

Arrival: Hope

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[0 : 0 0] Welcome here for this Sunday, December 1st. My name is Kent Dixon. It's my joy to be the pastor here. It's that time in the morning when Joan changes aisles. She moves to the other side.

I don't know what that signifies. It's like maybe we get three more weeks of winter. I don't know. Perhaps. There you go.

So thanks to all the decorators. I can't even list all the names because there's lots, but lots of decorations around. So thanks to all the decorators. There's lots of people involved, not only just here in the sanctuary, but out in the foyer, in the gym that we'll enjoy later.

Lots of people have given time and their decorating talents to do that. And so thanks to all the decorators. This morning as we begin the season of Advent, you see a wreath. Maybe you've forgotten it over the past 11 months.

But it's shaped in a perfect circle. And the reason for that is that it symbolizes the eternity of God. And each candle has a significance as well. Each Sunday of the Advent season, we'll be recognizing one of the four virtues that Jesus brings us.

[1 : 1 5] Hope, peace, joy, and love. And this morning I'm lighting our first candle, which represents hope. Today we celebrate the wonder of the season like children on Christmas morning, with our eyes wide open and our hearts full of hope.

And like Jesus, we say, let the little children come to me, for the kingdom of God belongs to them. 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 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 the miraculous birth of Jesus changed the world forever. It's a journey worth celebrating. And for centuries, the church has done just that through the season of Advent.

For those of you who need a refresher on the season, Advent is a significant religious season observed in various Christian denominations. Lots of Protestant churches do not recognize it because they don't necessarily reflect on it.

[2 : 3 9] Particularly in the Western Christian tradition, though, it's something that's recognized. It includes the four weeks leading up to Christmas, starting with today. Starting on the Sunday that's closest to November 30th, which is known as St. Andrew's Day.

And it concludes on December 24th, which is Christmas Eve. Advent serves as a time of preparation. A reflection, of reflection, of anticipation for the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ that we symbolize and celebrate at Christmas.

Do you know what the word Advent means, where it comes from? Advent is derived from the Latin word Adventus or Adventus, which means coming or arrival.

During this season, Christians focus on the themes of, as we talked about this morning, hope, peace, joy, and love, that are represented by the four candles in the Advent wreath.

And we light one candle each Sunday leading up to Christmas as we have started this morning. So there were many prophecies about Jesus' birth, among other things, long before his eventual arrival.

[3 : 49] For many people, these prophesied events gave them great hope. They gave them something to look forward to, in the middle of the suffering and pain that they may have been facing in their lives and in their circumstances.

Today, as we begin this Advent journey together, I'm going to lead us in reflecting and remembering that we also have every reason in the world to be filled with hope because of Christ.

To help frame our time together this morning, we're going to hear the words of Isaiah 9, verse 6. You may know it. Feel free to look it up in your Bible, if you have one with you or from the pew in front of you.

It's a key passage from Scripture that prophesied the birth of Jesus and presents him as the source of future hope for humanity. Let's hear it. Isaiah 9, verse 6.

So this verse heralds the promise of the coming king.

[5 : 04] It says, For to us a child is born, a son is given. This is something that is to come. But what did it feel like to hear this promise originally?

How did the promise, how has it aged over the centuries? The Jewish people faced increasing oppression and destruction from various people and rulers and religious groups.

So to gain a better understanding of this, we've got to dive a bit into Jewish history. And you're thinking, Oh, I thought it was a Christmas series. It's a history lesson?

Well, I have a history major in my undergraduate degree, so too bad. So the anticipation and excitement of the Jewish people regarding the coming Messiah is deeply rooted in their religious and historical beliefs, particularly in the context of Judaism.

It's important for us to understand the concept of the Messiah and the associated hopes that varied across different periods in Jewish history among different Jewish communities.

[6 : 11] So we're just going to take a quick peek at this. Historically speaking, the Jewish people had faced various forms of oppression and persecution and frustration.

And you may know that from learning about the Jewish people throughout Scripture or throughout other studies or things you've learned. So anticipating the Messiah.

Let's look at a brief overview of some of the key events that contributed to the longing that Jewish people had for a Messiah. During the Babylonian exile, that was between 586 and 538 BCE.

Now why is it going backwards, counting down? Because it counts down BCE and then up CE. Hopefully that helps. So the Babylonian exile marked a significant period of suffering and displacement of the Jewish people.

And maybe you know that. They were forcibly removed from their homeland. They experienced oppression and loss of culture and religious freedom. And other historical events, such as the Assyrian conquests, subsequent exiles, also caused the Jewish people to experience immense suffering and a desire to be liberated.

[7 : 28] What about the Roman occupation? Maybe that's more familiar to you. During the time of Jesus and the early Christian era, the Jewish people were, as you probably know, under Roman rule.

The Romans imposed heavy taxes and restrictions on religious practices and often subjected the Jewish people to brutal punishment for dissent, for resisting Roman rule.

So it's these two periods, specifically, that framed the Jewish people's hope for a Redeemer. The Jewish faith, as documented in the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, contains prophecies and promises regarding a future Messiah, just like we heard in Isaiah 9, verse 6 this morning.

The Messiah was expected to be a divine figure who would deliver the Jewish people from their suffering. He was someone who would reestablish their nation, was what they expected.

He was someone who would bring about an era of peace and prosperity for them as a nation. So because of this belief, because of their hope, there were heavy expectations placed on this coming Messiah.

[8 : 42] Pretty hard to meet. Different interpretations and expectations of the Messiah also evolved over time. They were influenced by prophetic writings and religious teaching and even oral tradition that people passed down.

These expectations of the Messiah of the Messiah. And as you may know, some anticipated a great military leader who would overthrow their oppressors, who would lead the people in defeating Roman rule.

Others expected a spiritual leader who would be focused on religious and moral transformation. That would be what he would represent, what his coming would represent.

So the religious and spiritual significance of the Messiah as a central figure in Jewish end-time thinking also fueled excitement.

There was anticipation. The coming of the Messiah would mean the coming of a new age. The Messiah was seen as a fulfillment of divine promises, the promises of God himself, as a manifestation, a tangible, real event of God's intervention into human history.

[9 : 56] So the Messiah represented the hope for a future where the Jewish people would be redeemed, where they would be restored to their homeland, where they would be returned to a time of peace and prosperity.

So all of this, this messianic belief, this messianic understanding and messianic culture provided hope and solace to them during difficult times. It fostered images of a better future and a deep desire for liberation from oppression and suffering.

So different interpretations of the Messiah's role and timing varied among different communities. But the common theme they all shared was this anticipation.

The anticipation of a figure who would bring about a significant transformation in their lives and in their society. Have you ever thought about this and had this background before?

It helps us understand what they expected, what they received, and what the responses were. It's against this historical backdrop that we begin to understand what a verse like Isaiah 9, verse 6 may have meant, may in fact still mean to the Jewish people today, and how we can continue to find hope in the promise of God as we read this same passage.

[11 : 21] Naming our hope. Isaiah 9, verse 6, and we read it a bit together, ascribes several titles to the future Messiah. These are titles that we ascribe to Jesus today, recognizing him as that Messiah.

And those are some of the ways, just some of them, that we understand his role in both the world and in our individual lives. So we're going to take a look at the context and meaning of each of these titles, just for a moment.

Wonderful Counselor. In the original Hebrew, Wonderful Counselor can be understood as Miraculous Advisor or Extraordinary Strategist.

That's a mouthful, right? Try and sing that in a Christmas carol. Jesus, you are an extraordinary strategist. It's true, but it's a mouthful.

It speaks of, Wonderful Counselor, this concept speaks of Jesus' wisdom and his guidance. That he brings supernatural insight and counsel to those who follow him.

[12 : 31] Jesus is seen as the ultimate source of wisdom and guidance, providing unparalleled advice and direction to those who seek him. Wonderful Counselor.

What about Mighty God? Mighty God implies strength and power and sovereignty. It acknowledges Jesus as divine, gives him the power and authority that belong to God.

There's no question. So, in meaning, Jesus is recognized as not just a man or a prophet, but as God incarnate, as the living God who displays divine strength and might.

Mighty God. Everlasting Father. Father. This one, I think, sometimes confuses people. God the Father versus Jesus the Son.

How is God, how is Jesus the everlasting Father? Well, the title emphasizes Jesus' eternal and paternal care for his followers. He is like a father figure to us.

[13 : 42] It doesn't imply, don't, Trinitarians, don't freak out, it doesn't imply that Jesus is God the Father. Separate people. But it suggests that Jesus possesses the ability of a caring and nurturing Father.

Is that helpful to clarify? Jesus is portrayed as having a timeless and enduring love for his people. Providing protection and sustenance and love that will last forever.

The Prince of Peace. I think that's my favorite. The Prince of Peace signifies Jesus as the one who brings peace and harmony and reconciliation, not only between God and humanity, but among people as well.

Jesus is heralded as the one source of true peace, both within individuals and in the world, offering peace with God through salvation and promoting peace and unity among people and among nations.

So it's hard to imagine what these promised titles would have meant to the original recipients of Isaiah's writings. And as we look back, we can probably appreciate the hope that would have been instilled in them in reading and hearing these names.

[15 : 09] These are positive characteristics and qualities and names. hope, the anticipated arrival of a wonderful counselor, a mighty God, an everlasting father, and a prince of peace.

So compared to some of the rulers of their day, now you can imagine some of them, these titles, the qualities that they indicate, would have likely been a very welcome list of attributes for future leadership, right?

There's humility, there's grace, there's love, there's care implied in all these names. So that brings us back to the most amazing truth of this prophetic hope.

It all came to pass 2,000 years ago in Bethlehem, where Jesus was born and the Messiah arrived, arrival.

He brought the kingdom and the promise with him. In Isaiah 9, verse 6, we read the phrase, the government will be on his shoulders, which really is a metaphorical expression that emphasizes the authority, the rule, the dominion that will rest upon the promised Messiah.

[16 : 37] that phrase, the government will be on his shoulders, uses the image of carrying a burden on your back, on your shoulders. It conveys the idea of bearing weight, the weight of governance and authority and responsibility.

The Messiah will rule and govern as a righteous and just leader, and in a manner, not to be missed, that aligns with God's will. today we trust that prophetic description is fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

He is the Messiah who carries the burdens of the world, who rules justly, who has ultimate authority, who provides salvation and grace and guidance to those who follow him.

He is the fulfillment of the promise that we see in Isaiah 6, Christ. And he is the reason that a weary world can rejoice.

Friends, it's in Christ and Christ alone that we place our immediate and eternal hope. We are called to live our lives accordingly as we follow him and share the good news of his arrival and his reign with others.

[17 : 59] this is our calling and our commission to share this good news of Jesus Christ, to spread the message of hope, peace, joy, love, and forgiveness, especially at this time of year.

the holidays can be chaotic, stressful, and as we all know too well, for some people, downright painful.

The memories of years past can flood us with joy or grief and pain. I encourage you this week to take some time to check in with your family.

Check in with your friends and your neighbors. prayers. Pray for them and encourage them. Spur them on, as scripture tells us, to love and good deeds.

And if possible, remind them that our hope, their hope, is not in the perfect gift or the parties or the Christmas bonus from work.

[19 : 13] Our hope is in the one who came to restore and renew. and set all things right again. Jesus is the wonderful counselor, the mighty king, and the prince of peace.

He is the reason for this season. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.