

## **Isaiah 11: The Greatest Story Never Told: Advent Presents from God.**

**Christmas. A time of year that brings memories, expectations, anticipation, hopes. For many it is a time away from the work place and an ability to be with family. For others it is a time to be involved in other things.**

**There are the concerts and music to hear, movies to watch, programs to see, traditions to follow. There are presents to wrap, trees to decorate, and homes to put lights on – all of which reflect the season of the year. And who can avoid all the advertising. There seems to be no end of advertisement in the store windows, on the radio and TV, in the newspapers, streamed from the internet, and more. There are the sayings to hear, and the people to involve. There are the trips to make, and sights to see. And there is the food to prepare, and meal to enjoy. All of these, and so much more seem to be the American experience, if not the world experience, of what we identify as the things to do at Christmas.**

**We all seem to thrive in and with it, at least in part. Some of us feel that, without all of this, “It just wouldn’t be Christmas!” There are others who experience this as part of Christmas but are not connected so tightly to these experiences. There are many in our neighborhoods, towns, and cities that will be, or are, experiencing difficulties at this time of year and as such, have a bit of a difficult time with this holy day.**

**We remember, from our own childhood, running in to see what is under the tree – for us. To watch what the response would be from others about the gifts we gave them. And to have a response in our emotions and / or our minds related to the gifts we received or feedback others gave us about their gifts.**

**There are the carols to sing, stories to read or quote, and cookies to make. There are the visits to make, stores to visit, and hopes to fulfill. There are the dreams to dream, and sermons to hear. It is all part of Christmas as we know it.**

**Memories. They flood our minds and our psyche. They affect who we are and how we respond to Christmas in our own thinking and emotions. They are part of what has become our mindset of Christmas. We remember the gifts we wanted, the gifts we received, and the gifts we perhaps did not receive. We remember the Christmases that were largely clothes, when we had hoped for toys. We remember the special gifts that still stand out in our minds of what we received. Those, if I may, are gifts of grace to help us realize that there are times when we can have good memories of Christmas, as those are the times we hoped and perhaps prayed for, certain gifts, and then received them.**

**Thousands of years ago, the gifts of Christmas were foretold. As we think of Christmas, often times, we are drawn to Matthew 1:21:**

**“And she shall bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sin.”**

We may be drawn to Luke's passage in Luke 2:1-20, of the revelation of the Birth of Jesus to the Shepherds. What a story it is, with lowly shepherds – social outcasts of society – on a hillside, being given the good News of the Birth of Jesus first. As they were given the message, went to the manger while leaving their sheep – something shepherds NEVER did for fear of something happening to the sheep – and made known the happenings to those around them, we are often caught up in the beauty of the moment and the celebration of the fulfillment of what was promised. Perhaps we relate these narratives to parts of Handel's Messiah as well.

We may be drawn to Matthew 2, of the account of the wise men from the East who journeyed what many feel was a prolonged journey to come to the place where Jesus was living with His parents. In this passage, we are not told it was a manger, and we ARE told that Herod – in a fit of fear, anger, protection, or whatever other emotion you may want to ascribe to him, had all the male children killed that were under the age of two years old. Many scholars believe this to be supportive of the thought that the wise men had been told of the event about two years earlier and it took them this long to reach Jesus and His parents. Again, however, we see the fulfillment of prophesy of Jeremiah 31:15:

“A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachael weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.”

Of Hosea 11:1: “Out of Egypt I called my son”.

In so doing, there are many promises that God fulfilled in the birth of Jesus. Many scholars agree that from a faith perspective we cannot help but conclude that Jesus was the fulfillment of these prophecies, but also that He is the Messiah. God is faithful to fulfill His promises and we focus on these in this Advent Season.

There is another passage of Scripture that deals with Christ and Christmas. It is not as widely used to share the message of the birth of Christ, yet it is poignantly appropriate to look at. In Chapter 11, Isaiah is full of the Spirit of God and is prophesying about the Messiah even more than he had done in Chapter 7.

Isaiah 11:1-6: There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with a rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins. The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together, and a little child shall lead them. ...”

We see here prophesy. We see here promises. We see here projecting into a future set of cultures and eras of time that there shall be a Savior who shall come, who is from the lineage of David, from Jesse his father – a man who no evil was ever recorded. We see many promised blessings, and many future benefits coming from this Messiah. We see so many

things that come to us, are promised for us, through the promises to those in Isaiah's day that were delayed so long. Oppression, persecution, seemingly God turned His back on the Children of Israel, no fulfillment of the promises.

Enter the inter-testamental period. It was a time of thundering SILENCE. No voice. No message. No visitation from God. No fulfillment of promises made. No faithfulness of God experienced. Only pain, slavery, poverty, and disappointment.

Then there was hope from the revelation of the Shepherds and the Wise Men about what God had done. Yet, to the contemporary observer of the day, that ended up with more of the same. God did not use Jesus to deliver His people from the Roman Army, and set them free from oppression. God was not using Jesus to be the Messiah. God was not fulfilling His word. Still. Continued SILENCE.

Where are we this morning? Do we perhaps feel / experience some hopes not met, expectations not occurring, dreams dashed? Are we relating to the unfulfilled promises that we have read about, held on to, relied on, and that only to still be waiting? With God being in SILENCE.

Let me share this with you this morning. God is up to something. God is still moving – even in what we may feel or sense is SILENCE. God has a plan and is fulfilling it, even without letting us “feel” it happening. Let me share with you some presents, if I may, that God HAS given us, and HAS bestowed upon us through this Jesus, this Messiah, this Savior of the world that came as a babe in a manger those many years ago.

1. He has promised righteous intervention (verses 4-5).
  - a. His righteousness shall be manifest in heart assessment.
    - i. Not by what is the obviously seen.
    - ii. Not by what is spoken.
    - iii. But by the true meaning of the heart.
  - b. His righteousness shall be manifest in rewards to the needy.
    - i. The poor will be remembered.
    - ii. The humble and meek will be remembered.
    - iii. The evil – doer will be struck down.
  - c. His Righteousness shall be manifest through His being faithful: Faithfulness will surround and clothe Him.

■ Have you ever felt forgotten, or that God has simply given up on your situation?

■ Have you felt that your heart is, to the best of your knowledge, pure and yet, God has seemingly delayed, in SILENCE, bringing to pass what He has promised?

■ Have you or do you wonder “Where is God's faithfulness, to me?”.

God still promises HIS gift of righteous intervention, through His Son, and into your lives, even to make Advent real to you, and that in a new way! And realize too: the promises in many passages are yet to come, and not failing to be done!

Are your expectations occurring? What gift are you looking for this Christmas? What is the hope under the wrapping paper and ribbons of faith in His faithfulness?

2. He has promised overshadowing Protection. (vss 6-9).

“The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together, and a little child shall lead them.”

a. He will protect from fear.

- i. Fear of lack devastation or absolute loss: The overshadowing protection of God will prevent devastating losses or danger (Wesley’s Commentary).
- ii. Fear of ongoing enemies that threaten: Symbolic of the predator and the prey now living in harmony with happiness now realized (Adam Clarke Commentary).
- iii. Fear that does not end: A continual living in the state of uncertainty that will not resolve (vs. 9-10).

“They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. In that Day, the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples – of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.”

b. He will protect from lack of Belonging. (vs. 12)

“He will raise a signal for the nations, and will assemble the banished of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth”.

- i. He will protect from the sense of abandonment: He has come to be “God with us”.
- ii. He will protect from the sense of forsaken: He still remembers His Children – His promise is to gather, not to forsake.

- Have you felt loss that seems to devastate: Physical, Financial, Emotional?
- Have you been dealing with a lack of happiness or harmony in a situation?
- Have you been dealing with an uncertainty that does not end?
- Do you know someone liken to Job that seems to be a magnet for difficulty?

Let me share this: The Jesus of the Advent still promises to be with you, even unto the end of the Earth. When God seems to delay, in SILENCE, God is still busy and working. It may be a difficult time to understand. It may be a time that is impossible to comprehend completely. But the good news of the Gospel and the Prophecy here is that Jesus came to bring fulfillment of His completeness in our lives, even in the midst of delay or lack of seeing what He has promised. Many of His promises here are yet to come, and not failing to be done.

Are your expectations occurring? What is the gift you are seeking for this Christmas? What is our response when it SEEMS that things we had expected aren’t happening? These are great expectations, with great promises of fulfillment that will be joyous!

3. He has promised a triumphant resolution. (vs 16)

“And there will be a highway from Assyria for the remnant of his people, as there was for Israel when they came up from the land of Egypt.”

- a. a He will resolve with a road THROUGH the difficulty: The Children of God WILL be delivered.
  - i. The difficulty may not resolve, as much as the road will lead away or out of the difficulty.
  - ii. The difficulty may not resolve, as much as our awareness may reveal His resolution in the process.
  - iii. The difficulty may not resolve, as much as our maturity in being triumphant may increase in the journey.
- b. He will resolve with a perspective DURING the difficulty: The Children of God WILL remember the triumphant resolution.
  - i. The perspective of the triumphant person is more about the victory than the battle.
  - ii. The perspective of the triumphant person becomes centered on the "whenever" the promise happens, not "IF" the promise happens.
  - iii. The perspective of the triumphant person is more about the holy life in faith – seen or unseen expectations – and not as much about the trial or waiting that happened.
  - iv. The perspective of the triumphant person is more about the realization in Who's we are, than about the "when will this promise happen".

■ Do you have a right perspective?

■ Are you looking in expectancy for the resolution and highway, or for the answer to the "Why hasn't IT happened yet?"

Are your expectations occurring? What gifts are you looking for this Christmas? What is the highway you are needing to sense and feel that the expectations ARE happening?

Perhaps, if I may, what are the gifts you – me, we – are wrapping and giving back to the Christ who was born at Christmas? Are we shepherds who bring praise and proclamations through our living and testimony? Are we wise men and women who bring gifts from our treasuries of our lives? Are we simply seeking expectations to happen for US, being US focused?

OH COME ALL YE FAITHFUL.