

Sunday, November 29, 2020 ADVENT 1

Philippians 2: 5-7 Matthew 1:18-25

The Backstory to Jesus' Birth

Advent begins today and with this new Christian year beginning we ask the question- what does this mean? Advent is a time of waiting. But what are we waiting for? For many people this season which prepares us for celebrating Jesus' birth is a waiting time for everything to be as it should not perfect, but as it should. We know that this year Advent and Christmas is not what we anticipated will occur. With the Health Unit's code red coming to Windsor Essex starting tomorrow it is hopefully being carried out in order to prevent a lockdown when we really want to be with family members. But just what are we waiting for this Advent?

This year's theme for Advent is "Home Alone and Christmas Promises". In 1990, Home Alone, a Christmas based family movie came out and soon became a classic to watch through these past 30 years. It focuses on a young boy who is accidently forgotten at home while the rest of the family takes a family vacation during the holidays. It is watching the boy's emotions and actions during his time 'Home Alone' that will help us throughout advent to see what God's promises are all about as God sent Jesus to us. Kevin McAllister is left home alone. Many of us know what this means because of the stay home orders we have received in past months. Yet Kevin is alone and what does he do? At first he is worried and upset as he realizes that he is alone. Then he then receives being alone as a gift when normally he is surrounded by his family, extended family and the activities and busyness of the household. In these moments when he realizes he is alone, he explores and discovers his home and then makes the best of the situation knowing he has to eat and sleep and just be.

We are familiar with this time of discovery when we were told to stay home. Many people explored their homes which led to purging their belongings, cleaning out closets, painting rooms and even getting outside and working in a flower or vegetable garden for the first time this past summer. There was freedom to do what you wanted to do—sleep in, wear pyjamas all day, eat what and when you wanted and watch Netflix or movies at any time. There was a freedom of eating and sleeping and just being.

In Old Testament times life was difficult and God saw this and he promised his faithful people that there would come One who would save them from their sin and that they would live with freedom. For generations the cycle repeated itself- people followed God's law and lived as

he intended. But then there was a turning away and living with no laws, guidance or direction and ultimately against God's rules of life. The people experienced freedom but did so against God's plan. This might be difficult for us to understand because we wonder if we hundreds of years later whether we really have freedom to choose how we live or if we will have it again like we felt we did in January and February. But God made a promise to the people.

In Isaiah 7:14, "therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look the young woman is with child and shall bear a son and shall name him Immanuel." This promise was shared with Joseph through a dream because he had thought of abandoning Mary when she told him she was pregnant. In the dream, he was not to be fearful of taking Mary as his wife for the baby she carried was from the Holy Spirit. She would bear a son who was to be called Jesus. And this infant will save his people from their sins. He would become the Saviour that the prophet had spoken would come.

We must remember that the story of Jesus' birth did not start the night he was born in Bethlehem. Prophecies were abounding for the need of a redeemer or one who would change the course of human history. God had a choice and he chose to become a weak human child. God chose to come to earth to be the sacrifice for all people.

An old hymn by Emily Elliot was written to convey the message that God's plan for Jesus' birth took form long before that night in the stable. "Thou didst leave Thy throne and Thy kingly crown, When Thou camest to earth for me; But in Bethlehem's home was there found no room for Thy holy nativity." God left heaven's throne room to be born as a human being and placed in a feed trough. But it is God who became flesh in the person of Jesus the Son. And Jesus who is God, who gave up splendor and glory for suffering and shame. He took upon himself the role of a servant and became human. Jesus emptied himself for us, that is, he set aside his heavenly home and in great humility became human. Jesus mind set is clearly one of servanthood and self sacrifice, long before he took the basin and towel and washed his disciples' feet, long before he went to the cross and allowed himself to be sacrificed as the one who took our sin upon him.

This is Jesus who remember comes to us in human flesh at Christmas. This is Jesus who was with God in the beginning. John 1:1-2 states, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning." God really loved us and loves us still. Not only was Jesus willing to come to earth, he chose to come to save us from ourselves and our sin. And God, the Father was willing to send Him to accomplish

this purpose for all of eternity. The Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the World. What does this mean for us as we begin Advent 2020? The meaning of Christ's birth will hold significance if we allow 3 things to occur. 1) To open our hearts with the hope that God's Spirit might enter. We must open ourselves up to receive what God has in store for each of us during this Advent season for we do not know where God's Spirit will meet us. 2) Currently we must wear masks to gather as God's people, but we cannot mask the purpose of Jesus' coming with tinsel, lights, and gifts. We need to fully understand that God just didn't say let's interrupt human history at one point and see what happens. God F,S and Spirit, planned all which was to take place. So be sure not to get tangled up in the lights and busyness of what has to be done, but just be. And 3) Paul's words to the Ephesians (3;17-19) states that Christ dwells in our hearts through faith if we are and as we are rooted and grounded in love. We must also have the power to comprehend like those saints who faithfully served in their time, to know that Christ's love surpasses any knowledge so that we will be filled with the fullness of God.

So what do we do as we wait in this season of Advent. We must realize the freedom we have right where we are. Like Kevin, we need to take in our surroundings, the decorations, the lights, and realize that yes we have experienced losses, but as we are present in this moment, God's Spirit is touching your life. As we are present in these days of waiting to see what unfolds next, we need to realize that God has been there before and we are not alone.

Joseph took Mary as his wife not fully comprehending what the angel had shared with him in the dream. He came to understand that life with Mary and her baby would not be what he had first intended with his small carpentry shop in the village where his family had been living for many years. But he soon came to know that the Baby she carried was like no other.

God sent Jesus from heaven to save us. How can we not rejoice and express our gratitude to freely choose to follow him? We must have hope and carry on. We must believe and like Kevin take in the freedom we have and just be. For as we know the world changes every moment and every day. Let us have hope in our hearts as we carry on this journey of faith and hear again Christmas promises fulfilled in the manger.

Let us pray:

Holy God of grace and love, we praise you for loving us so much that you sent Jesus to live on earth and to be like us so that he could understand our human limitations. Help us in this time of waiting to turn to you, to open our hearts, to freely give our thanks for Jesus coming and to be grounded in love. Hear our prayers as we offer them to you. SILENCE> Amen.