

Pastor Jacob Hanson
12/24/2020

Opening Prayer

Good Evening Beloved, we are finally at Christmas Eve! This evening and tomorrow morning are the days in which we traditionally have celebrated the birth of the most important man who has ever lived, God in human flesh, Jesus the Messiah. In our own personal lives up until this point in the Advent season we have been waiting in hopeful, joyful, anticipation haven't we? All the things that we love about this time of year outside of the church are found in this time. Tomorrow or tonight we may open presents. Around this time we will be eating special foods, meeting with family or friends (in person or virtually, no judgement here), and reminiscing about all of the wonderful times from the past while also making new ones. It is one of the few times of the year where we don't worry about much other than that which is really and truly important: those around us.

Within the church the anticipation is no different. Jesus's birth marks the first step in God's redemption of you and me. Without Jesus there is no salvation from sin. Without Jesus there is no hope, no eternal joy, no peace between God and me. All of the promises of God, all of the assurances He gives us, the personal relationship that He desires to have with us, all of that is wrapped up and shown to be true in the miraculous birth of Jesus.

We read the majority of the traditional Christmas story this evening that recounts the birth of our Savior. Matthew 1:18-25 gives us the cliff notes of Jesus's birth and how God's promise to redeem us came to fruition through our Messiah's birth. Verses 21-23 read "'She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.' Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 'Behold, the virgin shall be with Child and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,' which translated means, 'God with us.'" The true importance of this season, what we celebrate and remember this time of the year is all summed up there Beloved. Jesus is born for a purpose, to save us from our sins. Who He really is can be explained by the name given to Him of "Immanuel," which means God with us. Jesus, fully God and fully man, is born into the world to save you and me. Furthermore to prove that He is in fact Immanuel, He is born of a virgin. He is born the same way we are physically, and He is born in humble estate as we will see, but just so that there are no questions about it God marks Jesus with Him being born of a virgin. This is according to a prophecy from Isaiah 7:14, and that is what Matthew quotes word for word. This is where the anticipation comes from Beloved, the people knew they needed salvation, they knew that God was going to send someone to save them, and so they were waiting for the one who would come and be named Immanuel.

Christmas Eve is again all about that joyful anticipation, that looking ahead to what is to come shortly, and the joyful realization of that which is hoped for. We wait in hope for the one with the title of Messiah, of Immanuel. It is akin to us waiting in anticipation for the tow truck driver

when we get stuck in the snow, or waiting for the I.T. guy to show up and fix our work computer, or waiting for our grandkids to show up and make the internet work once more. In situations like that we know that we are in need, we know that we need the help of another, and when that person arrives there is joy in knowing that finally what needs to be fixed will be fixed. The joy in the coming of Jesus is no different, except it is magnified infinitely so because He doesn't come to pull us out of the ditch or fix the printer or make our smartphone work... He comes to save us from our sins.

Our reading from Luke is the other explanation of the birth of Christ that is given in the Bible, and it gives us just a little more backstory. Luke 2:1-4 sets the stage for where and when Jesus is born. "Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city. Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David..." There was a prophecy from Micah 5:2 that the Messiah was going to be born in the city of David, in Bethlehem. This was known, the where was known, but the exact time was not. Additionally, while there were clues all throughout the scriptures about who Jesus was and who He would be, no one could have guess that He would actually be God in human flesh. "God with us" was not just a nickname for a great prophet or king, it was actually descriptive of who Jesus is, and with the birth of Jesus that hope turns to joy for the people. Not just for the royalty or the special was this hopeful anticipation finally realized, but for also for the regular man. This is seen in who the Lord revealed the Christ's birth to in that time.

In Luke 2:8-15 we read about the shepherds whom the Lord revealed the birth of the Messiah to. It is a marvelous scene, as these average men, think teachers or mechanics or farmers, are witness to angels singing praises. "In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.'" The hope of all the people, to be free, to be made right, finally is realized in the birth of Jesus. The one who would take away the sins of the world, who would go to the cross in our stead, was finally born in Bethlehem. Just as the angels proclaimed to the shepherds an answer to their anticipation, an answer to their hope and longing, we too are given that same joy.

Beloved, on this cold Christmas Eve, in a year that has been very much different, we too are recipients of that joy. We have been in anticipation and longing for our Savior. Every year we look forward to the joys of Christmas. Every year we talk about the hope and the necessity of Advent, but I don't know if most of us have ever needed the assurance God gives on Christmas quite like we do this go around. On Christmas Eve as we worship in the dark, we remember that unto us (just like those shepherds) a Savior has been given. To us the Lord has come in human

flesh to proclaim joy and salvation. You may have had it extra hard this year, but eternal hope has not been diminished... Jesus has still come. You may be in longing still for an end to the pandemic, for an end to outdoor and online worship, for a return to normalcy, but you need not anticipate any longer the arrival of your Savior. He has already come! Your sins, they are forgiven if you cling to Him. Your hope for eternity, it is set and secure not by your hand but by His. Wrapped up in that little baby boy born all those years ago is the realization of everything we most desperately need.

So Beloved, have joy. Enjoy everything that the Lord has blessed you with this year. In this night of anticipation, if you feel alone or hurt or in need of hope, take courage in the fact that your Savior loves you and came to dwell among you all those years ago. Praise Jesus that He came to save us, let us pray.

Closing Prayer