

**Introduction:**

- As a boy I used to go hunting rabbits and pheasants with my grandfather. He had the uncanny ability to see them sitting still in all kinds of places and with all sorts of ground cover. On many of those occasions he would say to me, "Timmy—there is a rabbit sitting right over there in front of me. Come over here." I'd walk over and he'd ask, "Do you see it?" I would stare trying to find the rabbit. Most of the time, I never saw it even though, from my grandpa's point of view, it was obvious. He would say to me things like, "It's right there in front of you. If you take a few steps you're going to be standing next to it." Yet, it wasn't until I actually got so close to the rabbit that it jumped from its hiding place that I would finally see the animal. What was so clear to my grandfather's trained eye was obscured to me. APPLICATION: A similar thing happened during the first Advent of Christ. God sent His Son in such a way that only those who were looking for the Messiah were able to see Him. Yet, in spite of the fact that God was saying to humanity, "He's right there...in a manger in Bethlehem," their response was, "Where? We don't see Him."

- Is 9:1-7

"When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life"* (John 8:12).

- This year as we go into Christmas I want to help us see Jesus by pointing him out to you. We are going to be those who are looking. I want you to look for Him and see Him among the all the other things that life presents us trying to hide Him. We are going to be looking for Jesus in this Advent/Christmas season.

**I. What is Advent?**

- A. Advent comes out of the Catholic tradition. We know this because the Latin word *adventus* is used to translate the Greek word *parousia* which translated means 'the coming' or 'the arrival'. You won't find Advent in scripture but you will find parousia.
  1. For Christians, the season of Advent anticipates the coming of Christ from two different perspectives.
    - a) It is the time of year when we specifically look to the coming of Jesus Christ, first in his coming to bring our salvation. It offers the opportunity to share in the ancient longing for the coming of the Messiah. Which the wise men were doing, and Simeon and Anna.
    - b) And it also alerts us to be looking for his Second Coming when Christ will return to reign in glory.
    - c) In Advent, we're reminded of how much we ourselves also need a Savior, and we look forward to our Savior's second coming even as we prepare to celebrate his first coming at Christmas.

2. It is a long standing tradition in many churches that can be very beneficial to the believer if approached with an open heart and not a 'religious observation.'
- B. How the traditions works.
1. The Advent begins four Sundays before December 25th so the actual start date changes each year. This year Advent begins on November 27. The idea is to meditate on Christ's coming, much like God's people waited the thousands of years for him to arrive. It also serves to remind us that He is coming again and to be watching.
  2. The tradition also revolves around an Advent wreath. The wreath revolves around the four weeks leading up to Christmas.
    - a) It is typically a circular candle holder that holds five candles. During the season of Advent one candle on the wreath is lit each Sunday until all of the candles, including the fifth candle, are lit on Christmas Day.
    - b) Each candle represents an aspect of the spiritual preparation for the celebration of the birth of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Most Advent wreaths use three colors of candles - purple, pink, and white. However, some may use blue in place of the purple.
  3. The candles
    - a) 1st CANDLE - November 27 (purple-repentance and royalty) THE PROPHECY CANDLE or CANDLE OF HOPE. That is the one that was lit today and in a few moment I will share on Hope.
    - b) 2nd CANDLE - December 4 (purple-repentance and royalty) THE BETHLEHEM CANDLE or THE CANDLE OF PREPARATION. You get ready to welcome God.
    - c) 3rd CANDLE - December 11 (pink-joy) THE SHEPHERD CANDLE or THE CANDLE OF JOY. It was the message of the angel...Joy to the World!
    - d) 4th CANDLE - December 18 (purple-repentance and royalty) THE ANGEL CANDLE or THE CANDLE OF LOVE. I bring you good news!
    - e) 5th CANDLE - December 24 (white) CHRIST CANDLE
  4. Each Sunday a new candle is lit until the Christ candle is lit on Christmas day. If you are doing Advent as a family you can light the candle each night as you do scripture reading that I prepared for you. Then each Sunday you can light another candle until on Christmas light the Christ candle. We are going to do that here at Freedom. Each week before I preach I will have a family or person light another candle. Today I want the Flynn's to come and light our first candle. The Prophecy Candle of Hope.

## II. Advent Starts With Hope Is 9:1-7

- A. It should be of no surprise that Advent starts with hope.
1. Without hope most things slowly come to a stop or cease all together. Hope is a powerful force in the earth and in the hearts of men. A person with hope overcomes, outlasts, and springs forth in their future. Take hope away and people dry up, be-

come discourage, depressed and lifeless. Their life become 'darkness.' They are merely surviving. We were not created to merely survive we were created to live. And living requires hope that we have hope. One purpose of Advent is to create hope in us.

2. Hope is having confidence in the future. It is an expectation of good based on God's gracious promise to us. Hope is feeling that what is wanted can be had so it looks forward with desire and confidence.
  3. In fact the Gr. word means intense expectation, eager watching. The composition of the word indicates watching something with the head turned away from all other objects. It ignores other interests and strains forward to something you fully expect to happen. Faith is the substance of things hoped for!
  4. A major part/result of hope is the empowering of one to wait in the midst of difficulty. IE. Daniel and Revelation are books of hope not scary endings. They are written to a people in the midst of difficult times in order to give them hope.
- B. Hope is given through God's Words. What I am referring to today, are those scriptures that are prophecies given to God's people. IE. Is. 9:1-7 is one of many examples. IE. Daniel and Revelation. Hope is given through God's Word.
1. The Prophecy Candle or the Candle of Hope is the first one we lit today.
  2. All of the Advent readings this week are meant to give us hope! God with His Word is painting a picture of our future. As you read them, the Words points to Jesus...The Light of the World.
  3. We can have hope because God is faithful and will keep the promises made to us. Our hope comes from God. *"Again Isaiah says, 'The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him.' '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 15:12-13)*
- C. Prophecy is meant to give us hope in the midst of darkness.
1. Hope can put a sick man on the road to recovery.
  2. Hope can put the losing team on the road to victory. IE Just ask the Cubs.
  3. Hope can create dreams in little children and adults alike that cause them to see the unseeable and hear the un-hearable. Hope is powerful! It is a great companion of faith.
  4. IE A man approached a little league baseball game one afternoon. He asked a boy in the dugout what the score was. The boy responded, "Eighteen to nothing--we're behind." "Boy, I'll bet you're discouraged." said the man. "Why should I be discouraged?" replied the little boy. "We haven't even gotten up to bat yet!" That is hope at work!

- D. "Prophecy is one of the greatest tools of love we have. It is the technology of heaven that accelerates relationship and creates connection with people. It helps us to live with a connection to how God feels and what He thinks." Shawn Bolz. It is the prophetic scripture that let us know how God feels about us and that gives us hope!
- E. "He who gives the most hope will have the greatest influence." Kris Valotton Advent starts with hope and our hope starts with Jesus.

### III. Our Hope Starts With Jesus

- A. The first Advent Sunday is about hope and that hope is Jesus. Jesus is the Son of God and God is the source of hope for His people. Jer 29:11 God has promised us a future and a hope. As one wise preacher said, "Wise men still seek Him!" If you have lost hope in life I want to encourage you today to begin seeking Him. When you find Him you will find hope. Christmas is about God giving the gift of life to a people who were spiritually dead.
- B. Jesus is our hope.
  - 1. A Messianic scripture. Refers to Jesus. *"To open blind eyes, To bring out prisoners from the prison, Those who sit in darkness from the prison house."* (Isaiah 42:7, NKJV)
  - 2. *"The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine."* (Isaiah 9:2, NLT)
  - 3. *"Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, And whose hope is the Lord."* (Jeremiah 17:7, NKJV)
  - 4. He is the Gift of God given to men. *"he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior."* (Titus 3:5-6, NLT)
- C. Jesus supplies our hope.
  - 1. Jn 1:4 *"In Him is life and that life is the Light of men."* He is the Light of the world.
  - 2. *"The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world."* (John 1:9, NLT)
  - 3. Sin is referred to or describe in the scripture as darkness, because darkness has to do with the absence of light. Those who die with out Christ are cast into outer darkness-a place without God where everything that is not of God is thrown. That is what makes it so tormenting.
  - 4. Jesus is called the Word. *"In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God."* (John 1:1, NLT)
    - a) Ps 119:105 The Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.
    - b) Ps 119:130 God's Word gives light and understanding.
    - c) Light gives hope.

- D. We must long for His appearing. Longing for His appearing actually strengthens the church.
1. *“Arise, Jerusalem! Let your light shine for all to see. For the glory of the Lord rises to shine on you. Darkness as black as night covers all the nations of the earth, but the glory of the Lord rises and appears over you. All nations will come to your light; mighty kings will come to see your radiance.”* (Isaiah 60:1-3, NLT)
  2. *“Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”* (1 John 3:2-3, NKJV)

**Conclusion:**

- Advent starts with hope, and our hope is Jesus.
- “The school system in a large city had a program to help children keep up with their school work during stays in the city's hospitals. One day a teacher who was assigned to the program received a routine call asking her to visit a particular child. She took the child's name and room number and talked briefly with the child's regular class teacher. “We're studying nouns and adverbs in his class now,” the regular teacher said, “and I'd be grateful if you could help him understand them so he doesn't fall too far behind.” The hospital program teacher went to see the boy that afternoon. No one had mentioned to her that the boy had been badly burned and was in great pain. Upset at the sight of the boy, she stammered as she told him, “I've been sent by your school to help you with nouns and adverbs.” When she left she felt she hadn't accomplished much. But the next day, a nurse asked her, “What did you do to that boy?” The teacher felt she must have done something wrong and began to apologize. “No, no,” said the nurse. “You don't know what I mean. We've been worried about that little boy, but ever since yesterday, his whole attitude has changed. He's fighting back, responding to treatment. It's as though he's decided to live.” Two weeks later the boy explained that he had completely given up hope until the teacher arrived. Everything changed when he came to a simple realization: “They wouldn't send a teacher to work on nouns and adverbs with a dying boy, would they?” (God would not have sent his son to a dying world if He knew they could not live.)
- If you have been burned in life, I want you to know this morning one was sent to give you life and give you hope.
- Church this first Sunday of Advent is about hope. We find hope in Christ.