

December 22, 2024

The Fourth Sunday of Advent

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Sermon Title: Get All Excited

Texts: Psalm 96, Titus 2:11-14, Luke 2:8-20

Today is the fourth Sunday of Advent. Advent is a time for inner reflection as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus. It is a time to reflect on the significance of Christ's birth, His first coming but also on the hopeful anticipation of his eventual return and second coming.

It is a good time to reflect on what God done for you, for me, for the world.

There are four Advent themes that help us prepare for Christ's Birth. They are **hope, peace, joy and love**. Those are all positive themes. I don't know about you, but I can get excited about those themes as they apply to Christ birth and our personal lives. **Hope – Peace – Joy and Love.**

First is **Hope**. **Hope** is anchored in the promise of Christ's coming—not only for Christmas, the celebration of Jesus' birth and His first coming but for us to HOPE in anticipation of his second coming.

While there are many prophecies of the coming Messiah in the Bible, no one knew for sure when it would happen. It had been 400 years since the final words of the prophets, testing the hope of even the most faithful. In today's world, we can hardly wait a weeks or even days for something to happen, let alone generations or centuries. But the story of God's people shows us that waiting in hope isn't a "sit back and do nothing" kind of a waiting. Christian hope is active; it is always listening to God, always learning from God, always walking with God.

Hope rooted in faith inspires us to look beyond our immediate circumstances and trust God's faithfulness to his promises. We extend this hope to our everyday lives by acknowledging all the ways God is moving in the world today and focusing on his promises to come.

What is God calling you to do? Maybe God is calling you to serve in a special way in the church or the community. Or perhaps he is prompting you to spend extra time in his word, or in prayer. What can we do to give people hope and getting to know Jesus?

The second theme of Advent is Peace. **Peace** can seem like a distant ideal in a world marked by turmoil, uncertainty, and conflict. Today we think of peace being no wars or conflict. The Hebrew word Shalom has been translated to be "peace" or "peace be with you." But it has a deeper meaning. It means possessing a wholesome and well-being peace. The inner peace of knowing God is with you through your personal challenges and needs. This peace is a constant source of assurance, even when external circumstances challenge us. In the Book of Isaiah, he promised the Messiah would be "... called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, **Prince of Peace**."

God gives us the gift of peace as we draw close and rely on him: *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus”* - (Philippians 4:6-7).

In the next few days consider putting a special emphasis on praying, meditating, and reflecting on Scripture to embrace God’s peace and let us cultivate this peace throughout the year as we worship God in our daily lives, acknowledging our total reliance on God for our needs.

Again, God does not want for us to just sit back and indulge in this peace. He calls us to work along with the Spirit to restore God’s shalom here on Earth

How can you help usher in God’s peace this Christmas season? Some ideas might be to set aside extra time for personal devotions, help a busy or overburdened friend, or provide a meal for a family facing the anxiety of hunger. This is the perfect time to commit to pursuing peace in your life and that of the greater world as we look ahead to the time of personal Shalom:

The third theme is JOY. Joy starts with recognizing the difference between fleeting happiness and enduring joy. While happiness usually describes a feeling based on external circumstances, joy is a deeper, rooted in faith and the assurance of God’s presence, regardless of what’s happening around us. That joy comes from God and our joy is a product of what God has done and continues to do for us. True joy is found in the promises and coming of Christ. This lasting joy provides comfort and strength even in times of struggle.

Biblical joy is not just a feeling but a practice. The joy you experience in acts of service, such as volunteering at our church or helping a neighbor, visiting a shut in, calling family or friends. What gives you great joy and fulfillment. Don’t just experience Joy at Christmas but all year long. Remember the joy we have in Christ is not seasonal. Like the joy of the ancient Israelites, our joy is a response to what God has already done and continues to do.

Today, our joy, fueled by the Holy Spirit, is what God uses to spread his joy throughout the world.

Last but not least is Love Throughout Scripture, God reveals his love as sacrificial, unconditional, and transformative. This profound love is shown through God’s gift of his son, Jesus Christ. “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). This is Advent love, “not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins”

This act of love calls us to respond in turn. We can share and express God’s love in many tangible ways in our lives. Simple gestures, like a kind note, a phone call, or a hot meal, can encourage those around us who may be lonely this time of year. We can demonstrate this love by volunteering our

time or resources to a local shelter, food bank, or toy drive to bless those in need. Another way to show God's love is to pray for those around us regularly. By seeking ways to love and care for others, we embody the spirit of Advent love, reflecting Christ's example in our daily lives.

Unconditional love is a gift from God that surpasses our understanding. It is a love that knows no bounds, that remains steadfast through every season of life. With unconditional love our heavenly Father lavishes us with his grace and mercy.

Now let's see how the themes of Advent play out the scriptures from Luke recording that special night 2000 years ago.

Luke 2:8-20 New International Version

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

**¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."**

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

There is something unique in v.11 that you do not want to miss. Nowhere else in all of the Bible will you find the three words Savior, Christ, and Lord together in one verse.

At the time shepherds were looked down on by many of the regular church leaders and church goes because their daily occupation in the fields left them unable to keep the detail of the ceremonial law. So the religious classes looked down on them as very common people. But God gave the shepherds the honor of being first to hear of the Messiah's coming.

God's moment had arrived. The angel announced to the terrified shepherds, "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord" (2:11).

The shepherds had no gifts – they observed the joy of seeing God's Son

The shepherds lost no time in making their way to Bethlehem. It must have been the most unforgettable moment of their lives. It was something that they couldn't keep to themselves. But there is more: "The shepherds returned to their work as the faithful shepherds they had been before. But there was an added element to their lives. They "returned glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen." They had seen the Messiah. They were eyewitnesses of the coming of the Lord and they couldn't keep it to themselves. We're told that the shepherds "spread the word what had been told to them about this child". If we are Christians, we have come into a living relationship with Jesus and it's our duty to share the good news to a world still in darkness.

When you come to think of it, it's really incredible that the babe lying in the manger was God himself - God in human form, God made man. Yes, it's something you've got to think about. Perhaps if we did think about it more, we should begin to realize how amazing the whole thing is. God and man were united in the one person of our Lord Jesus Christ. The babe in the manger isn't only Mary's child, he's God's Son.

We have much to learn from the Christmas story. It has been over 2,000 years from that holy night and it's only by faith that we can receive the Word of the Angel: "good news of great joy". Let us offer our adoration "to God in the highest" and know his peace. Let us be the example of the Shepherds and return to our day to day lives "glorifying and praising God".

The angel was excited saying, "I bring you news of great **joy** that will be for all the people". This was the best news that the world had ever received. They faithful had waited 400 years for this miracle. The shepherds may have been startled by the drama and awe-stricken by the spectacle before them, but they had no need to be afraid. The angel had hardly finished speaking when God's herald was joined by a crowd of heaven's host. Picture the scene, the night sky suddenly lit by an army of heaven. What a sight! And what a song! "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests". Here we have a declaration of what the coming of Christ means to both God and mankind. God in heaven would be glorified, as he would be revealed as a God of love.

When Christ returns, he will set everything straight and we will see our Savior in all his glory. This will be a day of rejoicing, and this is the eternal hope that we live for now. There is no reason we should not celebrate and acknowledge this. Jesus came once, and he is coming again. In fact, this hope should affect how we live now.

So we can see the four themes being part of the celebration of Christ's Birth.

The **Hope** coming to pass and the hope for us of the second coming when we get to see God face to face

The **Peace** that knowing Him and that he is always with us, through it all.

The **Joy** of knowing Him and being able to share Him with others in our daily lives, by what we do so we can bring Joy to others.

The **Love** of God, as an example for us to love others. To show the love to live and give love. The more we show God's Love the we will experience His love.

You see the Advent themes are not just for Advent but we need to adapt them to our lives. They are all action words and action: HOPE, PEACE, JOY and LOVE.

Can you get excited? Who is God calling you to love today?

May God's hope of the second coming, the inner peace of a personal relationship with God, the joy of sharing God's gifts with others, and God's love surround you, not only during this Advent season but every day of your life. Get all excited, Jesus Christ is Born, His is God's gift to you.

*PRAYER: Dear heavenly Father, We are excited about your gift of Jesus your Son. We thank you for the Hope you give us, the **Peace** we enjoy knowing you, the **Joy** of sharing the talent and skills you have given us to glorify you here on earth. We thank you for your **Love**. Help us to love others generously and unconditionally as you have shown us by example. Jesus name. Amen. Give us the grace to show love to everyone around us.*