

Rev. Janet Doyle
Elmer Presbyterian Church
First Sunday in Advent
Sunday, November 27, 2022
Scripture: Genesis 12: 1-3
Luke 1:26-45

Sermon: Be Born In Us Today: Bringing Blessing

Today is the first Sunday of Advent 2022. It is hard to believe, isn't it? The Advent season comprises the four weeks before Christmas. It is an old tradition dating at least as far back as the 400s when the early church observed a period of preparation leading up to Christmas.

Advent is a time when we prepare our hearts and minds, remembering the first coming of God's Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. The word "ADVENT" means "TO COME," and as we recall God coming as Jesus, divine and human, Immanuel, "GOD WITH US," we are also preparing and anticipating Christ's second coming and his return.

We are all decorated in our sanctuary for Christmas, and we lit our Advent Wreath this morning led by our Deacons. The Advent Wreath is a fairly recent tradition in church history. The first Advent Wreath was invented by a German pastor in 1839. It was used as a means to countdown to Christmas for the children. Today we lit the candle of HOPE. The other candles are PEACE, JOY, and LOVE.

Hope is an important theme to Christmas, and especially relating to the Advent season as we journey to Bethlehem. Our world is in desperate need of hope. Many people live without hope or have given up hope. But Christ came to bring hope and light to a world in darkness.

Advent is also about waiting. It is a time when we remember the long period of waiting that preceded the first coming of Christ and also a time when we reflect on our own season of waiting for the second coming of Christ.

That first period of waiting stretched all the way from Genesis to Matthew, from Adam and Eve to Joseph and Mary, and from the Garden of Eden to the manger in Bethlehem.

Even with the judgment in the Garden of Eden there was still hope, and it continued on in the form of prophecies throughout the Old Testament.

In Genesis 12, God called Abraham and promised him: *“I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”* (Genesis 12: 2-3)

God fulfilled this promise by bringing the nation of Israel out of Abraham, and through the nation of Israel, God continued to give promises about this special individual who would bring blessing to all the peoples of the earth.

In Genesis 12, God is initiating a relationship with Abraham. God wanted to bless Abraham and God’s goal is to bless. The same blessing he gave to Adam and Eve are now given to Abraham. But Abraham and Sarah, his wife, have been unable to have a baby and they are older now, but God promises to bless Abraham and his descendants, saying that they will one day bless the world. God is about blessing people, and he uses his people in order to accomplish this purpose.

God called Abraham into a relationship with him, and it was a relationship of blessing with Abraham. God does bless us when we are connected to him. Abraham trusted in God and followed God because he believed in his promises. The curse of sin was replaced by blessings. It will be a blessing so great that its effect will extend to “all the families of the earth.” God, in his mercy and grace, came to Abraham with his blessings.

God clearly tells Abraham that he will bless him. But God didn’t immediately pour out his blessing on Abraham. God first tested Abraham and found him obedient. Abraham showed his obedience and his call to faith in his willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac.

When Abraham obeyed God we read how God responded. Genesis 17:18, says, “*And in your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because you have obeyed my voice.*”

Today, as believers in Christ, we are Abraham’s offspring. We are called to obedience and faith. Obedience is part of Abraham’s call. This obedience goes right along with Abraham’s blessing.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, was also obedient and blessed by God and part of this line of blessings.

Gabriel told Mary that she had “found favor with God.” Both Mary and Abraham were chosen by God. Both Mary and Abraham were obedient to God’s calling and were faithful. Both Mary and Abraham were blessed to be a blessing for generations to come. Both Mary and Abraham point to a future with hope and blessings for all who believe. With Mary and Abraham, God made what seemed impossible to humans possible with God.

Through the generations of waiting and of blessings, we come to the birth of Jesus, Immanuel, God with us, and Mary experiences the blessings of God in a new and exciting way for she is “blessed among women.”

As we think about Mary’s experience this Advent Season, let us also say of her as her cousin Elizabeth did, “*blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken of her from the Lord.*” (Luke 1:45) Because God’s greatest blessing is given to those who believe him. What mattered in Mary’s situation was her willingness to obey and respond to God’s favor, and in her willingness to respond, she was blessed to carry the Christ child.

Like Abraham and Mary, God calls us to trust him completely. Mary said to Gabriel, “*Let this thing you have told me about happen to me.*” Mary’s response was an act of humble obedience. God had a plan to save the world through his Son, Jesus.

Luke 1: 46-55 is Mary’s Magnificat : Mary’s Song of Praise, and she tells what Jesus will do. He would feed the hungry and send the rich away empty. He would give power to the poor and bring down the powerful leaders of his time. It ends with “*He has helped his servant*

Israel and remembered to be merciful. For he made this promise to our ancestors, to Abraham and his children forever.”

In her song, Mary now claims the title of being “blessed,” one that had been given to her by both Gabriel and at her visit with Elizabeth. In her proclamation of God’s deeds, she begins by describing how God has acted in her own life (Luke 1:47-49) and then branches out to how God has acted in the world. (Luke 1:50-55)

The physical seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is Christ, and the spiritual seed of Abraham includes every true child of God who receives Jesus Christ by faith.

Abraham’s blessings have become our blessings, and salvation through faith in Jesus Christ is for all nations and all generations.

In Christ Jesus, the blessing of Abraham comes to Jews and Gentiles alike, so that all can receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

The Apostle Paul writes in Galatians 3:13-14, *“Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as Righteousness. Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘All the nations will be blessed in you.’”*

The birth of Jesus is the long-awaited fulfillment of the blessings foretold to Abraham.

God has blessed you for the same reason he blessed Abraham and Mary, to know his love and forgiveness. No one else can bless you like God can bless you through Jesus Christ our Savior.

We need to take hold of this blessing and move forward in faith and obedience.

God’s plan and his blessings were beyond what we could ever imagine.

Through the grace and mercy of Jesus, God has blessed us to bless others when he gave us the Great Commission. Jesus told us to Go and Make disciples of all Nations baptizing them in the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The Great Commission is a fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham to bless all the families of the world.

God has called us to be people of hope and blessings and to teach others of the blessings of God.

Jesus, Immanuel, is the promise, the giver of abundant life, the one who invites us to enter into a life of blessing, to be a blessing.

The Good News of the Gospel message, the Good News about Christmas, is about God loving us enough to come to us in Jesus Christ. Christmas is about blessing the world. It is about the Father sending the Son into the world out of love and the Holy Spirit sending the church into the world.

Christmas is about following and obeying God whose mission is to bless you and me and the world.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him will not die but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

God has put us here as a church so that, with HOPE, we could be a blessing to those we meet. Amen.