

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
First Sunday in Advent, November 29, 2015

✠ ✠ ✠

(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 62, 55:1, 56, 66, 76:1-4.

Lessons: Isaiah 40:1-11, Galatians 3:26-4:7,

Sermon Text: Matthew 1:21-23.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Advent means arrival or coming. The Advent season, the four Sundays before Christmas, is used to prepare our hearts for the coming of Jesus. In our Sunday worship this Advent season we will look at several ways in which Jesus comes.

We generally speak of his two Advents, or comings. His first coming to earth and his second coming to earth. The first is his coming to earth to be born a child so that he could live as a human – sinfree – and then die for sins – the sins of all mankind. The second is his coming to judge the living and the dead on the last day.

But in a sense, Jesus also comes in other ways, as you just sang in the hymn “Jesus Came, the Heavens Adoring”. He comes into our hearts in mercy to save us from despair. He comes joyfully into hearts rejoicing because of sins forgiven. He comes to lead redeemed souls to heaven. And he comes – and wants to come – when we are joyful and when we have sadness.

Today we are reminded that

JESUS WILL SAVE HIS PEOPLE FROM THEIR SINS

- 1. Jesus came to earth as a true man to earn redemption for all mankind.**
- 2. Scripture is filled with prophecies promised and prophecies fulfilled.**

You are probably pretty familiar with the history of Jesus coming to earth, but don't go to sleep now. It all started for mankind when Eve and Adam disobeyed the God who created them and had provided everything they needed. Satan, an angel who had disobeyed God tempted them to think that they needed something more, something God had told them they should not have. God commanded them not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. But they disobeyed God.

God then told Satan "*And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.*" (Genesis 3:15 NIV) And in so doing, God gave to Eve and Adam the first promise of rescue, of salvation from the death that had now become their heritage, something they would pass on to all their descendants. No human will live forever on earth. And every human is, by nature, without faith in Jesus Christ, condemned to eternal death.

There are hundreds, if not thousands, of prophecies in the Old Testament which point forward to Jesus coming to earth to save mankind from their sins. One source speaks of “324” Messianic prophecies. Another source speaks of more than 700. And the more we read the Old Testament, the more we see Christ in it. Whatever the actual number of Messianic prophecies God placed into the Old Testament, we normally look at only a handful each Advent and Christmas and Epiphany season. Today we simply want to emphasize again that Jesus came to earth as a true man to earn man's redemption.

Man had sinned, and all mankind inherited that sin, called original sin. God had warned Adam and Eve that they would surely die if they ate "*from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.*" (Genesis 2:16-17 NIV) They didn't drop dead immediately, but everything was changed. Death was now in the world, and all humans would return to the dust from which God created man. Previously they had only had the knowledge of

good. Now they were plagued with the knowledge of evil, of sin. They were also driven from the perfect garden.

But physical, earthly death and returning to earthly dust was not to be the end of sinful man's punishment. Scripture plainly tells us **"For the wages of sin is death,"** (Romans 6:23 NIV), the opposite of eternal life.

But God had a plan to rescue mankind. He tells us about that plan repeatedly in Scripture. One of the best summaries of that plan is found in John 3:16 **"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."** (NIV) That may have been one of the first bible passages you put into your memory. Not only does it tell us about God's grand plan, but it also gives us comfort, as we also read from the very next verses of John 3: **"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."** (John 3:17-18 NIV)

That is the real message of Advent and Christmas. It is the most important message anyone could ever hear and believe. For without it, we would receive all the wages we deserve from God because of sin: **"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."** (Romans 6:23 NIV)

Mankind earned death because of sin. Each and every one of us earned death because of our sins. Death. That's not good to only be able to look forward to physical death and beyond that to be thrown into **"the fiery lake of burning sulfur."** (Revelation 19:20 NIV) Could there be a more horrible picture of eternal damnation?

Right now you are hearing and seeing so much about "Christmas" that has nothing to do with its real reason. You are surrounded by sights and sounds that totally replace Jesus in Christmas. You are surrounded by advertising trying to sell you things, encouraging you to celebrate and to enjoy yourselves in any way that you can. The word "gifts" is used a great deal, encouraging you to spend so that you can give things to others, especially children. But the emphasis is on buying something that belongs to this earth.

Oh, yes, there are a few slogans showing up that encourage us to "Put Christ back in Christmas" and telling us that "Jesus is the reason for the season" and I am sure you can think of some other slogans which suggest that people should think about Jesus Christ. But the world would like to have us forget that Christmas as celebrated by believers in Christ is a time to look at what God did for sinful mankind in sending his only-begotten Son to earth. Christmas is a time to remember God's greatest gift to mankind.

That gift is his only-begotten Son sent to earth to redeem all mankind. **"She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel' – which means, 'God with us.'"**

This is Matthew's prelude to the familiar "Christmas Story" – the history of Jesus coming to earth, born of a virgin. This is the message which the angel gave to Joseph, the betrothed husband of Mary, the mother of Jesus, before they came together.

I think you remember some of the Old Testament prophecies.

Abraham is one who received such promises. When God called him out of a pagan land to follow him God told Abraham **"all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."** (Genesis 12:3) Everything that God told Abraham about his large family of descendants or about the new homeland they would inherit gets its real purpose and meaning from God's revelation centering in Christ. Abraham understood this from what God told him. Jesus made this clear when he said: **"Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad."** (John 8:58 NIV) The Scriptures make it clear that Abraham was saved by faith in Jesus Christ. The way Abraham was saved is the same way sinners are saved today. God didn't have one way for people of Old Testament times to enter his family and a different way for us of the New Testament period. There has always been only one way: to trust God's promises as they are centered in Jesus Christ.

The sacrifice of Isaac, Abraham's only son is another prophecy, a picture of the sacrifice of Jesus, God's only-begotten Son.

Many other prophecies in the Old Testament point forward to Christ. In Psalm 22, a psalm of David, we have David's sufferings as a picture of the sufferings Jesus Christ would endure for all mankind. **"My God, my**

God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?" (Psalm 22:1 NIV)

God even tells us where his Son would be born of a virgin: ***"But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting."*** (Micah 5:2 KJV)

For hundreds and hundreds of years God promised the coming Savior. You may wonder why God did not send the Savior earlier. God tells us through the apostle Paul: ***"But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons."*** (Galatians 4:4-5 NIV)

When the time was right. Not before. Not when men wanted the Savior to come. Not when men thought they had to have the Savior, the Redeemer come right now.

Does this mean God was ignoring mankind and especially his chosen people?

No. God was surely testing his people. When things got really difficult, they had nowhere to turn but to God. They couldn't go to any human. They couldn't go to Pharaoh, the ruler of Egypt. They couldn't go to any pagan kings because they would have gladly destroyed all of God's people, the Jews. They couldn't even turn to the kings of Israel or Judah. If those kings rejected the true God, God was not with the people and with their kings.

They could, however, turn to God. And they could do this by turning to God's Word which had already been written down for them and for us. They could also turn to God through his prophets. You heard a beautiful example in our Old Testament lesson: ***"Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for."*** (Isaiah 40:1-8 NIV)

And so it happened, in God's right time, that God sent his Son into the world.

"Jesus came, the heavens adoring,

Came with peace from realms on high;

Jesus came for man's redemption,

Lowly came on earth to die;

Alleluia! Alleluia!

Came in deep humility." (The Lutheran Hymnal 56)

Jesus came to earth for man's redemption. He came from the heavens which adore and worship him to the earth which would mock and despise him. He came from his heavenly realms, his heavenly kingdom bringing peace. He came in great humility to earth to die. For all that – and all he did for us – we rejoice with Alleluias!

This Advent as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus, remember the reason.

And as we prepare for Jesus coming as a child to live among us, to be tempted in every way just as we are and yet live without sin, we must stay awake, and be alert, for Jesus' last coming will and could be any moment.

May our Advent season be one of preparing for Christ to come into our hearts again each day! Amen.