

GLENKIRK CHURCH



WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

The DEVO

NOVEMBER 21 - 25, 2022

HOPE LOVE

Peace Joy

practicing
Christmas

ADVENT & CHRISTMAS 2022

SERMON SERIES

Nov 27 - Jan 1

MONDAY

Read **Psalm 62:5-8; Isaiah 9:6; Luke 2:4-20**

The late Tom Petty—Pastor Tim Peck’s favorite rockstar—sang, “The waiting is the hardest part.” Ancient Israel knew this—the Jews’ anticipation of the long-awaited, promised Messiah intensified by the first century. God’s prophets had been silent for 400+ years, stirring expectations. In the Old Testament’s last book, Malachi prophesied regarding the Christ: “... *the Lord (Messiah) whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple ... He is coming, says the LORD (Yahweh) of hosts ... like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap*” (Malachi 3:1-2).

This coming Sunday opens the Advent season. “Advent is a word with Latin roots and means ‘coming.’ Christians use this period ... to prepare for the celebration of Jesus’ birth. It’s also a time of repentance and meditation while anticipating Jesus’ second coming. Advent is a season rich in wonder as we focus on the incarnation of God.” (Crosswalk.com) Ancient Israel eagerly awaited the Lord’s arrival. Sadly, however, many of them rejected Him even while He walked among them.

Rome occupied Israel beginning in 63 B.C., later revoking the Jews’ right to execute capital punishment—this explains the Sanhedrin’s persistence in maneuvering Pontius Pilate, Rome’s representative, into sentencing the Man Jesus of Nazareth to death. Genesis 49:10 states, “*The scepter will not depart from Judah ... until Shiloh [Peace] comes and the allegiance of the nations is His*”—ancient rabbis interpreted

Rome's revoking Israel's right to execute "criminals" as a sign of Messiah's coming. That Roman edict was issued in 6 A.D. as the boy Jesus was growing up in Nazareth.

Historians indicate that several false messiahs were on the scene around the time of Jesus, representing Israel's general expectation that its Messiah would arise to throw off Roman shackles and restore Israel's former glory. However, the "insurrection" that Jesus led was one of the heart—His redemptive mission and kingdom are spiritual, not political nor military.

During this Thanksgiving week, we consider several figures prominent in the first Advent story. Like them, are you ready for Christmas?

"Arise, shine, for your Light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you" (Isaiah 60:1). Wise people still seek, serve and worship Him, faithfully awaiting Christ's return!

QUESTIONS

How does "Advent" relate to Christmas? Why was ancient Israel so expectant of the Messiah during the first century A.D.? What's the irony of Genesis 49:10 and how the ancient rabbis interpreted it?

PRAYERS

Please pray, during this Thanksgiving week and recent election season, that God would bless our country and its leaders—both local and national—with godly wisdom. Pray for revival in our country!

TUESDAY

Read **Luke 2:25-38; Job 19:23-27; Psalm 27:13-14**

Job—the Bible’s earliest penman, living centuries before Christ—professed amidst excruciating trials, *“For I know that my Redeemer lives ... whom I shall see for myself ...”* (Job 19:25-27). God later declared through Jeremiah, *“[Blessed is the one who] understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD...”* (Jeremiah 9:24). Upon Mary and Joseph bringing eight-day-old Jesus to Jerusalem’s temple for dedication and circumcision, Simeon praised God, saying, *“My eyes have seen Your salvation ... a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel”* (Luke 2:30-32).

Anna and Simeon represented the Jewish faithful remnant, those worshipping God *“in spirit and truth”* (John 4:24) while *“[waiting] upon the LORD”* (Isaiah 40:31). They recognized the Lord even as a newborn as He was carried into the temple. And though Anna was the prophetess, it was Simeon who shared stunning prophecy. This baby would become a Man whose mission would distinguish the saved from the lost, *“[separating] the sheep from the goats”* (Matthew 25:32). Concurrently, Jesus’ redeeming sacrifice came at great cost, including His own mother’s piercing heartbreak.

Lest we underestimate the faithful patience of Anna and Simeon, remember that both were elderly, having awaited the Messiah for many years. Anna was then 60+ years a widow—those generally on

Israel's lower societal rung—serving and worshiping at the temple while awaiting the Savior. Both persisted despite 400+ years of prophetic silence between Malachi's prophecies and John the Baptizer's later King-heralding ministry.

God-honoring Jews were those forming the earliest Christian church. Like “doubting Thomas” about 33 years later, Anna and Simeon recognized Jesus as “my Lord and my God!” (John 20:28). “[Anna’s] name ... means ‘favor’ or ‘grace.’” (GotQuestions.org) Simeon’s name is derived from the Hebrew verb meaning “to hear.” (Abarim Publications) Because both Anna and Simeon had “eyes ... [that] see, and ... ears [that] hear” (Matthew 13:16), they knew God’s favor and grace.

Perhaps you know an “Anna” or “Simeon.” If so, encourage them and learn from their examples. Stay faithful and committed amidst the trials and brokenness of this world, awaiting the Lord’s return while serving Him, fellowshiping with Christian brothers and sisters, and loving others in Jesus’ name.

QUESTIONS

Why were Anna and Simeon in the temple when Mary and Joseph came there to dedicate Baby Jesus? How was Simeon’s prophecy bittersweet? How do the meanings of Anna’s and Simeon’s names relate to this day’s featured story?

PRAYERS

Pray for those who go without, those on the fringe who are often marginalized and dismissed. Ask God to bless them, and to stir you, and others, to be increasingly generous and charitable toward the less fortunate.

WEDNESDAY

Read **Matthew 1:18-25, 5:7-9; Luke 23:34**

One of the marks of a mature believer is an inclination toward forgiving. A merciful heart is a grateful one, a heart appreciating all that we are forgiven in Christ. The faithful Christian with such a heart is not easily offended, not dead set on “pressing their rights” when those rights are violated. Jesus’ displays of righteous indignation were never regarding His own mistreatment, but in response to others being exploited or otherwise abused.

Jesus’ stepfather, Joseph, possessed a surrendered, peaceful, merciful heart. By ancient Jewish law he had the right to have his pregnant fiancée, Mary, stoned for apparent unfaithfulness—adultery was a capital offense. Even before learning that her pregnancy came by the Holy Spirit, however, Joseph decided not to press his rights, but to quietly end their relationship. He took the route of peacemaker, doing the right thing even when it was enveloped with heartbreak. God chose the right man as Jesus’ stepfather.

Even after learning and accepting that his betrothed would bear God’s Son and Israel’s Messiah, Joseph’s life would remain challenging. They would live in a then-obscure, small farming village—the prospects for economic prosperity were limited for a lowly carpenter in ancient Nazareth. Some Nazarenes may have seen Mary as unfaithful. Rather than considering Joseph the righteous, peaceful man he was, those

same people perhaps believed him to be the pathetic, gullible husband of a shameless adulteress.

Yet Joseph, who gets far too little attention in Christendom for his role and character, was ideally suited to serve as the Christ's legal guardian. And don't forget that among his children were two penmen of New Testament books, James and Jude. Jesus' half-brother, James, also became the de facto leader of the early Jerusalem church. Joseph's legacy is substantial.

When you believe that your "rights have been violated," do you press for them regardless of the consequences, automatically "seeking justice" regarding your "offender"? Or do you display a heart like Joseph's, acting based upon the greater good and God's kingdom purposes? Is "being in the right" more important to you than peacemaking? Learn from Jesus' faithful stepfather, Joseph of Nazareth.

QUESTIONS

Why should a mature Christ follower not always be focused upon "pressing for their rights"? In what ways did Joseph demonstrate his faithfulness and fitness for the role of Jesus' stepfather? What are some elements of Joseph's legacy?

PRAYERS

Pray that God would grant each of us more forgiving, grateful natures. Ask Him for a heart more like His—a heart that willingly sacrifices, aches for the lost, and is able to love the "unlovable."

THURSDAY

Read **Luke 1:26-55; John 2:5, 19:25**

How appropriate that on this Thanksgiving Day we consider the story of our Lord Jesus Christ's mother, the Virgin Mary! This unsuspecting, otherwise nondescript teenaged girl—pledged to marry Joseph the carpenter—would have her life turned upside down by the news of how God would use her. And the birth of Mary's Son, God's Son and the Savior of fallen creation, would be the marker and turning point for all of history.

Mary's response upon learning of God's miraculous work through her? The glorious "Magnificat," chronicled in today's Luke 1:46-55. What better praise song to share than this on Thanksgiving Day: *"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He ... has done great things for me, and holy is His name! ... He has filled the hungry with good things."*

As touched upon the past two days, however, Mary's life thereafter would be anything but easy. She, along with her husband Joseph, would likely be the subjects of vicious rumors. Her claim to be the Messiah's mother was likely ridiculed by some as delusional or a desperate attempt to deflect shame. And as Simeon prophesied in Jerusalem's temple at Baby Jesus' dedication, due to His sacrificial mission and its resultant, brutal crucifixion, *"a sword will pierce through [her] own soul also"* (Luke 2:35).

Mary's veneration by one church denomination borders on idolatry. She is not divine, nor is she our rightful intercessor—that role is the Redeemer's alone. However, Mary is generally underappreciated among Protestant denominations. We sometimes forget that the Bible declared her "*highly favored (of God)*" (Luke 1:28) and "*blessed ... among women*" (1:42). Unlike all of the apostles except John, Mary loyally and brokenheartedly witnessed the crucifixion, her Son's humiliating, torturous flogging, and His execution. She courageously faced the "sword [that would] pierce [her] own soul."

As you enjoy your Thanksgiving Day meal today, remember Mary and thank God for the devotion and bravery He gifted to her. Ask the Lord for a measure of Mary's joy amidst the challenges of a fallen world, for the strength to endure faithfully and finish well. Consider incorporating an excerpt from her "Magnificat" when praying thankfully today.

QUESTIONS

Why did the Virgin Mary praise God via her "Magnificat"? What are some ways in which Protestant denominations sometimes seem to undervalue Mary? How did Mary exhibit unique courage, loyalty and love?

PRAYERS

On this Thanksgiving Day, thank and praise God for His goodness and mercy, for loving us enough to send Jesus, God the Son, to secure our salvation. Ask God to stir and embolden you to share the Gospel lovingly with friends and family on Thanksgiving.

FRIDAY

Read **Matthew 2:1-12; Micah 5:2-5a**

Church Christmas tradition offers that three “*wise men from the east*” (Matthew 2:1) visited Mary, Joseph, and Jesus. This relates to the three gifts these travelers offered the Christ child; however, the Bible doesn’t indicate that there were three Magi. It’s more likely that they were part of a greater caravan journeying hundreds of miles to honor the infant Lord and Redeemer. Regardless, they manifested Jesus’ teaching, “*It is more blessed to give than to receive*” (Acts 20:35).

Their worshipful gifts of adoration were prophetic: gold for a king, “*the King of kings*” (Revelation 19:16); frankincense (incense) representing prayer to our “*Great High Priest*” (Hebrews 4:14); and myrrh, an embalming material used to prepare corpses for burial, recognizing the sacrificial “*Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world*” (John 1:29).

God revealed His redemptive plan through the Messiah to these eastern “*wise men*” despite their seeming lack of access to Scripture or other believers. Perhaps this addresses the “What about those who have never heard about Jesus?” question—I believe that God reveals Himself somehow to all who would receive Him, “*unwilling that any should perish*” (2 Peter 3:9). The fact that these Magi from a distant land—themselves clearly not Jewish and their scriptural access unclear—knew the Christ child is both glorious and greatly encouraging.

Some speculate that the Magi came from Babylon, that they were of an order that served under Daniel amidst Judah's Babylonian captivity. Regardless of their origin, their coming also reinforces that while Jesus was "*the Son of David*" (Matthew 12:23), He was also "*the Son of Man*" (Matthew 20:28)—Jesus is not only Israel's Messiah, but the Savior of all humankind. Thus, Simeon called eight-day-old Jesus "*a Light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel*" (Luke 2:32).

In this Advent season of expectation and giving, whom do you know who has not yet received God's free gift of salvation in Christ? How can you reveal to them "*the Light of the world ... the Light of life*" (John 8:12)? Shine His light before them to the glory of God the Father!

QUESTIONS

How many "*wise men*" or Magi visited Mary, Joseph and the infant Jesus? What did their three gifts for the Christ child symbolize? What does the Magi's knowledge of Christ tell us about God's redemptive plan?

PRAYERS

Thank God for His grace, for ensuring our adoption into His eternal family in Christ. Pray to Him regarding specific people you know—family, friends, neighbors—who may not know Jesus. Ask Him to stir their hearts, drawing them closer to the Lord.

Sources

- Tom Petty's quoted lyrics are from his song, "The Waiting" (Music and lyrics by Tom Petty; released April 1981, Backstreet Label).
- Crosswalk.com's quote is from <https://www.crosswalk.com/special-coverage/christmas-and-advent/the-wonderful-significance-of-each-advent-candle.html>.
- GotQuestions.org's quote can be found at <https://www.gotquestions.org/Anna-the-prophetess.html>.
- Abarim Publications' quote is from <https://www.abarim-publications.com/Meaning/Simeon.html>.

