go the distance.

Isaiah 40:31... *But they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.*

3) Hope in Christ does not disappoint.

Romans 5:1-5...*Therefore, since we have been declared righteous by faith, we have peace^[a] with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.* ² *We have also obtained access through Him by faith^[b] into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.* ³ *And not only that, but we also rejoice in our afflictions, because we know that affliction produces endurance,* ⁴ *endurance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope.* ⁵ *This hope will not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*

I. Hope in Christ gets you through the waiting

– Genesis 2:16,17, 3:15, 12:2-3; Isaiah 7:14

First of all, hope in Christ gets you through the waiting. The Advent season is all about waiting. It's a time when we remember the long period of waiting that preceded the first coming of Christ, and also a time when we reflect on our own season of waiting for the second coming of Christ.

That first period of waiting stretched all the way from Genesis to Matthew, from Adam and Eve to Joseph and Mary, from the Garden of Eden to the manger of Bethlehem.

The first signal of hope during that long period of waiting came shortly after Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden. God told Adam: "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." (Genesis 2:16-17) Adam and Eve both disobeyed this command from God, bringing death not only upon themselves but upon the entire human race to come.

When God appeared in the garden pronouncing judgment on the serpent, the woman and the man, all seemed bleak – except for a word of hope tucked away in God's judgment upon the serpent. God told the serpent in Genesis 3:15: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." (Genesis 3:15)

The serpent and his offspring represent Satan and all who follow in Satan's path. The woman and her offspring represent Eve and all those who love and follow God. And indeed there has been enmity between Satan and those who follow God ever since the garden.

And yet even in this word of judgment there was a beacon of hope for the people of God. Because even though the woman's offspring at first seems to represent many descendants of Eve, verse 15 focuses on one specific individual descended from Eve who will triumph over Satan and the evil he has brought on mankind. Satan will strike his heel, but this special individual will crush Satan's head, bringing an end to Satan's rule of misery over humanity.

These signals of hope in the form of prophecies continued throughout the Old Testament period. In Genesis 12 God called Abraham and promised him: "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you;

I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." (Genesis 12:2-3) God fulfilled this promise by bringing the nation of Israel out of Abraham, and through the nation of Israel, God continued to give promises about this special individual who would bring blessing to all the peoples of the earth. Through the long years of waiting the prophecies became more and more specific focusing on the Messiah who would come as prophet, priest and king to rescue his people. Around the year 700 B.C. we come to the prophet Isaiah who told the King of Judah in Isaiah 7:14: "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) This was the clearest prophecy yet that the promised offspring would come and deliver his people. There were still many centuries of waiting to come, but these prophecies and others like them continued to give the people hope. These were long and difficult days for the people of Israel, and yet their hope in the Messiah, the Christ to come, helped them through the waiting.

And it's the same for us today. We all go through periods of waiting in our lives, and we need hope to get us through the waiting. Waiting is never easy, and whatever you are waiting on today, I want you to know there is hope in Christ. Whether you are waiting on God's direction or a job offer or an answer to prayer or a response from someone you love – whatever you are waiting for this morning, there is hope in Christ, and the candle of hope reminds us that hope in Christ will get you through the waiting.

II. Hope in Christ helps you go the distance

– Numbers 24:17; Isaiah 60:3; Matthew 2:1-2, 28:19; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Hope in Christ gets you through the waiting, and hope in Christ helps you go the distance. An important part of the Christmas story has to do with the Magi who traveled to see Jesus some time after he was born. The Magi were pagan magicians or astrologers who studied the stars and interpreted dreams. We find early instances of Magi in the book of Exodus with Moses in Egypt and then again in the book of Daniel. We

are not told how many Magi visited Jesus, but later traditions speak of either twelve or three.

We read about the Magi in Matthew 2: “After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, ‘Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.’” (Matthew 2:1-2)

The Magi are important for a number of reasons. They were a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy which spoke about nations and kings coming to Zion to worship the Lord. (Isaiah 60:3) Their coming to Christ was a foreshadowing of the gospel going out to the Gentiles and far away nations. (Matthew 28:19) And the gifts they brought for Christ were gifts fit for a king, befitting the birth of Jesus who is the King of kings and Lord of lords.

But what I want us to focus on this morning is the distance they came to see Christ. Matthew tells us that they came from the east, so they were most likely from Babylon or Persia. Either way they had to travel a great distance, perhaps as many as one thousand miles, over difficult and dangerous terrain in order to come and see Christ. What would prompt them to make such a journey?

And the answer once again comes back to hope. They asked Herod, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.” (Matthew 2:2)

Now you might wonder how they would connect this star with the birth of the Messiah. As Magi they would have been very interested in stars and prophecies, and of course they would have access to the Old Testament Scriptures because of the Jews who had been exiled there centuries before. Perhaps they focused on the prophecy of Numbers 24:17 which said: “A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel.” (Numbers 24:17) This prophecy connected a star with a scepter or king of Israel.

But however they knew, the star signaled to them that the Messiah – the Christ – had been born, and it was this hope in Christ that helped them go the distance to worship the newborn king in Israel.

It is hope in Christ that helps us go the distance in life, too. We all go through trials in life, and it’s easy to get discouraged. That’s when it’s so important to remember that God is with you, that God will help you,

that God has a purpose for you in your trials, and most important of all, that eternal glory awaits you in heaven.

As Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4: “Therefore we do not lose heart.... For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” (2 Corinthians 4:16-18) How did Paul keep going when the going got tough? He had hope for the future, and hope in Christ helps you go the distance.

III. Hope in Christ does not disappoint

– Matthew 1:22-23; Luke 2:5-7, 25-32, 36-38; Romans 5:5, 8:23-25, 10:11

1) Hope in Christ gets you through the waiting. 2) Hope in Christ helps you go the distance. And 3) Hope in Christ does not disappoint. As Romans 5:5 tells us: “Hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.” (Romans 5:5)

The Christmas story is full of shining examples of people who put their hope in Christ and were not disappointed. We have already looked at the Magi who traveled such a great distance to see Christ. Imagine if they went all that distance and Jesus wasn’t even there. That would have been disappointing! But their hope was not disappointed. They found Christ in Bethlehem, just as it had been prophesied.

There are so many other examples as well. Remember that prophecy from Isaiah about the virgin who would give birth to a son? That prophecy was fulfilled when the virgin Mary gave birth to Christ that first Christmas evening. We read in the gospel of Matthew: “All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel’ – which means, ‘God with us.’” (Matthew 1:22-23)

How about Mary? Mary was told by the angel that she would give birth to the Savior. Every pregnancy is a time of waiting and expectation and hope, and in this respect Mary’s pregnancy was no different. And so we read in Luke 2: “[Joseph went to Bethlehem] to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed

him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.” (Luke 2:5-7) All of Mary’s hopes for that baby – when the baby was born and she held that newborn infant in her arms and wrapped him in the cloths and laid him in the manger – Mary’s hope in Christ was not disappointed.

And then there is Simeon, a man from Jerusalem who was waiting for the Messiah to come. We read in Luke 2: “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. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: ‘Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you 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 2:25-32) God told Simeon he would see the Messiah before he died. And at the precise moment that Joseph and Mary were bringing Jesus into the temple, the Spirit moved Simeon to go into the temple, too. Simeon put his hope in Christ, and he was not disappointed.

And then there is the prophetess Anna. We read about her in Luke 2 also. “There was also a prophetess, Anna.... She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.” (Luke 2:36-38) Anna lost her husband probably when she was still young, and she lived many years as a widow, but she put all her hope in God, and her hope was not disappointed. She also saw Christ in the temple.

And then remember that Advent season is not just about those who waited for Christ’s first coming, It is also about us who wait for Christ’s second coming. When Christ returns he will banish all evil, he will make all things right, he will restore the earth, we will see Christ face to face, and all our hopes will be fulfilled. As we read in Romans 8:23-25: “We ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of

our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.” (Romans 8:23-25) When you put your hope in Christ, you will not be disappointed. As Romans 10:11 says: “Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.” (Romans 10:11) If you put your trust in other things, they will disappoint you – whether you put your trust in people, or in possessions, or in future plans you have made – other things will disappoint you, but not Christ. Jesus will never disappoint you. Hope in Christ does not disappoint.

CONCLUSION: The Christmas season is a wonderful season for so many reasons, but one of the most important reasons is the hope that Christ brings to a lost world. “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” (1 Timothy 3:15) That means he came to save you and to save me. Jesus was born into this world at Christmas so that he could grow to be a man and die on the cross for your sins and mine. So if you are discouraged this morning – if you are tired of waiting, if you feel like giving up, if you’ve faced too many disappointments in life – then let me point you to Christ and the hope that is found in him alone. Hope in Christ gets you through the waiting. Hope in Christ helps you go the distance. Hope in Christ does not disappoint. Put your hope in Christ today and every day.

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