

# The Promised Hope

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[ 0 : 00 ] Welcome here for this Sunday, November 30th, 2025. Has anybody begun to think, oh, Christmas is way sooner than I thought it was?

! That really struck me, and you'd think I'd be thinking about Christmas months ago, and I was. But just particularly this week, I think. I think I was somewhere in the evening, one evening, and just ran some errands and heard Christmas music in a store.

And I thought, whoa, this feels early. And then I looked around and I thought, oh, there's Christmas decorations everywhere. And then I thought, oh, November 25th, it's exactly a month away.

And I began to reflect on that, right? And so I think, hopefully, for you, as well as for me, the fact that we're starting our Advent series today will help you to get into the Christmas frame of mind a little bit more.

This morning, as we begin this season of Advent, you see a wreath and candles up at the front. And so the wreath itself, shaped in a perfect circle, symbolizes the eternity of God.

[ 1 : 09 ] And each candle, as you probably know, has significance as well. And on each Sunday of the Advent season, we'll be recognizing the four virtues. That's what these candles represent, the four virtues that Jesus brings to us, which are hope, peace, joy, and love.

And this morning, I'm lighting the first candle, which symbolizes hope. Today, we celebrate the wonder of this season. Like children on Christmas morning, with eyes wide open, and hearts, I hope, full of hope.

We celebrate the wonder of the star placed high above Bethlehem, sent as a sign from God to announce the fulfillment of our deepest hopes and dreams, the birth of Emmanuel, God with us. Today, I encourage each of us to focus on the hope that we have, the hope in knowing that Jesus is the answer for our deepest needs. So today, we're starting our annual journey back to Bethlehem. Back to where this miraculous birth of a baby changed the world forever. And it's a journey worth celebrating. And for centuries, the church has done just that through this season of Advent.

[ 2 : 31 ] Now, for those of you who need an introduction or a refresher on the season, I know it was 12 months ago. So Advent is a significant religious season that's observed in various Christian denominations.

I still remember being a person in the pew like you are this morning many years ago. And our pastor at the time, the church that we came from before we came to Braemar, our pastor was very white, very Western, very Canadian, all these things, right?

And so then he introduced Advent and the importance and reflected on it. And I thought, this feels really liturgical to me. So this feels really Catholic or really something foreign to me.

And yet it shouldn't be for us. Because this includes, the Advent season includes these four weeks that lead up to Christmas. It starts on the Sunday closest to November 30th, which is today.

Known as St. Andrew's Day. And maybe you knew that. And it concludes on December 24th, Christmas Eve. Advent serves as a time of preparation, of reflection, of anticipation for what is to come.

[ 3 : 42 ] For the birth of Jesus Christ, symbolized by Christmas. And the word Advent is derived from a Latin word. Maybe you know it. Adventus.

Which means coming or arrival. There's the connection. So during this season, Christians focus on the themes of hope, peace, joy, and love.

Often represented by these candles. Sometimes in churches you will see different banners at the front that represent different colors. As I've said, tongue very much in cheek over the years.

I didn't just run out of purple candles. There's a reason for the pink one. And you probably know it. And we'll get there in two weeks if you don't. So each Sunday, we light a candle leading up to

Christmas.

As we've started here this morning. Boy, this is one of my favorite times of the year. Because you can start to sense that Christmas is coming.

[ 4 : 46 ] You heard me say it a moment ago. Houses are decorated with lights. If you live in our big horseshoe crescent, maybe you're one of the only decorated houses like we are.

Stores play festive music. Maybe you've heard it. Have you been in Safeway and suddenly started humming and thought, that's joy to the world. I love this time of year. I've said it before. But I love this time of year in that you hear Christmas carols playing.

Because to me, it's God's way of winking at the rest of the world who doesn't recognize him. Joy to the world. People sing it all the time. What do the words say?

Silent night. People sing it all the time. What do the words tell us? So these beloved Christmas carols that we sing, that the world sings, are just infused with theology and God's message to humanity.

As we talked about a few weeks ago, I was visiting with somebody and I was talking to them about, you may remember a few weeks ago in a sermon, I was talking about being stressed at this time of year, right?

[ 5 : 53 ] And then we flipped all the letters and it spells out, desserts. So all the treats are out as well, right? We're beginning to see that. We're beginning to feel more and more that it's a lot like Christmas.

So this morning, we're beginning this brand new sermon series called, Behold, a Savior is Born. So as we begin this morning, we're going to recognize that thousands of years ago, there were prophets in the Old Testament who wrote about a future day when God would send a Savior to his people.

He would make a way for all things to be healed from the devastating effects of sin. Our sermon this morning is titled, The Promised Hope.

And it's during this season we celebrate that in a dirty stable in Bethlehem so long ago, a baby was born who would change the world by bringing eternal hope.

And I believe that to really enjoy Christmas, you must embrace hope. This happens in so many ways, but one of them I remember from when I was a child.

[ 7 : 06 ] Some of you laugh when I say, oh, that was a long time ago. Not as long as me, Pastor Kent, people say. You're right. But I still feel like this was a long time ago.

So this is not our family tree, by the way. This is just our family tree. Ha ha. Little genealogical joke there. So I remember that I couldn't wait to put together my Christmas wish list.

We would stick them to the fridge. We would put them in envelopes and hand them not so subtly to our parents. Sometimes, I remember, we would bring it clutched in our hands to deliver to Santa in person.

Or mail it to him if it worked out that way. But as a child, leading up to December 25th, I would get up in the morning, early, before anyone else.

Before my parents got up to get ready for work, I would lay on my stomach right under that tree. And I would assess. I would take a look and see what had changed.

[ 8 : 12 ] Were there more? Were they different? Had someone tried to do a little sorcery and mix things around to try and throw us off the scent? I was hoping that the things that I had been longing for that were off that list.

See, my parents were always smart. They didn't ever check off the list, right? The list stayed pristine. So there wasn't a sense that, oh, done, done, done. But I still hoped that some of these things that I was desperately longing for would be wrapped and under that tree, waiting to be opened.

And for me, that was the beginning of a kind of hope. It instilled that in my young heart. But this hope that every child feels is actually pointing to something bigger, something greater and more meaningful than any earthly gift could ever hope to offer.

As fun as it is, I think, to make lists. I still do them. Except I can text them now, which is easier. Making lists, waiting to open presents during the holidays.

The bigger picture behind this holiday is that because of Jesus' birth, we have hope that our greater desires beyond electronics, beyond toys and jewelry or cell phones or anything like that.

[ 9 : 34 ] Things like purpose and meaning and significance. Things like forgiveness and wholeness. Those things, my friends, are available to us.

And those are gifts that we don't have to wait to open. When we place our faith in Jesus, greater things beyond material possessions are available to us.

And that really should fill us with hope. A real kind of deep and lasting hope. That abides in us, no matter what our current circumstances or situation might be.

God gives us signs of hope. In the Old Testament, God's people were waiting and hoping that God would fulfill his promise to bless them.

And through them, bless the entire world. They were waiting and hoping for a Messiah. If you don't know this, the word Messiah means the anointed one.

[ 10 : 39 ] The Messiah would be sent, they believed, to rescue and heal all of creation from the destructive effects of sin. Many of the Jews believed that God's promised Messiah would come as a great military leader.

Who would liberate God's people from the oppression of the Romans. The prophet Isaiah wrote about this hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus. Let's hear the words of Isaiah 7, verse 14. Therefore, Isaiah says, the Lord himself will give you a sign. The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call him Emmanuel.

What does Emmanuel mean again? God with us. God promised to give his people a sign for when this promised and anointed one would finally arrive.

And this was meant to give them something to wait for, to watch for, so that when they saw it, their hearts would indeed be filled with hope. I remember going to visit family at Christmastime when I was little.

[ 11 : 50 ] I remember my aunt and uncle lived on a farm in the far-off metropolis of Westlock, Alberta. Seemed so far. Side note, I remember driving to visit my aunt and uncle in the winter.

No seatbelts, right, because that wasn't really a thing then. I was very little, sleeping on my mom's lap. And icy roads, wintertime, a drunk driver slammed on his brakes and kind of came over into our lane.

My dad slammed on his. I was on my mom's lap and then on the floor looking up at my mom. Vivid memory. There you go. But this was the same trip that I remember going to visit my aunt and uncle, my cousins.

And fortunately, like it seemed like a long trip. It's Westlock's not that far. But we recognized landmarks along the way. So my parents and my two older brothers and I would travel.

And so we watched for those landmarks, whether it was a, you know, a little hill or somebody's barn or something like that. And as we got closer, we, as we saw more, recognized more of these signs, we also got excited that our trip was almost over.

[ 12 : 59 ] What do kids say on long road trips? Thank you. We watch for these signs along the way, though, in anticipation of what was to come.

So hundreds of years before Mary and Joseph ever came to Bethlehem, hundreds of years before there was ever a crowded inn and an old dusty stable, God had spoken through the prophets.

God told his people to watch for a sign, to watch specifically for a virgin who would become pregnant. Now, that's an interesting sign, right?

First of all, this doesn't happen every day, you could say, or ever. In fact, that would be a miracle. I think we can agree.

But this miracle would also indicate that it was coming from God and not from man. That was an important part of that sign. And also that this pregnant woman would give birth to a son and his name would be Emmanuel.

[ 14 : 08 ] Emmanuel. The signs of God, I don't know about you, but the signs of God working in your life, hopefully, are things that you couldn't possibly conceive of having done on your own.

They should be things that only God can do. And that's where hope and faith is born. If I could do things on my own, if you could do things on your own, then we would not have a need for God, would we?

The truth is, we need divine power to save our marriages. To face an unexpected diagnosis.

To kick an addiction once and for all. Or sometimes even to be freed from depression. God shows up, friends, to make things that seem impossible, possible for us.

When a virgin gives birth to a son, that is a work of God. A sign that he can do anything. And so when the angel Gabriel visited Mary, he said, as it is worded in the ESV translation, for nothing, nothing will be impossible with God, Gabriel said.

[ 15 : 32 ] God with us, my friends, is the hope that we need. It's the name that's given to this child that is really interesting in this passage. Emmanuel is, if you know, a Hebrew word that means, as we said, God with us.

So when creation cried out for help, God didn't say, well, you know what, let's hold on, hold on, take it easy. You get your act together first, and then we'll talk about it.

Then I'll come close once you have it at least partly figured out. Instead, God saw all that he had made, and that it needed to be rescued.

And God made the first move towards us. When we were still sinners, God came to us and ultimately died for us.

Paul tells us this in Romans 5, verse 8, where we read, but God demonstrates his own love for us in this. While we were sinners, Christ died for us.

[ 16 : 42 ] God didn't come to us because we deserve it. He didn't come to us because we earned it in some way. He came to us, my friends, because he loves us.

He knew that we could not get ourselves out of the mess of sin that we were in. It was the knowledge that God would return for his people one day that kept the people of God going in their day-to-day lives.

It's what inspired their hope. And today we should be inspired as well, because we know he has come just as he foretold.

One night at dinner, a man who had spent some summers in Maine fascinated his companions by telling of his experiences in a little town named Flagstaff.

The town was to be flooded as part of a large lake for which a dam was being built. In the months before it was to be flooded, all improvements and repairs in the whole town were stopped.

[ 17 : 51 ] What was the use of painting a house if it were to be covered with water? Why repair anything when the whole village was to be wiped out? So week by week, the whole town became more and more bedraggled.

More gone to seed, more woe be gone. Then he added by way of explanation, where there is no faith in the future, there is no power in the present.

Where there's no faith in the future, there is no power in the present. At Christmas, I don't know if you've ever thought about this, but we actually have the luxury of looking back over the Old Testament prophecies and then seeing many of them come to fruition in the birth of Jesus.

So while the Israelites waited for God to come near, we can look back at a God who came and is now with us.

I think far too many of us may have the mentality of the old town that we just heard about. Maybe in our lives, we've stopped believing that God is with us and therefore our circumstances, our lives, good or bad, are as good as they're ever going to get.

[ 19 : 15 ] Maybe we've stopped hoping for a change in the wind, change in direction, or even a bit of new life for us. But friends, it's when we give up hope that it tends to become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

When we lose hope, we stop pursuing our spouse. We may turn to substance abuse or another form of self-medication.

We may lose the will to fight in a given situation or set of circumstances. And then I believe our mind and often our outlook and our attitude as well can become a very dark and dangerous place. But here is the good news today. Friends, there was a virgin who gave birth. That child was and is Emmanuel.

God is with us, my friends. Never lose heart. Never lose hope. The story of Jesus is actually bookended.

[ 20 : 31 ] Maybe you'll think, well, duh. It's bookended by two major events. The first is his birth that we read about in Isaiah 7. The second event is what confirms that our hope is actually in the right place.

The second event we find prophetically spoken about only a few chapters later in Isaiah 53, verse 5. Let's hear that. But he was pierced for our transgressions.

He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was on him. And by his wounds, we are healed.

Hundreds of years before Jesus grew up to be a man. Hundreds of years before he carried out his powerful ministry. Hundreds of years before he would ever be arrested and crucified and killed, Isaiah wrote about how the manger would lead to the cross.

Jesus was pierced in his hands and his feet by nails that held him to that cross. He was crushed and beaten by his accusers. He was punished for offenses.

[ 21 : 49 ] He never committed himself. He received wounds on our behalf. And it's by that suffering that Jesus went through that we have freedom from our own sin and rebellion.

Because, friends, though you and I deserve death and the penalty for all the sinful things we have done, Jesus took it on himself.

Your hope of healing and freedom and wholeness and ultimately eternal life is made possible because of Jesus.

I heard someone once say that if Christmas is the promise, then Easter is the proof. If Christmas is the promise, Easter is the proof.

I think that's such a powerful insight. We celebrate Christmas because we know the resurrection is coming. We've been given the awesome privilege of being offered the hope that we have found in Christ ourselves to others.

[ 22 : 59 ] And what better season than Christmas to do that? It may cost us something. It may be a sacrifice. But considering that all that God has done for you and me, isn't it the least we can do?

David Livingston was a Scottish missionary and explorer. He spent 33 years in the heart of Africa and he endured a great deal of suffering as he labored to spread the gospel and open the continent to missionaries.

And this godly man, this godly missionary once remarked, people talk of the sacrifice I've made in spending so much of my life in Africa. Can that be called a sacrifice which is simply paid back a small part of a great debt owing to our God which we can never repay?

It's emphatically no sacrifice. Say rather, it is a privilege, Livingston said. Anxiety, sickness, suffering, or danger now and then with the foregoing of the common conveniences and charities of this life may make us pause and cause the spirit to waver and the soul to sink.

But let this only be for a moment, Livingston says. All these are nothing when compared with the glory which shall hereafter be revealed in and for us.

[ 24 : 24 ] He says, I never made a sacrifice. Of this we ought not to even talk. When we remember the great sacrifice which he made who left his father's throne on high to give himself for us.

my friends, this holiday season, may our hearts truly be filled with the hope that is ours in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

my prayer for you and for me is that we may be so overwhelmed with gratitude that we will be compelled to serve and sacrifice for others as a way of sharing our hope with the world.

Because friends, our servant king has been born and he has given us an example to follow. What's one way that you can offer someone hope this week?

Maybe it would be by sacrificially giving to an organization or an individual in need. Maybe it would be by writing a letter or a note to encourage someone to share the hope that you have in your life.

[ 25 : 40 ] Whatever it looks like, ask God to show you what to do. Ask him to guide you where he wants you to bring hope. Then listen and act.

May God use each of us to be his agents of hope this Christmas season. God bless you.