

Hope: An Advent Journey

Advent/Christmas Sermon Starters

Nov 29-Dec 27, 2020

DATE

Nov 29 (Advent 1)

TITLE

Heaven on Earth

SYMBOL

Hope

SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 9:6 NIV

Scripture:

Isaiah 9:6 NIV

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Prayer:

Dear God, as we light the Prophecy candle and are grateful for Jesus, give us knowledge to understand what you have spoken through the ages by your prophets and strength and hope to wait until it comes to pass. In Jesus' name, Amen!

Commentary

Isaiah had a prophetic word for the people. The people were in exile and they needed a word of hope. This prophetic word that comes forth through Isaiah is an announcement that would alter the lives of people like never before. It gave the people hope. Hope that made the future something to look forward to experiencing. The interesting caveat to this was there was a wait. We all know that waiting is not easy. Was there hope to help them in the waiting? Was there hope in the middle of dismal circumstances? Was this hope fulfilled?

The hope came in the form of a child named Jesus. The Savior for the world. This Savior was the hope worth the wait. He was the fulfillment of God's promise. Jesus made it possible to experience heaven on earth. The coming of the Savior was the incarnation of God. The existence of God among humankind. The revealing of the prophecy was fulfilled.

What did this mean for the people of Israel? What does this mean for us? Isaiah the prophet tells us in Isaiah 9:6 that this child will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. This was great news to the people of Israel, and it is great news to us today.

Sermon:**Title:**

- Heaven on Earth

Introduction:

Currently gender reveals are a huge highlight during the preparation time for expectant mothers, fathers, their families and friends. Creativity and innovation have become evident in the planning and execution of these monumental moments. The fulfillment of the prophecy was a huge moment during Isaiah's era because the people were waiting for the prophecy to come to pass. Even today, we get excited at gender reveal parties as we await the good news. Is it a boy? Is it a girl? It's a Savior! The greatest prophecy to ever be revealed. What does that mean to us? What does that mean for us?

Points:**Worth the wait**

- The fulfilling of the prophecy was worth the wait.
 - Even if your expectations were different.

Now that you know

- What does it mean to have a Wonderful Counselor?
- What does it mean to have a Prince of Peace?

A Great Moment

- The work of the Holy Spirit in this moment makes it spectacular.
- A Savior who can identify with the pain and suffering of our world and our human experiences.

Illustrations:

- Gender reveal parties.
- It's a boy, it's a girl, it's a Savior.

DATE**Dec 6 (Advent 2)****TITLE****Forgiveness & Grace****SYMBOL****Faith****SCRIPTURE****Micah 5:2 NIV; Isaiah
61:1-2 NASB****Scriptures:****Micah 5:2 NIV**

“As for you, Bethlehem of Ephrathah, though you are the least significant of Judah’s forces, one who is to be a ruler in Israel on my behalf will come out from you. His origin is from remote times, from ancient days.”

Isaiah 61:1-2 NASB

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners; To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord and the day of vengeance of our God.”

Prayer:

Dear God, our world seems to be in constant chaos with despair, hurt and pain caused by the brokenness of humanity. The constant threat of natural disasters from forest fires, hurricanes and earthquakes leave people on edge and unable to fully rebuild and dream of the possibilities of a better future. Pandemics and racism continue to cripple our land and people are trapped in the bondage of anxiety and fear. God, we look to you our liberator and savior to remind us of the good news of hope and freedom through you. Free us today and through your forgiveness and grace, give us hope. In Jesus’ name, Amen!

Commentary

The powerful prophetic words spoken by Isaiah to a people living on the edge of freedom and bondage being given an opportunity to be in right relationship with God again are words of hope to each of us today. These words are a reminder of God as the great liberator who is always available to free us to live a life of hope and peace. The words of liberation declared in Isaiah 61 and referenced by Jesus in Luke’s gospel are still relevant today.

Sermon**Title:**

- Forgiveness and Grace

Introduction:

There is hope for the world and purpose for the local church and as representatives of God on earth, we are called and commissioned to bring Good News. It is news of liberation to those who are trapped in fear and failure and feel there is no hope for them and that life at its best will be a meaningless existence. It is also news of forgiveness and grace to remind people that our sins and mistakes of yesterday cannot keep us from living fully today and tomorrow and that through God's grace we are forgiven and freed to live our lives to the fullest. Go forth in faith and hope holding fast to our faith in Jesus Christ.

Points:**The need for Good News**

- Society on the edge of despair due to a pandemic, historic racism and an uncertain future.
- The media doesn't help and creates even more anxiety when it offers a less optimistic outcome.

Anointed to bring Good News

- Your voice in your church, community and circles of influence is vital for this time in the world.
- What you say matters and there are those waiting with broken hearts to hear that there is a God who cares about them.

The Good News of Grace and Forgiveness

- We are loved by God.
- We are forgiven.
- Grace abounds.

Illustrations:

- Video of someone who comes from difficult times or place.
- Highlight someone in your congregation or life who overcame great odds.
- Liberation.
- Delivery trucks delivering good news.
- Baby delivery / Dr. comes in with news about the delivery (Good News).

DATE**Dec 13 (Advent 3)****TITLE****New Life in Christ****SYMBOL****Joy****SCRIPTURE****Luke 2:8-11 CEB****Scripture:**

Luke 2-8-11 CEB

8Nearby shepherds were living in the fields, guarding their sheep at night. 9The Lord’s angel stood before them, the Lord’s glory shone around them, and they were terrified. 10The angel said, “Don’t be afraid! Look! I bring good news to you—wonderful, joyous news for all people. 11Your savior is born today in David’s city. He is Christ the Lord.

Prayer:

Dear God, help me to be open and present to your glory and all that you want to announce in my life. At times I feel unworthy and wonder why you choose me, but I am grateful, and I surrender to your call and favor for my life. Let me be filled with joy as I look to the future and overcome the fear of what you have in store for me. In Jesus’ name, Amen!

Commentary

An angel suddenly appeared to the shepherds. The angel came out of nowhere. This illuminating site shined brightly among the shepherds. What kind of bright light was it? Was it a star that had fallen? It was the presence of the glory of God manifested in the company of the shepherds as an angel. A moment of uncertainty I am sure. The daily routine of the shepherds was interrupted by an angel. A visit from God.

Visits from God in the form of angels are often met with a myriad of reactions. The most common reactions are fear and curiosity. The question, “what is really happening here?” would be a common sentiment. The truth of the moment was that God was speaking and communicating directly with the shepherds. Have you ever had a moment when God paid you a visit? What happened in that moment? Were you afraid like the shepherds? The fear in the shepherds is like the fear in us. It must be encountered, embraced and dealt with in order for the blessing of God to be received.

Sermon:**Title:**

- New Life In Christ

Introduction:

Have you ever received some news that was too good to be true and you didn’t know what to make of it? Maybe it was that job you interviewed for that you thought was way out of your league and all of a sudden you were made an offer. Or, maybe it’s the surprise of the loan officer when he or she

gives you the news that you are approved to own a home. You may be waiting for a call or visit from the doctor and expecting a grim report but when the call comes the breaking news from the doctor is the tumor that was seen last month has now disappeared. The wait for such news is filled with anxiety and fear. Sometimes even when the news comes, it seems too good to be true that we still have anxiety and fear. But we must all admit, the delivery of good news should be one of the best times of our lives.

During the Christmas season, Amazon trucks will be seen delivering gifts from sunup to sundown. Those receiving these packages can't wait to receive the good news in those packages that may be a gift too good to be true. That is how it is with the gift of Jesus. The gift that is too good to be true. It gives us new life in Christ. But how do we receive it? It was given while we were yet in sin.

Points:

Celebrate the Good News

- Savor the moment when you experience God's goodness.
- Believing that God will come through.
- Be prepared when the good news comes.

Celebrate your faith

- Choose to "look" with your faith and not your sight.
- Make an effort to trust God with every moment.

Celebrate God

- Remember God's mighty acts, the good news of the coming of Jesus.
- Celebrate salvation.
- Celebrate new life in Christ Jesus.
- Beginning and the end... Book end approach to writing and life...Loaf of bread with ends... (Don't throw away your ends)... (Illustration)

DATE**Dec 20 (Advent 4)****TITLE****Emmanuel****SYMBOL****Peace****SCRIPTURE****Matthew 1:23 CEB****Scripture:****Matthew 1:23 CEB**

Look! A virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will call him, Emmanuel.
(Emmanuel means “God with us.”)

Prayer:

Dear God, thank you for being at the beginning and the end of our journeys. It is comforting to know that we are always with you and that the promise of your presence is constant and consistent. Although life brings change and uncertainty, we rest in the promise of your presence. Today, remind us of your promise as we go about the business of living, and we pray that we do not become so busy that we forget about your presence and the importance of remaining grateful for your care. In Jesus’ name, Amen!

Commentary

Matthew’s Gospel is chronologically first in the Protestant New Testament, but scholars do not believe it was the first Gospel to be written. It is thought that Mark’s Gospel was written first, and Matthew and Luke referenced Mark’s gospel, as well as other sources, to build and develop their texts.¹ One of the essential lessons from Matthew’s gospel is not the order in which it was written alongside the other gospels in the Protestant New Testament but the structure in which it was written. The writer used a bookend approach by beginning with 1:23, “Look! A virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will call him, Emmanuel.” (Emmanuel means “God with us.”) and ending with “Look, I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age” (28:20b). It is a strategic way to reassure the reader and the community of faith that God is with us at the beginning and will be with us at the very end; whatever we experience in the middle of life will be okay because God is present.

Sermon**Title:**

- Emmanuel

Introduction:

¹ Olu Brown. *Hope: An Advent Journey* (Knoxville: Market Square Books, 2020), 93-94.

As you light the Angel's Candle (Purple) representing peace, the angels are still announcing good news and peace for the world today. Although the world on the surface doesn't always resemble peace, we pray for the day when there will be harmony and all people will be on one accord. Advent is about realizing the future now and claiming peace before it becomes a reality. Notice, the angel announcing Jesus' birth did not announce Emmanuel (God with us) as a certainty for the future but as a reality for now. In the midst of unrest and uncertainty receive Emmanuel (God with us) and live and walk in peace.

Points:**What's going on in our world?**

- Community
- Homes
- Government
- Schools

What's going on in our lives?

- We often mimic the world and don't always reflect the hope of Christ.
- Challenge to believe and live in faith.

Emmanuel is Hope

- God is present in all aspects of our experiences.
- God is calling us to be Emmanuel disciples and Emmanuel Churches by proclaiming peace and living lives of peace.

Illustrations:

- Beginning and the end of a journey.
- A set of bookends with books in the middle.
- A loaf of bread with end pieces holding the loaf together.

DATE

Dec 24 Christmas
Eve

TITLE

Claim the Christ

SYMBOL

Christ

SCRIPTURE

Luke 2:14 CEB

Scripture:**Luke 2:14 CEB**

Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors.

Prayer:

Dear God, on Christmas Eve, we celebrate the birth of our Savior and like the shepherds in the field who received the good news, we claim and receive Christ this Christmas. Thank you for the blessing of our Savior. In Jesus' name, Amen!

Commentary

Many faith communities light the Christ Candle on Christmas Eve and the atmosphere shifts from anticipation to fulfillment as Christmas morning is just hours away. "The Christ Candle represents the light that the Son brought into the world when he was born a little baby, God in the flesh. The fact that the Advent candles remain on Christmas Eve puts the focus on this special moment of birth, the moment of transition from prophecy to fulfillment."² The culmination of Advent is filled with joy because the promises and prophecy of God are coming to pass and we join the legacy of those who waited on the words of Isaiah to become a reality and through Jesus, the prophecy was fulfilled. Rejoice all people because God's promises have come to pass, and it is good news for all the world. "The fulfillment of the promise and prophecy is not only for you, but for the world that awaits the coming Christ and their own fulfillment of God's promises and prophecies. Allow the light of Christ to guide you and to keep you and know that Christ will never leave you nor forsake you. The light and presence of Christ will be your Heaven on Earth, and although you may have lamented more than you would have liked to and found yourself crying more than praising, hold on in faith."³ Claim Christ this Christmas and live in true joy.

Sermon**Title:**

- Claim the Christ

² G. Goebel. *What is the Christ Candle?* Anglican Compass. <https://anglicancompass.com/christ-candle/>. (2017, December 24). Accessed July 16, 2020.

³ Olu Brown. *Hope: An Advent Journey* (Knoxville: Market Square Books, 2020), 114.

Introduction:

The wait is over, and Christmas has arrived. Rejoice all people and hold your heads up high because God's promises have been fulfilled and "Unto us a child is born." This Christmas, God is challenging us to claim Christ and rest in the fulfillment of the promise being fulfilled of our Savior being born. With all of the turmoil and unrest in the world, we cannot lose focus on Jesus and how we have grace and peace at hand; if we choose Christ, our lives will be radically different from the world in which we live. Claim and choose Christ today and Christmas will never be the same.

Points:**Christmas is not an ordinary day**

- On Christmas Eve, as we await the birth of Christ, God is reminding us of hope.
- Our hope is not in the world but in Christ.

The greatest gift on Christmas

- The gifts we exchange and receive under trees in our homes brings joy, but the eternal joy we seek that will never end or expire is the joy of our Savior.
- Today you have an opportunity to receive the greatest gift you will ever receive in your life.

Give your gift away

- When the shepherds saw Mary, Joseph and Jesus, they were filled with joy and went and told others what they had seen.
- The joy of Jesus is so fulfilling that we cannot keep it to ourselves. We have to share it with the world. This Christmas give Jesus to the world.

Illustrations:

- Gifts under a tree.
- Gift sharing experience.

DATE

Dec 27 1st Sunday
after Christmas Day

TITLE

2021

SCRIPTURE

Luke 12: 22-34 CEB

Scripture:

- **Luke 12:22-34 CEB**

²² Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Therefore, I say to you, don’t worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. ²³ There is more to life than food and more to the body than clothing. ²⁴ Consider the ravens: they neither plant nor harvest, they have no silo or barn, yet God feeds them. You are worth so much more than birds! ²⁵ Who among you by worrying can add a single moment to your life? ²⁶ If you can’t do such a small thing, why worry about the rest? ²⁷ Notice how the lilies grow. They don’t wear themselves out with work, and they don’t spin cloth. But I say to you that even Solomon in all his splendor wasn’t dressed like one of these. ²⁸ If God dresses grass in the field so beautifully, even though it’s alive today and tomorrow it’s thrown into the furnace, how much more will God do for you, you people of weak faith! ²⁹ Don’t chase after what you will eat and what you will drink. Stop worrying. ³⁰ All the nations of the world long for these things. Your Father knows that you need them. ³¹ Instead, desire his kingdom and these things will be given to you as well. ³² “Don’t be afraid, little flock, because your Father delights in giving you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions and give to those in need. Make for yourselves wallets that don’t wear out—a treasure in heaven that never runs out. No thief comes near there, and no moth destroys. ³⁴ Where your treasure is, there your heart will be too.

Prayer:

Dear God, thank you for a joyous Advent and Christmas season, as we continue to celebrate the presence of our Savior. You gave us the greatest gift in the world, and we will live in the light of Christ forever. Although 2020 was a difficult year, we believe in faith that the promise of your presence is with us in 2021. In Jesus’ name, Amen!

Commentary

In Luke 12, Jesus offers several warnings that are still present and pressing in our lives today. Specifically, Jesus warned his followers about being consumed in fear and worry. Both of these recognizable emotional states can throw a person into despair and cause them to relinquish their rightful roles as God’s favored and blessed people. Fear and worry are dangerous because they are contextual, and if left unchecked can consume one’s life. Jesus’ modern-day application to Luke 12 would read, “I know 2020 was an extremely difficult year, and although you have concerns about 2021, don’t be afraid and don’t worry. There is nothing in the New Year that you cannot face as long as I am with you.” Luke 12 is a reminder of “Emmanuel” in Matthew 1:23 and a challenge for us to rest and not be afraid or to worry in God’s presence.

Sermon

Title:

- 2021

Introduction:

Now that the Christmas ornaments have been packed away and you have eaten all of the holiday food you can consume, you are facing the future, the end of one year and the beginning of a new year. In 2020, close to thousands of people in the U.S. died from COVID-19, and there is a deep concern about the future. It is my hope that you don't spend this new year in fear and worry but trust that God's grace is always present. Whatever you go through in 2021, God will be going through it with you.

Points:

Don't Worry

- We are more valuable to God than lilies in the field and God cares for them so God will care for us.
- Worrying is not about God's ability to care for us but our ability to trust in God.

Don't Fear

- All fear is not bad but fearing the future because of the past is not faith but doubt.
- Don't let 2020 hinder your dreams, plans and goals for 2021.

Stay Positive

- What we listen to and watch matters and the more we consume negative commentary, the possibility of despair and depression increases.

Stay Curious

- In these unsettling times don't lose your love for life and dare yourself to live boldly in the new year.

Illustrations:

- Song: "Happy" by Pharrell Williams.