

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
First Sunday in Sunday Advent, December 1, 2013

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

Hymns: 290, 645:1-2, 98, 68, 75.

Lessons: Isaiah 9:2-7, Acts 2:29-36, Luke 3:1-18.

Sermon Text: 1Peter 1:10-12.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Advent means coming. We are in the season of the church year when we are preparing for the coming of Jesus Christ.

In our church you see a wreath with five candles, called the Advent wreath. One candle is lit each Sunday in Advent, the four Sundays before Christmas, and the fifth, the white candle, is lit on Christmas.

Like medieval cathedrals, the Advent wreath may have developed in the Christian churches as a teaching tool leading up to the celebration of the birth of the Savior. In the cathedrals, the elaborate stained glass windows typically pictured Biblical events or sometimes events in church history. These were something that people who could not read could look at and understand a Bible history lesson or a Biblical truth. Much of the architecture of Christian church buildings in the centuries since Christ walked the earth also can teach us. Even in our simple places of worship we have some symbols of Christianity. Some elaborately decorated churches make it a point to teach people the symbolism of their architecture and decorations and how they point to Biblical truths.

In our series of Advent Sunday sermons, we will consider names that have been given to the candles on the Advent wreath.

The first one lit is called the Prophecy candle. This is a great place to start, for Jesus did not come into the world without any announcement or advance preparation. Please hear again today how

GOD’S PROPHETS LOOKED FORWARD TO THE SAVIOR

- 1. God used humans to tell his message about the coming Messiah.**
- 2. These prophets diligently searched the scriptures for evidence of the coming Savior.**
- 3. They did this so that the Jews might find him.**
- 4. We have those same Scriptures so that we might find the Savior.**

God’s prophets spoke of and foretold Jesus’ birth, life, death, and his ascension into heaven and sitting at his Father’s right hand.

Scripture records specifically that prophets at least from the time of Abraham have told and written of the coming of a Savior, the Messiah, from God for all mankind. Now the actual promise, the prophecy of the Savior started when Eve sinned, when God promised to Satan ***“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) Surely generations of believers before Abraham also told their sinful descendants of the promise of a Savior, but Scripture first uses the word “prophet” as a description of Abraham. God called and appointed many to be his prophets, to proclaim his holy Word.

The first and primary calling of a prophet is to proclaim. The verb “prophesy” (pronounced prah-fa-sigh) means to speak, to proclaim, to tell. But because many Old Testament prophets spoke of what God was going to do in the future, prophesying and resulting prophecy (pronounced prah-fa-see) has taken on the meaning of telling or foretelling what is going to happen in the future.

Now when men do that based on their own wisdom or the wisdom of other humans, it is a risky business, for no man can know for certain what is going to happen in the future. Oh, sure, men can look at certain signs, such as weather signs, or economic signs, or behavior signs and suggest what might happen in the future. But God is the only one who can foretell the future with absolute certainty.

Throughout the Old testament God's prophets gave more and more details about the coming Savior. Such prophecies which point forward to Jesus Christ, the Messiah, are called "Messianic prophecies". For example, one source lists "324 Messianic Prophecies" in the Old Testament. I even have a bible printed with little symbols of a crown next to each Bible verse the editors consider a Messianic prophecy. But the more one reads the Old Testament, the more one finds even more passages that speak of the work or the office of the Messiah.

So especially as we begin a new church year, it is important to look to and to point to God's Word for the salvation that mankind so badly needs.

Although God's Law was written in man's heart at creation and given again in written form on Mount Sinai, the message of the Savior is found only in the Bible. The Gospel is found only in the Word of God.

The words prophet, prophesy (the verb) and prophecy (the noun) are found almost 500 times in the Old Testament. That shows how much God used humans to tell his words. And not every one of God's messengers, that is, people who told of God's will are called prophets!

Many times the word "prophet" is used in the Old Testament to refer specifically to the Messiah himself as a prophet. The translators of the New International Version even capitalized the word "Prophet" in the Old Testament when they thought it referred directly to Jesus Christ. The Old Testament prophets were anointed to tell people God's Word, especially the good news about the coming Savior. As God's Prophet, Christ preached God's Word, especially the good news of eternal life.

When planning sermons for the Advent season, pastors often examine prophecies in the Bible, for they helped God's people learn about the coming Savior. Old Testament passages of prophecy can help prepare us for the coming of Jesus Christ.

Then, in the weeks after celebrating the birth of Jesus, sermons often speak of the life of Jesus on earth, and then in Lent, after Ash Wednesday, sermons often speak of the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ.

We are especially concerned today about the multitude of Old Testament Biblical prophecies that look forward to Jesus Christ, God's Son, our Savior.

Peter tells us today "***Concerning this salvation*** [that comes from Jesus Christ], ***the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.***"

Many who spoke God's Word were wondering exactly when and how the Word of God which they spoke and wrote would be fulfilled. Remember, God caused them to write down the very words that they wrote down. They didn't just write what they wanted to write. This doctrine of verbal inspiration is plainly taught especially in passages such as Peter records just a few verses later: "***Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.***" (2 Peter 1:20-21) One of the Holy Spirit's jobs was to give the prophets – and the New Testament apostles – their messages from God to the people of the world. When the Old Testament prophets thought about the coming Messiah, the one who would crush Satan's head, they perhaps had a powerful superhero in mind, someone who by superior force would do a lot of destroying of evil and righting of wrong.

But the Messiah that God revealed to them was a servant who would suffer.

God recorded 39 books of his Word before Jesus was born. This makes up a majority of the printed Bible. (Hold up the Bible with the books of the Old Testament held so they can see how much of the Bible is Old Testament.) Some of those books are specifically called "prophetic books" when you examine their content. But the printed Word of God is strangely silent for about 400 years before Christ was born. The last book of the Old Testament, Malachi, was written about 400 years B. C.

Peter specifically makes reference to ***“the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.”*** His sufferings, after all, are what specifically redeemed mankind from sin and the punishment every one of us humans deserves. Jesus lived a perfect life, obeying every single one of God’s commands. Then he was punished for sin, for breaking God’s commands, suffering the torments of hell that every human deserves. But his suffering and death wasn’t the end of it all. After he “was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell” to proclaim his victory over Satan. “The third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From there He shall come to judge the living and the dead.”

God wanted his chosen people, the Jews, to recognize Jesus when he came and honor him as Savior. Many knew the Scriptures and anxiously waited for the Savior. We could even look to the unbelieving ***“chief priests and teachers of the law”*** of the Jews as men who knew the Scriptures and their prophecies. When the Wise Men came to King Herod looking for the one born King of the Jews, we read ***“When [Herod] had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. ‘In Bethlehem in Judea,’ they replied, ‘for this is what the prophet has written: “But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.””***” (Matthew 2:4-6) When Herod wanted to know what to tell the wise men, his religious leaders told him, because that is exactly what the scriptures said would happen. We might even wonder ‘So why weren’t they paying attention to what the Scriptures said?’ There is no mention in Scripture of anyone except shepherds and the Wise Men coming to worship the Christ-child in Bethlehem. For many, such as these leaders of the Jews, it was obviously a matter of knowing facts but not believing. May God preserve us from such learning the Words of God!

God’s prophets spoke and wrote what they did so that the Jews, to whom the Savior had first been sent, could find him. But few of them found and believed him when he did come to earth!

What a comfort it is to us that ***“It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.”*** Did you realize that the Bible was written for you? People think of it as a great honor when a book is dedicated to them, or even to have their names found in a book. But here (pick up the Bible and hold it out) is a book that was written for you. Paul tells us: ***“For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”*** (Romans 15:4)

Isn’t it marvelous that ***“Even angels long to look into”*** the things that you know and have been told? And you, mere mortals, have these truths written in words you can understand, can read to your children and memorize along with them!

So it isn’t just coincidence that you – and your children – memorize passages from the Old Testament as part of our Christmas message. It is the important, the essential Words of God!

Isn’t it wonderful that we have the same scriptures that were written – by inspiration of God – by prophets like Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, among others I haven’t named? Isn’t it remarkable that the scriptures that you have today, unchanged and unchanging, teach you of Jesus Christ?

As we approach the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, our Savior, may we even privately examine anew the Holy Scriptures that prophesy of his coming. Amen.