

Advent Mid-week One: December 5, 2018
“Visitation Prep”

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Advent is a great time. It is a season that announces the coming of the Christ, the gifts He has procured, and bestows upon His people. It is no wonder, the many Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah get much attention when we begin the new church year. Like every important feast you have in your home, there is a period of preparation. As we prepare to celebrate the birth of God in the flesh, and joyfully anticipate His second coming, we will gather the next several weeks to look at the last prophecy spoken about Jesus, before His incarnation.

These words pour forth from a servant of God, the Priest Zachariah. As he was fulfilling his duty at the temple, he was visited by the angel Gabriel. It was at the altar of incense that Zachariah would hear a divine birth announcement. Even though he, and his wife Elizabeth, were well-advanced in years, Elizabeth’s barren womb would be opened and the forerunner of the Messiah would be born. Zachariah doubted these words, and as a punishment, he would not be allowed to speak until the child was born. Immediately after the name of John, Zachariah’s tongue was loosened, and he cried this final prophecy concerning Jesus, as well as, a special vocation which is given to his son, John.

As a priest, Zachariah would have been very familiar with the prophecies of the Christ, which includes, “***Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.***”¹ Now that the designate forerunner had come, the rest of the prophecies of the Savior would also be fulfilled. So, Zachariah speaks as though everything the Messiah was to do was already an accomplished fact, even though the events still lie in the future.

Of course, Zachariah speaks not of his own accord. The Holy Spirit used his mouth as a vessel to speak the blessed truth. God has visited His people. The same word is used in Genesis 50 by Joseph as he comforts Israel in Egypt, and in Psalm 8, “***What is...the son of man that you care for him?***”² The visitation of God involves a sense of deep care and concern. God cares for His people. He is always looking out for your eternal welfare.

¹ Malachi 4:5

² Psalm 8:4

This is the very purpose for His visiting, the redemption of His people. A ransom was needed for you to be released from bondage. This is not a simple earthly or material bondage. Zachariah's bondage was not simply to Roman occupation. Your bondage is not simply to be a material girl in a material world. All of mankind from Adam is in bondage to darkness and the shadow of death. It is no accident that we observe the Season of Advent when the daylight is shorter and shorter. It is a stark reminder of the burden of sin and the captivity of death. We drive on and on towards our celebration of Christmas, where the lights are lit as a reminder of the star shining over Bethlehem. They then stay lit until, January 6, the Day of Epiphany, where we celebrate the coming of the Magi to Jesus. A day where we celebrate the truth that Jesus came to save all people, Jews and Gentiles, from their sins.

It is because we do not like to talk about sin, and even less, confess our sins, so we rush to the celebration of Christmas. The world tries to start the Christmas celebration right after Halloween, and more so after Thanksgiving. Christians gladly move right into the celebration, because sin is too hard to think about. Much like having Easter without Good Friday, many attempt to have Christmas without Advent; however, the presents are not opened, unless they are first wrapped.

The redemption of Jesus is all-embracing, because there is none outside the need of it, ***“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”***³ With David, we all must confess, ***“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.”***⁴ From our very conception, death captivates us. The Holy Spirit declares, ***“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”***⁵

It is for this very reason, many try to skip over Advent. I have heard many Christians say, “Let us put Christ back into Christmas.” In many ways, He never left. We forgot why He came. We deny our sin and death. We have removed this child from the sight of the cross. How we live and speak in the next month, teaches others, our families, our friends, the

³ Romans 3:23

⁴ Psalm 51:5

⁵ Ephesians 2:1-3

world around us, just what we believe about the birth of this child. The gift is not simply God becoming man, and Jesus being born. The gift is that this man was born to die. The gift wrapped in swaddling cloths in Bethlehem, will be unwrapped and nailed on the cross. The gift laid in the manger will be laid into the mouths of the faithful, and where animals once feasted, now God's children will feed on the bread of life.

The wages of sin is truly death, and we have nothing of ourselves with which to pay this high cost. We are fast-bound in Satan's chains; thus, all the more relief must come from outside ourselves. What a gift of God is Jesus' visitation! ***"Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery."***⁶

Through the redemption of the Christ, ***"We are saved from our enemies, and from the hands of all who hate us."***⁷ Christ has given His lifeblood to buy you back. Satan can no longer accuse you. Sin has lost its power. Even death is no longer a terror. Here is the great news. You deserve none of this! God does this for you, and gives these gifts to you, because He promised, ***"to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our father Abraham."***⁸ These gifts have been in preparation for a long time. Already to Adam and Eve, salvation was promised. The death of God's Son to redeem the world was known before the world was created, and God created anyway. He created and gave, knowing your rejection. He gives, knowing your dismissal. He gives life, knowing your death.

In this time of darkness, God has raised up a horn of salvation. Power and strength is seen in horns. Ask a child what gives the Triceratops its might, they will not say the Triceratops; they will say its horns. From goats to elk, horns are used to establish dominance. The Old Testament is chocked-full of references to horns as a sign of strength. In Daniel, horns are associated with the power and dominion of a king, and Jeremiah declares, ***"The horn of Moab is cut off,"***⁹ announcing the end of his reign.

A horn is a beautiful picture of Christ. Though He was born and found in the form of a man, He is power and strength. Although He is in the form of a servant, He is God. The

⁶ Hebrews 2:14-15

⁷ Luke 1:71

⁸ Luke 1:72-73

⁹ Jeremiah 48:25

power and might of God can be seen in this horn. The Almighty power of God is seen in the death of Jesus. The omnipotence of the loving God is seen directly on the cross, lifted up high for the all the world to see. There, ***“we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source.”***¹⁰

The life He gave, was for all. The only source of life for every man, woman and child is right here. The Word of God who bestows life, continues to this very day. Through His life-giving words, children are born through water in the kingdom of God. Through words, sin is obliterated and forgiveness is bestowed. Through His Word, ordinary bread and wine, are no longer ordinary; instead, you feast on the very body and blood of the Word made flesh who continues to dwell among us.

It is for these reasons, we joyfully prepare. We rejoice in the preparatory details. The meticulous planning gives us just as much joy as the feast, as we know what the feast truly gives. While the world spews a future that is bleak and dark, while world conditions are chaotic, and the hectic December season rages, Christ is your horn. His is the King of kings and Lord of lords. He is the Head of the Church. He is your head. He is your ruler, protector, and guide.

“I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning.”¹¹ Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

¹⁰ Hebrews 2:9-11

¹¹ Psalm 130:5-6