

## **“Why Christmas? Discovering Jesus in the Old Testament”**

### **Part #1 - *Preparing for the Coming Saviour***

**~ Pastor Kevin Thiessen ~ Sunday, Nov 27, 2016**

#### **TITLE SLIDE “Why Christmas: Discovering Jesus through the Old Testament”**

As we start our Advent series “Why Christmas: Discovering Jesus through the Old Testament” some of you may be asking the simple *question: “What is Advent?”*

The word “advent” means “coming” or “arrival.” The purpose of the Advent season is to help us focus on the coming of Christ to be with His people, and to seek and save that which was lost. Just a reminder – Christ is not Jesus’s second name – it’s his identity – Jesus is God’s Son. The focus of the Advent season is firstly the celebration of the first arrival or coming – the birth of God’s Son – the Messiah – the promised Anointed One – God taking on human form – Jesus the Christ. Secondly, it is the anticipation of the second coming – the return of Jesus the Savior and King. Advent is far more than simply marking a 2,000 year old historical event. It is celebrating a truth about God, the revelation of God in Jesus his Son, the means by which all of creation might be reconciled to God.

The first candle we lit today is traditionally the candle of Expectation or Hope (or in some traditions, Prophecy). Advent is marked by a spirit of expectation, of anticipation, of preparation, of longing. We yearn for deliverance from the evils of this world, which was first expressed by Israelite slaves in Egypt as they cried out from their bitter oppression. It is the cry of those who have experienced the tyranny of injustice in a world under the curse of sin, and yet who have hope of deliverance by a God who has heard the cries of his people and brought deliverance!

Lighting a candle is a simple yet profound act. It is a testimony to the power of light over darkness, as even the light of one candle can reveal our faces if we stand near it. As we lit the candle, we began our journey to Christmas, a day of joy and celebration.

The light also reminds us that *we are called* to be a light to the world as we reflect the light of God’s grace to others (Isaiah 42:6). The progression in the lighting of the candles over this Advent season symbolizes the various aspects of our waiting experience. As the candles are lit, it symbolizes the darkness of fear and hopelessness *receding* and the shadows of sin *falling away* as more and more light is shed into the world. The flame of each new candle reminds the worshippers that something is happening, *and* that more is yet to come. Finally, the light that has come into the world is plainly visible as the Christ candle is lit at Christmas, and we rejoice over the fact that the hope and promises of long ago have been realized.

Yet another part of this expectation anticipates a *judgment* on sin and a calling of the world to accountability before God. We long for God to come and set the world right. Yet, as the prophet Amos warned, the expectation of a coming judgment at the “Day of the Lord” may not be the day of light that we might want, **because the penetrating light of God’s judgment on sin will shine just as brightly on God’s people.**

Thus, over the next four weeks we will be both celebrating the coming of Jesus to this world, as well as working through themes of accountability for faithfulness at His return, judgment on sin, and the hope of eternal life. We will do this through the lenses of both the Old and New Testaments.

In the Old Testament, over 400 scriptures and prophecies that outline the Messiah’s birth, life, death, resurrection, and return. **God had a plan to redeem His people.** He declared His plan to and through His prophets over the centuries and is fulfilling His Word even now.

**SLIDE #2** These Old Testament readings should address us in far more significant ways than merely offering further miraculous proof of something already well affirmed in the New Testament. They must be understood on a different level than simply predicting specific historical events, even events related to the coming of Jesus. As we listen to the Old Testament readings *as Scripture*, our hope is that you will be able again to hear the **living word of God spoken through the community of Faith across the centuries**, God speaking in various times and in various ways that, indeed, prepares us and leads us to hear the new Word spoken in Jesus the Christ. As Hebrews 1:1-2 tells us, *“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.”*

Prophecies will testify to God and his sovereign plan, they will confront us with our own sin, they will bear witness to God’s grace and mercy, and they will call us to repentance and right living, and a renewed and redeemed life.

I want to read you something from *The Jesus Storybook Bible* by Sally Lloyd Jones. It is so well written, and her summary of Isaiah is no different. Isaiah’s name meant, “YAHWEH is salvation” – God that is with us and for us to the rescue. God gave Isaiah a message for his people – to let them know that he was going to mend his broken world. **(Read pages 146-150)**

This Secret Rescue plan is interwoven throughout Old Testament history. As God’s people were abused by power hungry kings, led astray by self-centered prophets, and lulled into apathy by half-hearted religious leaders, there arose a longing among some for God to raise up a new king who could show them how to be God’s people. They yearned for a return of God’s salvation and his dynamic presence in their midst.

Our Scripture today gives us a picture of the King and Rescuer God would send.

In Isaiah 11:1 – The stump is a metaphor for the remnant of King David’s royal line. His lineage has been all but eliminated through the invasions and deportations of the Babylonians. The shoot and branch though, are metaphors for the restoration of his line through the promised **rescuer – the coming Messiah**.

Then in verse 2 we see some of his characteristics. These are characteristics of an ideal ruler. Wisdom, understanding, knowledge and a healthy fear of Yahweh were key components of righteous living. As Proverbs 2:5 states, “then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.” This was not a cowering fear but a reverent fear that provokes increased understanding and a life of obedience.

In regards to judgment in verse 3 we see that he will be impartial or non-biased.

**SLIDE #3** Then there’s a seemingly odd phrase in verse 4, “he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth.” What could this mean? As I looked into this I learned that the Hebrew word for “mouth” is also used for the ‘edge’ of a sword. Interestingly the power of speech as an offensive weapon – like a sword – is reflected throughout the Bible. An Old Testament example would be Hosea 6:5 which says, “Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth, and my judgment goes forth as the light.”

The New Testament uses the image of God’s word as superior to a sword.

**SLIDE #4** Hebrews 4:12, “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and

intentions of the heart.” It also depicts the Messiah returning with a flaming sword coming from his mouth in the book of Revelation.

You’ve heard the phrase, “The pen is mightier than the sword.” The ancient Egyptians also believed in the active power of royal speech and used the metaphor of a sword in the Instruction to King Merikare: “The tongue is (a king’s) sword; Speaking is stronger than all fighting.”

This is a theme that will carry throughout Advent: we celebrate that Jesus has come – a thrilling fulfillment of God’s plan – and we know he will come again. Yet we need to receive this sobering reminder that upon his return he will also judge – and his judgment will discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart. The coming King is clothed in righteousness and faithfulness which is similar to the imagery in Ephesians 6:11-17 where Paul speaks of the ‘armor of God’. Later in Isaiah, in chapter 59, verse 17 it says, “He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak.” **God does not want our passive acknowledgement ... he desires a zealous, righteous, and faithful all-of-life obedience to him.**

Verses 6-9 then offers a number of metaphors symbolizing the peace of a renewed creation. Predator and prey relationships are negated, all dangers of the animal kingdom are removed...the Eden type state will return.

I saw a video recently of a polar bear and dog who had become friends. (show clip?) The video went viral recently because the bear ate the dog! The owner had missed a feeding and the dog paid for it! This utopia Eden state is not yet ... but will be!

Then in verse 10 we return to the tree imagery with the “root of Jesse.”

One reason why we need to read the Old Testament as Scripture and not just as historical predictions is so we can observe and understand the overarching and interweaving themes of the whole biblical context.

There was an Eden – a utopian state. Yet, one act of disobedience, one disobedient bite of fruit in the Garden and our tree of life fell.

The whole planet groaned and humanity became like a stump. Cut off from God.

And then out of our fallenness, out of our cut-down tree, springs this singular fragile shoot. It rose out of a family line of obscurity, poverty and small account, and it rose to be a King. As you read the whole Bible you see a theme that **God is in the business of clothing the neglected, the marginalized and the unexpected in royal robes.**

**SLIDE #5** As Ann Voskamp puts it, “And out of the last and forgotten son of Jesse, comes forth one tender branch that will grow into a crown of thorns... a rugged cross... our ladder back to God. **Jesus will go to impossible lengths to rescue us.**”

**SLIDE #6** *It’s out of the stump of that fallen tree, watered with the living waters that flow from His grace, that a twig sprouts that will be the scepter that defeats sin... and lets us grow again.*

**SLIDE #7** Recently, Cristy and I had the opportunity to go to Thetis Island for a two-day retreat with the help of Capenwray School. While on the island we learned of a fruit tree that grew a variety of different types of fruit. We learned that you can actually reinvigorate branch systems, root systems, and even weak trees through the practice of grafting. This immediately caused me to think of Jesus – our tree of

life – who grafts us into himself ... giving us new life, transforming our lives from the inside out, and changing us so that we produce the best kind of fruit – the fruit of His Holy Spirit. Whereas the grafting process we learned of can repair or improve an earthly tree – Jesus’s grafting process not only repairs and improves us, but totally transforms us inside to out.

Now we come to why I wanted to include **Luke 3:4-8** as our secondary Scripture. As John the Baptist prepares the way for Jesus, he proclaimed a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins – and he used the words of the prophet Isaiah that declare the coming Messiah. John’s ministry was in preparation for the Messiah. It was preparation for one who would renew and restore God’s creation ... and “all flesh” would see the salvation of God. Throughout Luke’s gospel there is this “whole world” – worldwide significance of Jesus’ arrival.

Though Jesus came for all ... verse 7 is a critical warning. “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee the wrath to come? Bear fruits in keeping with repentance.”

John, and Jesus, are calling out for repentance and obedience – behaviors that are the natural result of a truly repentant heart.

So as begin this Advent season – let’s **prepare** our hearts by starting on our knees. As we long for his return – let’s repent of the sin in our lives – the idols that have taken our attention – the footholds that have been distracting us from worshipping the one true God.

On this first Sunday in Advent we begin a spiritual pilgrimage as we joyously anticipate Christmas day, and the birth of our Savior. As we reflect and worship, I hope that you are drawn into his presence and his peace. Our collective prayer is that all may know the peace and salvation that Jesus brings.

Centuries ago, the importance of Christmas caused many Christians to feel that it was inadequate merely to mark off only one day on the yearly calendar for celebrating this incredible gift from God. Believers had (and still do have) such a sense of awe and overwhelming gratitude and wonder at what happened that first Christmas that they felt the need for a period of preparation immediately beforehand. By extending the period, they could take time themselves to meditate on it, but also teach their children the tremendous significance of Christmas.

One of the teaching tools they used was the Advent calendar. Yet sadly, with the wane of Christianity in Western nations, the Advent calendar, although still enormously popular with all children, has lost its true meaning. Many children and their parents have no idea of the history of the little calendar or its true purpose, which is to prepare us for the celebration of the advent of the Christ-child. Even if they do know, most would not care. Also, the makers of today’s Advent calendars are anxious only to sell their product, and the majority of these neither know nor care about the meaning and purpose of Advent. Their calendars depict Santa Claus and his reindeer, snowmen, holly, mistletoe, and all the secular trappings of Christmas behind the little windows, often along with a piece of chocolate.

Yet as Jesus followers - we pray that one day the whole world will be aware of the incredible wonder of the true meaning of Advent and Christmas. We are waiting for the glorious second coming of Christ. Sometimes the heart yearning for the gift— is part of the gift! If you have advent calendars in your home, I encourage you to use them not just to count down the days until Christmas, but as **a way of opening the door every day and saying, “Come in, Jesus!”** – Invite him into every moment of your life.

**Prayer**