

# 5th Advent - Prophets

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, thank you very much for bringing that. That was unbelievable. I'm so appropriate as well to what we're looking at today.

So I feel like I don't need to see anything. But really it is very appropriate and it's helped me with how to end.

I was going to say this morning again. Today I thought, you know, when we're looking at the prophets, I don't know if you even got to a passage bill or what you were thinking.

I was thinking about this myself. There's so many areas you could go. I don't know how many sermons you've heard from Isaiah at Christmastime. I mean, we could have went anywhere.

We could have went to all the usual ones. We could have looked at Anna and Simeon. We could have looked at Isaiah. We could have looked elsewhere. But today I thought, let's do something a little bit different.

[ 1 : 0 3 ] Let's do a little bit of big Bible picture stuff. And I want to do that just by looking at four different parallels that we see that relate to waiting, that relate to silence, that relate to listening.

Four parallels. And sandwiched in between two and two, I want to look at Zechariah's prophecy. So, there's a sense in which every Christmas, every single Christmas, we replay this.

And it's a theme in the Bible. We replay this feeling of waiting, counting the days down, seeing the light diminish every winter, and the days become darker.

Now, imagine if the winter was 400 years long, and yet we did not even know when Christmas would come.

I don't know if you've ever read or seen the Narnia series, but in the Lion, Witch and Wardrobe, there's a line that says, It is winter in Narnia, said Mr. Tumnus.

[ 2 : 1 0 ] Has been for ever so long. Always winter, but never Christmas. Imagine that was the scenario, waiting for hundreds of years.

Well, today we're reflecting on prophets in relation to the moment when Christmas finally arrived. And so, the first parallel I want to look at is this idea of waiting.

You see, Christmas, the first Christmas, brought an end of 400 years of silence. 400 years of waiting. Waiting on God to visit.

Waiting on God to come to his people. This is a time when people visit, isn't it? Christmas time. Some who have come who you haven't seen for a long time.

But what if someone said that they were going to visit you? But years go by and they don't turn up. How long would it be before you felt stood up? Is the person even coming?

[ 3 : 1 5 ] How long before you doubt whether they will show at all? How long before you wonder whether you will ever see them? Christmas comes at a time when God has promised long ago to visit his people.

Hundreds of years have went by. If there was one thing that we could be sure of when we look at the prophets, it is this. God always keeps his promises.

So the first parallel about waiting is a parallel between Joseph in the multicolored dream coat and a prophet called Malachi.

You see, at the end of Genesis, the people of God were not in the land of promise that God had swore to Abraham. They were not there. Instead, they were in Egypt. And the book of Genesis closes with a promise of God to visit them.

A promise of God to bring them up out of Egypt and into the land he promised. You see, it says in Genesis 50, you know, we all know that verse, what God, what you meant for evil, God meant for good.

[ 4 : 23 ] But a little bit later, Joseph says this. Joseph said to his brothers, I am about to die. But God will visit you. And bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

And then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, God will surely visit you. God is going to visit. But how long will they wait?

You see, for us, we just turn a page between Genesis and Exodus. But for them, it was 400 years. 400 years in Egypt turned into 400 years of slavery.

But when God did visit them, it began with the birth of Moses. 400 years of the sons of Israel waiting. But God would keep his promise.

400 years of waiting. But God really would visit them. He really would. 400 years of waiting. God would send a baby. Does this ring any bells?

[ 5 : 30 ] 400 years of waiting. But they would need to wait a little bit longer. See, Moses spent 40 years of his life before he went out. And then another 40 in the wilderness.

This was not the last time that God would make his people wait. But encouragingly, this was not the last time that God would visit. You see, at the end of the Old Testament, again, the people of God were now in the land of promise.

But they were not free. Just like in Egypt, they were oppressed. Malachi, the very last prophet, just like Joseph, his last words were that God would visit.

Malachi chapter 3 says, Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple.

And the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. And then in chapter 4, Malachi says this.

[ 6 : 38 ] His closing words. Parallel 1 is about waiting.

You see, Joseph and Malachi, they're both the last prophetic voice before this long wait. They both leave Israel with a promise of God to visit. They both proceed a 400-year wait.

They both sit at the hinge of a great exodus. They both do not live to see it happen. Both of them speak a word of hope to see the people through the long wait.

And both messages come to fulfillment in the birth of a child. Matthew 1 says, She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.

For he will save his people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son.

[ 7 : 46 ] They shall call his name Emmanuel. Which means God with us. A long wait, but God promised that he would visit. You see, Jesus, the Christmas child, is God visiting his people.

With Jesus, the wait is over. The second parallel is about silence. Christmas brought an end to 400 years of silence.

I don't know how long you've spent in the silent treatment, either with a friend or a spouse. Probably not 400 years. But imagine this. Imagine being in a hostile territory.

And you signal for help. And you hear word back. They've received your May Day. They've received your cry for help.

And the end of their message is this. We will come to you. We heard your cry. We will come to you. And we will rescue you. And you think, yes. I might be in this hostile land, but my message has been heard.

[ 8 : 50 ] And a message has been received. That someone's going to come and someone's going to rescue. You're glad at first. Time goes on. It seems to take forever. Has something happened?

Has something changed? Are they no longer coming? Is help actually going to arrive? If it was, surely it would be here by now. Or we would have at least got an update.

Do we sometimes feel like that with the words of Jesus? Something changed? We're waiting forever here. We would have got an update. No, you can trust in the word of God.

If he says it, he's going to do it. Is God still coming 2,000 years later? Is God still coming? Can we trust the prophet? It's the only word to go by.

There's no being any other prophets or any other new words. Parallel 2 is about silence. How do we live in the silence? For us, we turn the page from the Old Testament to the New Testament.

[ 10 : 00 ] But for them, again, they came back from exile. But 400 years of silence between Malachi. 400 years. 400 years. But when it did happen, the sound of prophecy filled the air again.

400 years of silence. But on the cusp of his visit, God spoke. 400 years of silence. But now they would hear God. 400 years of silence.

400 years of silence. But a baby began to cry in a manger. 400 years of silence. But they would need to wait just a little bit longer. For he was just a babe.

This was not the first time that God was silent for 400 years. But encouragingly, when the silence ended, the exodus began.

Between Malachi and Zechariah. You see, Malachi and Zechariah both were given a word about God visiting. Both about the prophet preparing the way.

[ 11 : 05 ] You see, Zechariah is told almost word for word what Malachi says at the closing of his ministry. Both of them proceed a long silence. You remember, Zechariah was silenced.

Both sit on the hinges of the Old and New Testament together. And with both come to a fulfillment with the birth of a child. The angel said to Zechariah, Do not be afraid, Zechariah.

For your prayer has been heard and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son. You shall call his name John. And then the angel says the words of Malachi. He will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah.

To turn the hearts of fathers to their children. You see, John is the prophet who prepares the way for the Lord's visit. If John is the one that Malachi was talking about, who precedes the Lord.

Who does that make Jesus? But God himself. John is the prophet. And with John the silence is now over. For us, with John the silence is now over.

[ 12 : 18 ] You see, Zechariah's prophecy, it's about the silence and the waiting being over. It's about the prophet who prepared the way and the God who did visit his people.

This is what we read in Luke chapter 1 from verse 57. Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth and she bore a son.

And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her. They rejoiced with her. And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father.

But his mother answered, No, he shall be called John. They said to her, None of your relatives are called by that name. They made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted to be called.

And so Zechariah asked for a writing tablet because he was still mute. And he wrote his name as John. And they all wondered.

[ 13 : 21 ] And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue was loosed. And he spoke, Blessing God. And fear came on all their neighbors. All these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea.

And all who heard them laid them up in their hearts saying, What then will this child be? For the hand of the Lord was with him. And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David.

As he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all those who hate us, to show mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant.

The oath that he swore to our father Abraham to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

And you, child, he spoke to John, will be called the prophet of the Most High. For you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high, to give light to those who sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death to guide our feet into the way of peace.

[ 15 : 04 ] You see, the first half of this prophecy was about the end of the way, and the second half of this prophecy was about the end of the silence. The first half was about the God who will visit his people.

The second half was about the prophet who prepares the way. You see, Zechariah said that John would be called the prophet of the Most High, yet the angel said that Jesus would be called the Son of the Most High.

Do you see how all this points to what is coming? Parallel number three is about the Exodus. Moses and Jesus.

Both were sought as babies to be killed by their ruler. Both fasted for 40 days. Both were attested to by signs and wonders.

Both delivered the law of God. Both were rejected. Both had a transfiguration, and both appeared after their death. You see, when Joseph said that God would visit them, it did happen.

[ 16 : 06 ] And it happened through Moses after a 400-year wait. When Malachi said that the Lord would come, he did. He came to his people through Jesus after a 400-year wait.

God will visit you. Emmanuel, God with us. You see, with Moses, God not only visited. With Jesus, God was with them.

The arrival of Moses, God not only visited them, but kept his promise to rescue them and take them into the land he promised. With the arrival of Jesus, God's not only with them, but through Jesus he will rescue us and take us to the final place of promise.

You see, Moses indicates the end of the way and the beginning of the exodus. Yet he's just a foreshadow of a greater one. Remember, Moses said, a prophet will come like me.

There's going to be a greater exodus. And it comes through Jesus. Might be a longer wait, but it's the beginning of an exodus that will last forever.

[ 17 : 20 ] What kind of exodus will Jesus bring? Parallel number four is about the prophets. Prophet Elijah and the prophet John.

Both were preachers of repentance. Both wore garments of hair and belts of leather. Both were fed from the wild. Both spoke against hypocrisy. Both challenged the king for his failure to keep the law of God.

Both were sought to be killed by the queen. And both experienced doubt. You see, John is the one that Malachi spoke about. He came in the power of Elijah and the spirit of Elijah.

He's the one to break the silence. He's the true prophetic voice. And he is the forerunner of the Lord. He is preparing the way for the Lord to visit.

With the end of the silence and the prophetic voice back in the air, both Zechariah and his son John will tell us who Jesus really is.

[ 18 : 26 ] And they will tell us who Jesus really is and just what kind of exodus he will bring. You see, Moses was the meekest man that ever lived.

It is written of him. Yet Jesus is the son of God who humbled himself to take on flesh and become a servant and be obedient even to death on a cross.

Moses was a bridge between God and his people, yet Jesus is God with his people. Moses brought about an exodus from slavery to Egypt.

What is it Jesus does? Who is he and what is his exodus? Is that not what Zechariah prophesied? That finally God has come to redeem his people, to set them free from their enemies so that they might serve him without fear.

What does he mean? Because people seem to think that he means Rome. That's not what he means. And then he speaks about John. Then he prophesies about John.

[ 19 : 30 ] That John would tell us about a salvation that is in the forgiveness of their sins. What is it we need an exodus from?

Moses brought about an exodus from slavery to Egypt. Jesus brings about an exodus from slavery to sin and death. His exodus will last forever.

This fear, it says in Hebrews of death. Fear of death that is brought about by sin. That we might serve him without fear.

Because sin and death will be no more. Because Jesus really is God with us. And his exodus is salvation from sin and death forever.

For like we heard in the song earlier, whose voice is it we really need to listen to? You see, at first it's John.

[ 20 : 29 ] At first it's John, the great prophet, who says, repent from your sins for the kingdom of God is at hand. At first it's John who says, look, there he is, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

At first it's John, but then John points us to who it is that we really should listen to. Our great shepherd, Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.

Go to him. John must become less as he becomes more. What a great thing it is. The prophets attest to us and point us in the direction of God in flesh.

Jesus Christ, God with us, spoke to us words of eternal life and all who believe will receive eternal life in his name. Let me pray and then we're going to sing two more songs.

God, our Father, you have spoken to us in many ways through your prophets of old, but in these last days you have spoken to us through your Son, Jesus.

[ 21 : 37 ] Lord, would you help us to listen to his voice? For his words are true and sure. Heaven and earth will pass away, but his word remains forever.

And his words bring eternal life. Help us to listen to the voice of Jesus. Help us to trust in his words. Help us to know that in Christ the way and the silence is over.

And help us to look to him for the great exodus to come. We pray in his name. Amen.  
Amen.