

Aromatic

Long Beach Alliance Church • December 2nd, 2006 • Pastor Chris Lankford

“BEHOLD, I AM GOING TO SEND YOU ELIJAH THE PROPHET BEFORE THE COMING OF THE GREAT AND TERRIBLE DAY OF THE LORD. “HE WILL RESTORE THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS TO THEIR CHILDREN AND THE HEARTS OF THE CHILDREN TO THEIR FATHERS, SO THAT I WILL NOT COME AND SMITE THE LAND WITH A CURSE.”

~MALACHI 4:5-6 (NASB)

1) The Darkness Of Hopelessness

- A) The initial sin of Adam & Eve introduced death and sin into the “genetics” of mankind (2:16-17). Before Adam & Eve sinned, there was no death. After Adam & Eve sinned, death entered into humanity.

- B) Along with death, there were other curses which mankind and the creation suffered (3:16-19). This condition left mankind helpless & hopeless, born in a state of slavery to sin (Psalm 51:5; John 8:34)

- C) Further, mankind rebelliously refuses to seek God, rejecting God entirely (Romans 3:9-18).

- D) The only future that sinful, enslaved, cursed, and rebellious mankind has is eternal separation from God in hell (Matthew 25:41, 46; 2nd Thessalonians 1:9; Revelation 14:9-11).

- F) Worst of all, mankind would be completely ignorant of his slavery, ignorant of the genetic curse of sin, ignorant of the inky black hole of hell... If it weren't for a single, solitary beam of shining light in the midst of the darkness...

2) A Single Candle In The Darkness

- A) In the midst of the curses (Genesis 3:14-19), God makes an extraordinary promise (3:15). The "seed of the serpent" (evil) will battle the "seed of the woman." Evil will be defeated by woman's "seed." But who or what is that?

- B) Eve's response to her first child gives us her misapplied application to God's words... "I have gotten a man, the LORD" (4:1). It is clear Eve thought her child would be God, the child of promise. She was wrong, but also right...

- C) Later in the Bible, prophets foretold of a time in the future when the Messiah would come as a mighty king to free God's chosen people from oppression (Isaiah 9:2-5).

- D) The prophets foretold of the Messiah coming with miraculous power to heal the blind, deaf, mute, and lame (35:5-6). The Messiah would come and bring good news to those who were oppressed and broken (61:1-2).

- E) The prophets foretold of a Messiah who would bring justice to the earth with wisdom and glorious power which would bring peace to the whole earth (11:1-9).

3) The Light Begins To Shine Brighter

- A) Just before the end of the Older Testament, there is a prophesy which sets the stage for the story of the Newer Testament in which Elijah (cf. 1st Kings 17-2nd Kings 2) is announced as a forerunner to the Messiah (Malachi 4:5-6).

- B) Fast forward 400 years (inter-testamental period) and we find "a priest named Zacharias" (Luke 1:5) performing his "priestly service" in Jerusalem (1:7). He and his wife have no children (1:7), and are old in years (1:18).

- C) Zacharias was chosen for a once in a lifetime honor of bringing the offering of incense on behalf of the people (1:8-9). Probably presented in the evening when the crowd was largest (1:10), this was the "highlight" of a priest's career.

- D) As Zacharias approaches the altar, an angel of the Lord appears to him with a prophetic message about his future son (1:10-17). His future son is identified as the one who "will go before" the Messiah, the essence of Elijah (1:17).

- E) Zacharias, a God fearing man (1:6), does not believe the words of the angel Gabriel (1:20), and is rendered mute by God. This sign would remind Zacharias of his lack of faith, and conceal the prophecy from the crowds.

- F) As Zacharias emerges from the temple area, the people realize he has seen a sign (1:21-22), but do not know its content. His wife becomes pregnant, and in joy also conceals the pregnancy, anticipating the coming of her son (1:24-25).

Engaging Advent

The word "Advent" comes from the Latin *adventus*, which means "the approach" or "the arrival." The Latin verb is *advenio*: "I arrive. I come. I am coming."

For centuries, followers of Jesus Christ have observed this season with a passionate anticipation of Christmas morning, marking the joy of the birth of God in the flesh, Jesus Christ.

Despite its significance, our culture has largely captured this season and disguised it with Lord's-a-Leaping, Sleigh Bells Ringing, and a Jolly Old Elf.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with any of these special traditions... Unless we miss Jesus Christ in the midst of all the tinsel and trappings.

If we miss Jesus Christ, then we have missed Christmas, and we have missed the message of "Peace on Earth, and goodwill toward men..."

Will this year be any different?

Simply, you are invited to engage Advent, perhaps for the first time in your life.

Through this season, which encompasses the four Sundays which lead up to Christmas, there will be special Advent Scripture readings which you (and your family) are invited to read during the week. There will also be some readings from Christian writers who have contemplated Advent over the centuries.

Will you schedule a time each day to anticipate His coming? Will you engage Advent? Join with the shepherds, walk with kings from the East, sit with Herod as he hears of the Christ child, exult with Mary & Joseph, gaze on the star of Bethlehem all over again, as though this is the first time...

Advent Scripture Reading

Without God revealing the hope of the Messiah, we would never know of the depth of our need or of the hope of a Savior.

- **Read 1st Peter 1:10-12**

From ancient times God gave His chosen people hope in a coming Messiah. Join with them this week in anticipating the Messiah, in hearing the voice of God as it gazed into the future.

- **Read Genesis 3:15, 12:1-3, 17:1-8**

In the midst of oppression, the only thing to which God's people could look forward was the Messiah. Sometimes, in our comfort, we forget our overwhelming need. Still, for others of us, the need is intense. Glory in the message of God to the oppressed, the broken, and the needy.

- **Read Isaiah 9:2-7, 11:1-5**

For God's people, the hope of the Messiah was the hope in a new kingdom. Not a kingdom built by the hands of man, but a Kingdom built by the will of God. It would be God's Kingdom, where the Messiah was on the throne, and His people were able to be free from sin and pain forevermore. Can you, with them, see the Kingdom of God?

- **Read Isaiah 11:6-12; 25:6-12; 32:1-5**

Advent Reading #1 ~ Walter Wangerin, Jr.

Walter Wangerin is author of more than thirty books. He is best known for his book "The Book of the Dun Cow," a small parable about the fight between good and evil. Wangerin holds the Jochum Chair at Valparaiso University, where is a professor and writer-in-residence.

A Teaching *How God Enlarges Little Prayers*

But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John.

"You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. "For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb.

*"And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. "It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, **TO TURN***

***THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN,** and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."*

~Luke 1:13-17

One night in the dead of winter a woman entered the room of her small son and paused to tip her head and listen. When she heard how painful and labored his breathing was, she fell on her knees beside him and wept and prayed.

"Save his life, save his life," she prayed.

The little boy had asthma. His mother had often heard this troubled respiration, and had often prayed this prayer. But on this particular night she was also exhausted, and that's why she wept when she prayed: "Save his life. O Lord, possess his life. Use his life for something good – and then you will have a good reason to let him live

a long life in this world. Please, please, save his life.”

By morning the boy’s breathing was better – as was usual after a difficult night.

By the time he reached adolescence, the boy himself was better. It isn’t unusual for children to outgrow asthmatic conditions during puberty and never suffer them again.

By the time he was an adult, the boy’s mother had forgotten the prayer she had prayed so many years before.

But God had not forgotten. God does not forget.

Long, long after that cold midwinter night when his mother had given him to God that God might give him life, the man met Jesus on the road between two cities – and this was the real crisis of his life, his fierce conversion, the beginning of a lifelong ministry ... and the answer to his mother’s prayer.

Such is the love of God, both for those who pray, and for those prayed over, and for the whole world altogether, which receives the benefit of the prayer and of its answer.

For what if that mother’s son was named, in Hebrew, Saul? And in Greek, Paul? Or maybe the name of that mother’s son was something of sillier sound, like Wally. Who knows when Zechariah and Elizabeth prayed the prayer the angel mentions? Surely it was long ago, before they had grown old. The prayer was a plea to bear children, of course, so it must have begun soon after they had married. It must have grown more anguished as longer and longer grew the time when God did not answer it. But after a certain age reality must have persuaded the childless couple to stop praying for the impossible.

By now they had probably forgotten the prayer itself. Surely they believed that its purpose was past – and that the answer long, long ago had been, “No.”

But here is the first of our lessons today: that God does not forget our prayers. It is in the fullness of time that he answers them. He answers

in that rich *kairos*, when to answer at all does the most good for the most people!

And that is the second lesson: that the particular and seeming-private prayer becomes, in God's omnipotent answer, a universal benefaction. Universal: something for all flesh, something that binds all time together.

And you, my friend – you thought your older prayers had gone unanswered (because we live always in the particular present, forgetting the past, unknowing the future).

And you thought your personal praying had nothing to do with anyone besides yourself and a handful of intimate folk (because our own vision is confined to a particular space, place, community.)

But your prayer is never yours alone. It is also God's, you know.

So the young couple prayed for a baby.

And in the fullness of time, yes, God gave it to them.

But the child they wanted was also the man God wanted, and what the Lord gave to that particular couple he also gave to the world: a prophet filled with the Holy Spirit! Another Elijah! A "messenger" to prepare a people for the coming of the Lord.

"You shall call his name John," which in Hebrew is *Yehohanan* or *Yohanan*. It means "Yahweh has given grace."

Oh, what a vast answer to tiny praying! Grace for two becomes grace for the whole world!

And look how all time is also completely embraced in this answer: the past is fulfilled in this Spiritual child, that the future might still hear his message and prepare to receive the Lord.

Time past? "Behold," said the Lord through Malachi (long before the young couple married, met, or even appeared on earth): "I send my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you

seek will suddenly come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming” (3:1).

And again, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet, before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse” (4:5-6 – the very last words of the Old Testament).

Of course these past prophecies are familiar. The angel repeats them in order to describe the mighty work that John will do to prepare for the coming of the Lord Jesus: John is as Elijah was, accomplishing now what the prophets proclaimed; past is present.

And the future? Well, the angel’s repetition of old promises makes them new promises for the future, for the lifetime of John, and then for every next generation which must “turn ... to the Lord our God,” every one of us who even today “prepares” for the coming of the Lord.

So now, my friend, you are about to pray a little prayer. Whom shall you pray for? What is your immediate heart’s desire? Pray it. Use simple words. Consider but your own plain portion of existence. It is enough. It is good and fully enough. For even as you pray it, the prayer lodges with God – eternal, omnipotent, God only wise – never to die but in the fullness of time to find its holiest, most blessed expression.

Let us, each in our own words, pray a personal prayer...

Amen

From ‘Preparing For Jesus’ Meditations on the Coming of Christ, Advent, Christmas, and the Kingdom by Walter Wangerin, Jr., pages 36-40.

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