



**Sunday, November 29, 2020**

**The First Sunday in Advent**

**Rev. Dr. Michael R. Fitzgerald, Senior Pastor**

**“This Day.....”**

**Luke 2:8-12 (King James Version)**

Good morning, it is good to see all of you today. Thank you for taking care of one another; I see a sea of masks out there! We think of the church in earlier times when they gathered as house groups under the threat of arrest and persecution but yet they met. I'm thankful a mask doesn't keep us from meeting. We know the Lord blesses us and speaks to us today. 2020 has been quite a year. This past Thanksgiving is now in the history books; I love that holiday—a holy day when we count our blessings.

Today we begin to move toward the Christmas season and the “hustle and bustle.” We're trying to get everything together—the shopping, gifts, decorating, etc. Above and beyond that, remember this is a holy season. We prepare our minds and hearts for the coming of a Savior and to receive Him. God sent His very Son to us that we might have life everlasting. When the Son of God stepped out of His position in glory, He laid aside His robes of authority and shining brilliance and came to be with us. He came to walk the soil of this earth and get His feet dirty to bring the message of salvation to those who were dying. He came to get His hands dirty to reach out to those who were suffering and had so many needs. He touched them and took care of them. He does the same today even though we know He's not physically with us; His hands still reach to us in healing and blessing and giving us eternal life. Jesus laid down His comforts to preach to the multitudes until He was exhausted; He preached beyond the human capacity to do so—this so others would hear the gospel of the Kingdom of God. We know He carried His own cross until He faltered under its weight which also shows us His physical limitations as Son of Man. He was mounted to that cross to shed His perfect blood through His perfect earthly life so we might have life eternal and forgiveness everlasting. So, we prepare our hearts and say, Jesus, You not only came to us, You left heaven to come for us. You left the ninety-nine righteous in heaven to find the one lost sheep here. I was that sheep. You, if you're a believer, were that sheep He left heaven to come to find. Today, if you do not know Jesus as Lord and Savior, He left heaven to come and find you. He wants you to be His son or daughter. He wants you to accept Him and Lord and Savior and have everlasting life as well. He came to us; He came for us. Jesus came to a manger because from Adam and Eve forward all of us have been lost in sin—all of us lost with no way home until the Savior comes.

Every year at this time, a memory comes to mind of when Gwen's and my daughter, CariJoy, was three years old. We all went to a Christmas tree farm looking for a tree, and CariJoy would disappear in the midst of the trees. She would then yell out (knowing Mom and Dad were right around the corner), “Help me, I'm lost in the forest!” It was funny then, but over the years I've thought about it. Even as a three-year old, she had the concept of being lost and being found. I believe that's a concept that comes in our lives very early on. I believe God has put in every human heart the concept of being lost and being found because every single soul comes into this world lost. There's a longing in our hearts and souls that we need to be found. So many people in the world think they're going to be found in happiness by all the material possessions they can buy, but that doesn't fill the space of being found. There's only way to be found and that is through Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. People have a hollow space, a hole in their heart that needs to be filled.

As we think about the coming of a Messiah and the coming of Jesus Christ, we see His appearance as a prophecy throughout the Old Testament. You can summarize this section of your Bible by one question. It's not “Will there be a Savior?” Throughout the Old Testament there's the answer “There will be Messiah and Savior coming to us.”

But here's the question that's not answered: "When will He come?" "When will the Messiah arrive to save us?" This is never answered in your Old Testament but let's read some Scriptures which prophesy the Messiah to come. First, Genesis 3:15, which is the first prophecy of a Savior and comes right after the fall into sin by Adam and Eve. God punishes them because of their fall and disobedience, wickedness, and rebellion against Him. For the man, He tells Adam he'll produce from the ground by the sweat of his brow. Not everything will be given to him freely; he'll have to work to produce for his family. To the woman, He says part of her punishment will be pain in childbirth. Remember, too, that God punishes the serpent—old Satan himself who led Adam and Eve into sin through temptation: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." God says there will be constant conflict between you and the Son I am going to send. The woman's seed referenced here tells us of a virgin birth. The Holy Spirit will overshadow her but a human male will not be involved in the conception; it's called the virgin seed or birth. God says to Satan "you will bruise his heel" which points forward to the cross. But in turn, He's going to crush your head, Satan—referring to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This passage is the Old Testament promise of a coming Savior—He will come. When?

Isaiah 9:6-7 <sup>6</sup>"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, the everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." <sup>7</sup>"Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end..." Here's the assurance a child will be born! Now look at Isaiah 64:1 "Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence." The prophet is saying Lord, when will You break through the clouds? When will You come from heaven and be with us? We need You now! When will You make Your appearance?

We read in Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament, Chapter 4:2 "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall." Malachi says He shall come; He will come and minister to the world. Again, this passage doesn't say when. As we see the curtain fall on the Old Testament, I think you know before the opening of the New Testament, four hundred years pass before the event of the manger, before the Savior comes to us.

As we begin the Advent season today, we celebrate a huge truth that multitudes and generations of people could not celebrate. Those who lived in Old Testament times can't celebrate what we can; they lived before the manger, the cross, and the empty tomb. Praise God we're on the other side! We know He came; we know He died on the cross to forgive our sins; we know He rose from the grave so you and I as believers might have eternal life. As we think of the story of the Bible laid out before us, we live beyond the era of the Old Testament. Not only do we know God came to us but, personally, I know, He came for me. He came for you. If you don't know Him today, He has come so you'll know Him as son or daughter.

It all began with a baby in a barn. God answered the "when" question when an angel spoke to a group of shepherds in a field. Then a multitude of angels said "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." The angel of God announced to the shepherds some good news. Let's read today's Scripture in Luke 2: <sup>8</sup>And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup>And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. <sup>10</sup>And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. <sup>11</sup>For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup>And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." As we see the revelation of these words, a pack of shepherds were in a field near the vicinity of a crude barn where a baby would

be born. From Adam and Eve on, the question is posed “When will the Savior come to us?” The answer is in verse 11: “...this day...” Church, praise God, we’re on this side of Adam and Eve, of Isaiah, of Malachi who were waiting for a Savior. We’re not waiting any longer; we know the Savior has come. We have the message the world needs—we do not have a message; we have the message. The Savior has come this day. He is willing and wanting to save every single person. There’s something in your heart that says I’m lost and need to be found. Here’s the message you need: Jesus Christ loves you, He went to the cross for you, He rose from the grave for you that you might have life everlasting. He’s come to find you—the message of the Bible: this day. Jesus alone is the hope of every nation; He alone has the desire to locate every single lost sheep to restore that one to salvation, eternal life, and the forgiveness of sin.

From this pulpit, we know the Savior has come and the world has changed in so many ways because of Him. I would love to tell you from this pulpit today that every problem on earth has been solved and every conflict in the world laid to rest. I’d love to tell you that because Jesus came every government is godly, every sea is calm, and every soul at rest. Here’s the real state of the union today: The world still has its troubles, Amen? Millions of people are still lost and asking “When will I feel better? When will my soul be at rest? When will I finally feel I have peace in my life and that I’m finally satisfied? The answer to all these questions will always be: When you have Jesus Christ as Your Lord and Savior—“...born this day...” How wonderful this message is: He is still the way, the truth, and the life. He is still the centerpiece of our message, the reason we’re on mission, the reason for every ministry in church. Every outreach of the church is to deliver the message to the world that needs it—a world lost and searching and wanting to be found. He is the message, and we have it! We need to share it with the world; that’s our call as a representative and a witness of the living Lord Jesus Christ. As Malachi says he still has “...healing in his wings...” for every single person. Even in the darkest of days, He’s still the shining hope.

We’ve lived through some dark days this year—days of challenge and days we’ve never been through before; days we’ve had to readjust in various ways. There have been some darker days, too. In 1861-1865 the United States of America went through some of its darkest days—the Civil War—an internal war where brother took the life of brother, American fought against American. One side to the north; one to the south. Thousands died at the hands of fellow Americans. What a dark time for our country. An American poet lived during that time—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. He had his own tragedies; in 1861, he had a wife he adored. Her name was Frances; he called her “Fannie.” Tragically, she was at home one evening and her dress caught fire from a burning candle. As much as he tried to put out the fire and save her, her burns were too extensive and she died. He was with her when she passed, and he went into a deep depression. In 1863, Longfellow went through another trial. He had a son named Charles; he begged him not to sign up to fight in the Civil War. Against his father’s wishes, Charles signed up for the northern Army, fought in the war, and came home wounded that same year. His father cared for and ministered to him the rest of his life. A lot of weight and depression was on Henry’s shoulders. He was out walking on Christmas Day 1863 and wrote a poem. The first verse “I heard the bells on Christmas day, their old familiar carols play. And wild and sweet, the words repeat of peace on earth, good will to men.” This poem was set to music nine years later in 1872; there are more than three verses with one about the Civil War. So he reflected upon the loss of his beloved wife and other challenges which came in this verse: “And in despair, I bowed my head; there is no peace on earth I said. For hate is strong and mocks the song of peace on earth, good will to men.” Despite his sadness and despair, his faith shined forth: “Then pealed the bells more loud and sweet; God is not dead nor doth he sleep. The wrong shall fail, the right prevail, with peace on earth, good will to men.”

Praise God, we know Jesus Christ is going to prevail! Amen?! We know this in Genesis 3—He will prevail. Sin will be dealt with; He will be the victor. That’s the promise—no matter what tragedies, hardships, or challenges come our way. Jesus Christ is going to be the victor. At the end of this worship service, you and I are going to

walk out into the world—back to our workplaces, schools, and regular days of life. We're going to cross paths with many people who are lost, in despair, and caught up in verse 2 of Longfellow's poem. "And in despair, I bowed my head; there is no peace on earth I said. Hate is strong and mocks the song of peace on earth, good will to men." So many people go to bed each night with that kind of despair on their shoulders. You know what they need? **The** message of the Savior because He will be the victor over all things.

This year alone has brought so many challenges of sickness, shutdowns, job losses etc.—they have all taken place in this congregation. Jesus Christ came as our Savior, and He is still our hope. He's still the reason we can get up each morning with promise and hope—"He is not dead, nor doth he sleep." Amen! He is not dead; He's a living Savior and is with us this very moment. He's still the healer, the comforter, the solid rock, the island in a sea of tumult. We as a church have that message we need to give to the world—that a Savior came to find the lost, give us hope, and be the ray of light even on the darkest of days.

As Luke 2:11 says "...**this day**..." He is our Savior. Today, if you do not know Him as Lord and Savior **this day** you can be saved! **This day** you can be the son or daughter of God and simply by an act of faith say Lord Jesus, I believe you came for me. I believe You left the glory of heaven and got Your feet and hands dirty because You were searching for me. I believe You are the Savior, the Son of God, and You want to take up residence in my heart. Yes, I receive You and give my life and ask You to be my Savior. **This day** your eternity will change! **This day** Jesus will be your Lord. In Matthew 4:16 is a quote from Isaiah 9: "The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up." That light can shine on you today if you need Him as Lord and Savior. Church, we know He is the light, the Lord, and we're called to be witnesses in the world with **the** message the world needs to hear. I pray He will move in our hearts, believers, not just at Christmas but all year. Come today if you need Him.

**Let Us Pray:** Our Father, our God, thank you for these precious moments. Thank you for this day of celebration when we saw young men baptized to the faith. Thank you for the celebration of seeing that and being reminded of our own commitment to You. I pray You will bless us to be reminded once again that we don't have **a** message but we have **the** message to share with the world. We don't have a message to be mixed in with all the other information in the world; we have **the** message the world needs to hear, that the lost might be found, the sinner might be saved, that one bound for hell might be bound for heaven. It's the message of Jesus Christ who laid down His robes of glory and came to us, went to a cross, walked from a grave that we might have life. It is **the** message every person on earth needs to hear. Help us, Lord, be those witnesses. Bless that one who needs you. Bless us in this moment of decision. In Jesus' name, Amen.