

Christmas is the Beginning of a Life-Changing Journey

Christmas is here. The anticipation of the birth of Jesus Christ has now become reality. For kids, Christmas Day is the pinnacle. They are eager to open the gifts that are under the tree. A child's anticipation may have gained momentum with a request to Santa Claus. For adults, however, it is a much richer story.

Christmas is the celebration of the birth of Christ, and we know that historic event is only the beginning of a new journey of life. Jesus Christ came to earth to bring us hope, peace, joy and a pathway to salvation. This devotion highlights some of the messages of the Advent season that illustrate that the birth of Christ is the beginning of a life-changing journey, not only in biblical times but for us today.



The first Sunday of Advent the message focused on **Hope**. On Santa's lap children express their hopes for a particular gift, one that would bring them much enjoyment for the immediate future. Adults, however, know that the Hope that Jesus offers is not something from a wish list. Hope is a desire for an eternal future, a trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and an assurance of what is to come.



May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:13). Hope is the anchor onto which we hold through the difficult times of our lives, but it is much more than that. We know that good times are ahead. Our Hope is that our faith will lead us to the promise made by God to be fulfilled in us.

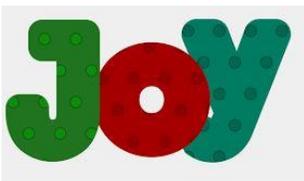
Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope set before us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. (Hebrews 6:17-19). The assurance that Hope will be fulfilled to the faithful helps us to deal with the difficult circumstances of our daily life. And we know that Jesus will return and He will bring an end to death, disease and suffering.

Advent also focused on **Faith**. *Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see (Hebrews 11:1).* The Bible contains many promises, and we know that God will honor all His promises. *Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!" (Luke 1:45).*



Without faith, we will miss the point of why Jesus came to live among us. Because of our faith we know that God can make good things come from even the most undesirable circumstances that we face. *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28).* Fixing our eyes on Jesus, we can rise above or pass through whatever troubles us. *And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith (Hebrews 12:1-2).*

Thirdly, Advent focused on **Joy**. The Joy of your salvation has nothing to do with the events of our earthly world. We may be terrified at times, but remember what the angel said to shepherds in the field: *But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people (Luke 2:10).* Did you catch the last four words: "for all the people"? That includes you and me. God wants you to know that the "great joy" can bring you through life's circumstances. There may be many disappointing things going on in this world, but to a follower of Christ, they don't need to be the priority. Let your eternal future be your priority. Jesus' birth makes that possible. "Joy to the world, the Lord has come!"



And fourth, the Advent message is for us to experience **Peace**. Peace comes from leaving behind the stresses, burdens and busyness of life to spend time with God. Jesus said, *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27).* Jesus knows we face a life full of challenges. He said, *"I have told you*

these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33).

Pastor Elliott Lutz gave the example of the shepherds who left their flock to come and spend time with the baby Jesus. It was a transformational. Yes, they returned to their flock and responsibilities, but as changed people. We also can escape from our burdens and spend a quiet time with God. We still have to face life, but we do it as a changed person. *And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7).*



So, how do we experience the Hope, Faith, Joy and Peace that Jesus offers to us? The final song of a worship service I recently watched on my computer talked about giving our life to God, just as He gave his life for me. It encouraged us to not let life distract us from our walk with Christ. The lyrics of the song said, “Lead me to the cross where your love poured out. Bring me to my knees, Lord. I lay me down.” The hopes, joys and peace are a gift from Jesus to the faithful because He loves us. The Bible tells us, *Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us (Romans 5:5).* The song continued, “Rid me of myself, I belong to you. Oh Lead me, Lord, Lead me to the Cross.” Jesus’ birth is not the finale, but the beginning of a new, life-changing relationship with Jesus. It is the beginning of a wonderful journey.

Closing Prayer: Lord. We are changed people because of Jesus, who came to us at Christmas. We acknowledge the hope for eternal life because of our faith in Jesus Christ. And because of our deepening relationship with Him we seek joy and peace in our lives. Amen.

Acknowledgements: Many of the points made in this devotion are based on sermons during Advent 2020, at Fountain of Life Lutheran Church (Pastor Elliott Lutz and guest pastor Mark Schroeder). The song, “Lead Me to the Cross” was part of a worship service at Westover Church, Greensboro, NC.