



ADVENT
DEVOTIONAL

2022

PART ONE

WEEK ONE

NAMES OF JESUS

ISAIAH 9

WHAT IS ADVENT?



Advent is all about anticipation. And Jesus. This is our focus at FBC in this season of time together. You'll not find the church in Acts observing Advent traditions and nowhere is the practice of Advent mandated in scripture, but neither is the celebration of Christmas. However, for many generations Christians have found great hope and joy in this practice of Advent and celebration of Christmas. So for the next three and a half weeks, you will be receiving short reflections in your email to tune your heart to the joys of this season.

What is Advent?

The English word "Advent" derives from the Latin word for "coming." Historically, Christians recognize three great comings of Jesus the Messiah: coming as a child in the incarnation, coming into the hearts of every believer at salvation, and coming again as the consummation of all things. The season of Advent is observed for the four Sundays before Christmas and ends Christmas Eve. Advent began yesterday, November 27. At FBC, we opened the season for with the following reading from Isaiah 9:2-7.

Isaiah 9:2-7

Welcome to the season of light! One of the most beautiful and essential themes of Advent is the light coming to shine into the darkness. Tonight the sun will set at 5:30 pm. It would be easy to think of this time of year as a season of darkness, but the incarnation

of Christ combats that theme with the light of Christ. Isaiah prophecies that the light will shine on the people in darkness and the land in darkness (Isaiah 9:2). May that be true of us this year! Though 2020 has brought unique darkness into our hearts and our land, the light of Christ still shines!

Think of all the benefits the light from the sun provides. The sun gives life, as we know life on this earth could not be sustained without the life-giving effects of the sun. The sun brings warmth, as we know we would freeze without it. The sun reveals what is there, as we know there is so much in life that cannot be seen without the light from the sun. And the sun creates beauty. Last week we had some beautiful sunrises and sunsets and I even had the opportunity to catch a couple on camera with my kids. The sun creates its own beauty and reveals the beauty around us.

So now think about the light of Christ. Christ too gives life, brings warmth, reveals what is true, and creates beauty. Spend some time today reflecting on these truths and the beautiful gift of the light of Christ. Then go hang some lights on your tree or on your home and remember that you have been given the light of Christ so that you might shine it into the darkness.

The rest of this week we will return each day to Isaiah 9 to reflect on the names given to the Messiah child: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

WONDERFUL COUNSELOR



I will never forget the first Christmas Jess and I spent together as a married couple. We were riding high, still in the honeymoon stage, deeply in love with each other, celebrating six months of marital bliss. I couldn't wait to see what she got me. So Christmas morning came, I waited for her to get up, and quickly lead her the tree. I grabbed the first present marked with my name and tore it open quickly knowing it was a book (my favorite type of present). I was so excited. Then I saw the title. I was stunned. My lovely bride had just gifted me a copy of the book, *How to Stop Being a Selfish Husband*. Huh? I looked at her. Was she serious? She just looked back with a straight face and gave gentle nod to her head to simply say, "yup, I'm serious."

Okay. None of that story above is true. Well, except for the marital bliss part. Jess never got me that book, but she probably should have. Can you imagine what that would be like? To receive a gift that exposes your weakness right in the face. That's what the gift of the Messiah does, He is the gift that exposes our weakness.

Today we turn our attention to the names given the Christ child in Isaiah's proclamation in Isaiah 9:6 and in these names we see a gift that exposes our weakness and incompetence.

Isaiah 9:6

*[6] For to us a child is born, to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,*

*and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (ESV)*

The eight words making up the last line of the verse could be translated as either eight names or four compound names. Since compound names are common in Hebrew, it makes most sense to unpack them as four names: “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (although Handel’s Messiah ringing in my head makes me want to put a comma between wonderful and counselor). Today we are confronted with all humanity’s need for a Wonderful Counselor. The word for Wonderful translates to “wonder-working, extraordinary, or miraculous.” This word does not simply mean good or great. Jesus is not the great counselor. He is the miraculous counselor! The word for counselor reveals the skill of “giving wise advice, making plans.” Israel’s history had been ridden with bad counselors, bad advice, and man’s wisdom. What they needed at this point in redemptive history was a perfect, miraculous, advisor.

That’s exactly what you need to.

You’re inundated with plenty of man’s wisdom every day. What you need... Sorry, what WE need is a healthy dose of infallible, miraculous, extraordinary wisdom from God.

James 1:5

[5] If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who

gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. (NIV)

God doesn't expect you to solve your problems without Him. We all face challenges and hardships every day. This year many of our challenges have been shared, but there are also plenty challenges unique to individual families. God wants to help. He wants to lead you through it. He expects you to need Him, he tells you to ask Him, and He promises to not find fault when you ask for help.

Before you try to solve your own problems today, stop and ask the Miraculous Wisdom-Giver for direction. He's waiting.

What are some problems you don't have answers to? Write them down and then ask God for wisdom. Literally, present these request to God and ask Him to lead you through them.

Today would be a good time to refresh your mind with one of the classic Christian hymns, "For Unto Us a Child is Born" from Handel's Messiah.

MIGHTY GOD



What's in a name? Do you know what your name means? There are all sorts of books and websites that give you all sorts of etymological histories of name origins and meanings. I'm grateful my name's meaning is simple and clear. Timothy comes from the Greek name Timotheos which is a compound of two Greek words, Timo and Theos. Theos is the Greek word for God, and Timo means "Honoring." So it's simple, Timothy means "honoring God." The second name given to the Messiah in Isaiah 9 is similar.

"Mighty God" in Hebrew is "el gibbor." And just like naming someone Timothy doesn't mean I'm God, naming a Hebrew "el gibbor" wouldn't necessarily be calling that person God. Lots of Hebrew names include the name of God in them. Ezekiel is a great example, his name means "God's strength." The Israelites sought to choose names that honored God so they would often give their children names that referred to God.

Why does this matter? It may explain some of the confusion experienced in Israel about the identity of the Messiah. Was the future King descended from David going to be a mighty warrior who represented God? Or was he to be God Himself? We see this confusion among the Israelites of Jesus' day.

Though it was confusing to Israel (as many prophecies are) Isaiah actually does answer this question, just not in chapter 9. One chapter later he says this: "A remnant

will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God” (Isaiah 10:21). Here “the mighty God” is a clear reference to Yahweh, the God of Jacob. What does this mean? Though it may not be clear from reading just Isaiah chapter 9, it is clear from reading 9 and 10 together that the Child mentioned in Isaiah 9 would not just be a “miraculous counselor;” He would be God Himself. Wow.

The beauty of the Scriptures is their wholeness. Singular verses give you great truth, but only the whole story gives the full picture of redemption. God is telling a story in the Scriptures, and He intends for this story to shape us. He tells this story to transform us. He authors this story for our adoption.

How are you engaging with the story this season? These short reflections that will continue to come to your email every day are not intended to be the only thing you read today. They’re not intended to be the only time you spend with God. They’re intended to whet your appetite for fuller knowledge and fuller presence.

So go pick up your Bible. Read Isaiah 9 and 10, then read Luke 1 and 2. And spend some real time today rejoicing in the Mighty God who has done great things.

EVERLASTING FATHER



I love coming home. My kids love it too (usually Jess does). In part, I love coming home for the welcome. Karis is in a stage in which she's excited about anyone who comes through the door. And she loves her daddy. Daddy coming home is a celebration! I love it. I love hearing the thumping coming down the hallway and turning to look right before the tackle hits. What a joy. Advent is both a celebration of a birth announcement and a party because daddy is coming home. The third name in Isaiah 9:6 gives us a picture of that.

The Everlasting Father

Isaiah 9:6 tells of the birth of the Son who is the Everlasting Father. The Son is God. God is the Father. Therefore... the Son is the Father? Confused yet? Welcome to the Trinity! The beauty of God is found in both His simplicity and complexity. Advent is beautiful in its simplicity. We needed a savior. God sent His Son. The Son was born simply, humbly. Yet the season is full of complexity. How can God be one yet send Himself while remaining on the throne? How can both Father and Son be God and remain in perfect relationship? What about the Spirit? The Advent story is simple enough for a child to grasp and complex enough to spend a lifetime reflecting on while never fully grasping every aspect of it. It's like the gospel in that sense. Shallow enough for a child to wade in, deep enough for an adult to swim deeply.

Notice how the coming of the Son who is Everlasting

Father brings joy.

Isaiah 9:3

*[3] You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil.*

Isaiah's song describes the nation dancing in joy. He gives us two pictures of joyful celebration. First, there is the joy at the harvest. Imagine the celebration and a plentiful crop yield after many months of waiting. The response is joy. Relief. Rest. The second picture is the dividing of spoil. This refers to victory after a hard-fought battle. There is joy in the nation when the troops return home victorious.

So we know that this Son, who will be called Father, will bring joy. Why is he called everlasting? There are several ways to interpret the name. Is He the Father who is everlasting? Or, is He the Father of those who are everlasting? Or, is He the Father of a Kingdom that is everlasting? Yes. All those are true. He is the Everlasting Father to everlasting children in an everlasting Kingdom. His fatherhood will never end!

This Son, who will be called Everlasting Father brings Everlasting Joy! That's why I love the simple picture of Karis running down the hall. When dad comes home after a long day, the reasonable response is Joy. When God Himself comes to Israel, there is celebration.

How will you celebrate His coming today?

PRINCE OF PEACE



“In order to experience peace that surpasses all understanding, you have to experience trauma that would result in peace that surpasses all understanding...If everything in your life is good and easy all the time, you don't have peace that surpasses understanding, you have understandable peace.”

I said that in a sermon recently. It's one of those offhanded comments that I didn't necessarily know how it would impact people. Since saying it I've had a certain person (cough cough Tom Perry) mention it to me several times. Apparently it connected with him in a real way, and I'm thankful. You know who really wanted peace that surpasses all understanding for Christmas? King Ahaz of Judah.

A couple of days ago I said it would be easy to miss the significance of Isaiah 9:6 if we don't read the surrounding context. One of the things you might miss is just how bad it was for Ahaz while Isaiah was delivering this message. Here's the story.

The nation of Israel had split into two kingdoms, Israel and Judah, in the 900s BC. Isaiah was prophesying to Ahaz the king of the southern Kingdom of Judah in the 700s BC. Isaiah 7 tells us that right before the messages of Isaiah 7-11, Ahaz had learned that Israel and the nation of Syria were uniting to attack Judah. So let's review. Israel and Judah were supposed to be one nation, but they split because of the mistakes of the sons of

Solomon. Then the king of Israel unites with the wicked king of Syria to go to war against their brothers down in Judah. Messed up right? Also, among the three nations, Judah was likely the smallest. 2 Chronicles 28:6 tells us that this join coalition of Syria and Israel killed 120,000 soldiers of Judah in one day. They were over matched.

But God tells Ahaz through Isaiah that this invasion will not ultimately overthrow Judah even though it would be tough. God says eventually Israel will be judged for their unfaithfulness. As a sign of the redemption of Judah, God gives a promise in Isaiah 7:14. You're going to recognize it.

Isaiah 7:14

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

Immanuel means "God with us." So there's going to be a virgin who will have a baby named "God with us." That story sounds familiar right?

Just a couple of chapters later comes this promise we've been reflecting on all week.

Isaiah 9:6

So let's talk about the promise of the Prince of Peace. We know now that when Judah was invaded God's solution was to promise that Judah would not be ultimately destroyed because the child, "God with us" would be coming. Now we see more news of this same

child. Go back and read the whole message from Isaiah 9:2-7. Look at the political and military applications found within.

In verses 4-5 we see the language of conquest. Judah's enemies will be destroyed at the coming of this child. The oppressor's rob will be broken. The warrior's boot and garment will be burned with fire.

Then verse 6 tells us the government will rest on the shoulder of this child. Verse 6 calls him the Prince of Peace. Verse 7 tells us that the increase of his government and peace will continue without end. We learn this child will sit on the throne of David over David's kingdom and establish it and uphold it with justice and righteousness forever.

The Messiah child brings peace through victory. That's the message here for Ahaz. Peace will come, but it would get worse for Judah first. We know how the story ends. We can now look back on Biblical history and see the Messiah child that was born as both Prince of Peace and "God with us." We can see how He defeated Judah's greatest enemy at the cross. We can see how His Kingdom continues to expand even today.

But. Looking around do you see peace? I sure don't. At least, not with my fleshly eyes. It sure looks like things are pretty out of control right now. It seems like our country is in a desperate place. It seems like trust in our government is low. That sure doesn't seem like peace.

But wait. What is the source of peace in Isaiah 9? Is

it Ahaz? No! There's plenty more to read about his faithlessness in Isaiah and 2 Chronicles. The Prince of Peace is Jesus. The answer to peace is "God with us." The source of peace is God's plan for all nations.

So what if God is waiting to give us the peace that surpasses all understanding (Philippians 4:7) in the midst of the circumstances that fill us with anxiety? What if God's plan is bigger than human governments? What if God's plans are neither canceled or delayed by disease? What if God is not surprised but rather right on schedule with His plans to usher in everlasting peace?

Based on scripture we know all those things to be true. God is on schedule for peace. We are called to represent the God who is with us by bringing Him to those who do not know Him. How are you serving as an ambassador to bring the God who is with you to someone who is without Him this Advent season?

Spend some time in prayer for someone you know in your family, workplace, school or neighborhood who is without God right now and therefore without everlasting Peace. Then rejoice that you have found Peace through the blood of Immanuel.

WEEK TWO

FULFILLED PROPHECY

MICAH 5:2

EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED



Christmas is a story that teaches us to expect the unexpected, that truth is stranger than fiction. The king born to a poor virgin? The royal announcement coming to shepherds? The wealthy rulers showing up late to the party? Not exactly the way one of us would script it. In God's story we see the lowly lifted up. But the beginning story of the lowly being lifted up starts way before Gabriel comes to Mary.

"But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah..." **Micah 5:2**

The story of the little town of Bethlehem starts centuries before Jesus was born, and centuries before Micah predicted His birth in Bethlehem. Little Bethlehem's story is the story of Little Israel. Little Bethlehem's story is God's story.

"I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem because I have selected a king from his sons." **1 Samuel 16:1**

David, the shepherd boy, lived outside of Bethlehem about 1000 years before Jesus. You know the story. He wasn't the first king, Saul was. Saul was a much better choice in man's eyes. But when Saul disqualified himself, God sent Samuel to anoint a new king. Did you know David wasn't even the most likely choice in his own father's eyes? Jesse presented seven sons before the prophet Samuel while David was with the sheep. God chose none of them. He chose the little guy.

I love remembering Advent with the reading of Micah 5 each year. I want to be reminded regularly that God doesn't always chose the path we would expect. But He always chooses the right path. In His Divine sovereignty He chooses to work through the weak and the small.

It's beautiful. He first chose the smallest son, from a small town, among a small nation. And when He chose David as king, He also chose David as Jesus great great Grandfather (read Matthew 1 and you figure out how many greats go there). He chose to work through the weak and the small in the eyes of the world so that His power would be most clearly on display.

God makes this way clear throughout all of scripture. Jesus says we should come to Him with the faith of children (Luke 18:17). Jesus blesses the poor in spirit, the grievers, the lowly, and the hungry (Matthew 5:3-10). Paul says God's strength is most on display in our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). Why does He do this? Paul tells us God chose the foolish things to shame the wise (1 Corinthians 1:27). Stop relying on your own strength. Stop taking pride in your own wisdom. Stop boasting in your own ingenuity. If you rely on your bigness, you miss the opportunity to see the power of the one who chooses the lowly to shame the wise.

I need Him. You need Him. Let's run to Him for provision today. He's waiting. Today spend some time in 1 Samuel 16 reading about the anointing of David, then read Matthew 1 to see how the family tree unfolds. This week we will focus on the Old Testament and fulfilled prophecy in the birth of the Messiah.

BREAD, BRANCH, BABY



What does your home town say about you? I realize I'm writing this to an audience based in the Carpet Capital of the World. So for many of you, your home town says, well, carpet. (Yeah, I know we make other types of flooring around here too). For me, my home town of Jackson, Tennessee brings to mind Andrew Jackson (for whom it was named), Carl Perkins ("Blue Suede Shoes"), Casey Jones (railroad folk hero, not the ninja turtles hockey mask guy), and Wink Martindale (game show host). What is your home town famous for?

*"But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days." **Micah 5:2***

Did you know Jesus had two tiny home towns whose names are vitally important to His ministry?

First, we know already what Micah says about Bethlehem. Tiny town, big ruler. Do you know what the name "Bethlehem" means? It means "house of bread." Do you think that's a coincidence?

John 6:35 "I am the Bread of Life." Yeah. I don't think that's a coincidence.

Here's the beauty of the scriptures. The Old Testament lays the groundwork for the beauty of the story of redemption. The New Testament fulfills the Old in

shockingly complex ways. How did God provide for the Israelites in the wilderness? Daily bread.

How did Jesus instruct His people to pray for God's provision? "Give us this day our daily bread." Matthew 6:11

Where was Jesus from? The house of bread. God knows how to tell a story.

But though Jesus was born in Bethlehem, He didn't grow up there. So in the early days of His ministry, no one connected Him to Bethlehem, they connected Him to Nazareth. So let's play this game again with home town number 2. What does Nazareth mean? "The place of the branch." So what could that mean?

Isaiah 11:1 "The branch will grow up from the root of Jesse." Hmm.

Zechariah 3:8-9 "Behold I will bring my servant, the Branch...I will remove the iniquity of this land in a single day" Wow!

Jeremiah 23:5 "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land."

Okay, I think it's clear. That one's not a coincidence either.

Think back to what you know of Jesus' life. Remember

when they said, “nothing good comes from Nazareth?” (John 1:46) The people waiting for the king from David’s line who would be known as a branch, totally missed it when they saw a miraculous teacher from David’s line come from “Branchville.”

Jesus, our Messiah, was the Bread of Life from the “House of Bread.” And the Royal Branch from “Branchville.”

His hometowns say a lot about Him and a lot about how He fulfilled prophecy.

Read John 1 today and reflect on how He who was from the beginning could have been overlooked by the people around Him. Then pray for God to show you what He’s doing around you and how you can be a part of following Him in His work.

FOR ALL PEOPLE



Yesterday was a day of baby news. Jess and I had the privilege of meeting a brand new baby of some dear friends of ours for the first time. Those times are always so fun and exciting. Then we saw an announcement on Facebook of other friends who will be having a baby soon. That too was fun and beautiful. Everybody loves baby news. At least everybody I know. Well, here's some baby news for everyone...

"Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

Luke 2:10-11

I hope you didn't think I was talking about some other kind of baby news...

Jesus' birth was for everyone. This is what the angels told the shepherds and this is what was predicted long before Jesus came.

"In your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."

Genesis 22:18

All this week we are reflecting on how God fulfills Old Testament prophecy in the life of Jesus. We've already seen prophecies from the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Micah but here's a prediction in Genesis. This one comes not from a human prophet but from the angel

of the Lord. He tells Abraham, “in your offspring all the nations will be blessed.” How will that happen? Through the baby born in Bethlehem.

There are hundreds of prophecies found in the Old Testament that are fulfilled in Jesus. This is why we can have confidence in both testaments fitting together. Think about this list of prophecies fulfilled at Jesus' birth from Josh McDowell's *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*.

The Savior would be a human descendant of Eve
(Genesis 3:15)

Born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14)

Son of God (Psalm 2:7)

Seed of Abraham (Genesis 22:18)

Son of Isaac (Genesis 21:12)

Son of Jacob (Numbers 24:17)

Tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10)

Line of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1)

House of David (Jeremiah 23:5)

Born at Bethlehem (Micah 5:2)

Presented with gifts at birth (Psalm 72:10)

Many children would die at His birth (Jeremiah 31:15)

That's quite a list. And there's many more unveiled through His life. Some are beautiful and one in particular is excruciating. Today and tomorrow we talk about the beautiful. Friday we'll look at the hardest prophecy fulfilled in the Birth story.

Today we rejoice in the words of the angels to the shepherds. This prophecy-fulfilling baby is for all people!

This was again confirmed by Simeon when the baby was presented at the Temple:

Luke 2:29-32

[29] "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; [30] for my eyes have seen your salvation [31] that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, [32] a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."

All peoples. All nations. Light for the Gentiles. Not just light for Israel. Light for Americans. Light for Romanians. Light for Fulanis. Light for Afghans. Light Kazakhs. Light for all nations.

Today, take some time to pray for the light to shine in every nation. Did you know that in 2020, 742,000,000 people viewed media relating to the Jesus Film? Through this technology over 30,000,000 people worldwide made decisions to follow Christ and 278,000 new churches and groups were formed. Wow! The message continues to go out! Pray for the lost to receive the light today.

In your time with God this week, look back on some of those prophecies listed above and compare them with the birth narratives of Luke 1-2 and Matthew 1-2. Pray for the lost people in your life and pray that God would use you to bring His light.

ORIGIN OF OLD



Where did you come from? For me, that's a complicated answer. I told you a couple of days ago about my "home town." But that's not where I was born, that's where I grew up. I was born in Cincinnati and I grew up in Jackson, Tennessee. But though I consider Jackson my home town, I don't consider myself a Tennessean. In truth, when I think of home, I think of four states not one. And one of those states I've never even lived in... I know, I'm complicated. I hope someone else out there can identify with my complexity.

Where did Jesus come from? It's complicated. As we've seen this week that question could be answered a couple of different ways. He came from Bethlehem. He came from Nazareth. He also came out of Egypt. But none of those are the best answer. His "coming forth is from of old, from ancient days" (Micah 5:2). This prophecy we've looked at this week shows us that Jesus isn't ultimately from any one city, He is from "ancient days."

*"But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days." **Micah 5:2***

Those who heard or read Micah's prophecy some 700 years before the birth of Jesus may have connected it with the words of Daniel about the figure known as "The Ancient of Days."

"I continued watching in the night visions, and I saw One like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was escorted before Him. He was given authority to rule, and glory, and a kingdom; so that those of every people, nation, and language should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and His kingdom is one that will not be destroyed."

Daniel 7:13-14

Notice there are two figures being described interacting with each other in Daniel. There is the Son of Man and there is the Ancient of Days (You probably know where this is going). The Son of Man has some level of appearance like a man, and yet He is riding on the clouds (a symbol of deity). He is the King over all. He is crowned by the Ancient of Days Himself. Then we see that His kingdom will never be destroyed and His reign will go on forever. Here is even more prophetic weight given to our faith in Jesus.

Jesus is clearly the Son of Man. He claims the title for Himself, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). That means God the Father is the Ancient of Days. So Jesus came from the Father, and Jesus was never created.

That's important. Jesus was not created in the womb of Mary. Jesus was incarnated in the womb of Mary. "Incarnation" means to "put on flesh." Before entering Mary's womb, Jesus was right where he had always

been, with the Father. When Jesus was incarnated he didn't just put on a "flesh suit" as if it was some sort of disguise. Jesus didn't just look like a man, he was a man.

That's important too. Because the sacrifice for sin needed to be offered by a man in flesh that could be destroyed. And the conquering of the enemy had to be accomplished by the Eternal God. Jesus was both. That's how we are saved.

So celebrate both today. Celebrate the eternal God becoming a finite man in order to provide the sacrifice for the sins of all mankind. Have you accepted this sacrifice for your own sins?

If you haven't, He's calling. He's calling to you right now to repent of your sins, believe in His sacrifice, and receive His new life.

In your time with the Lord today, remember the God who has always been and will always be and is always waiting to restore you.

RAMAH



Christmas is a season of suffering. Christmas highlights our losses. Christmas may even increase our grief. If you are mourning the loss of a loved one this Christmas, you know exactly what I mean. Some of our Christmas celebrations will lack the long expected presence of someone we love dear. Others are suffering even more intensely in this season of separation and distance because of the recent loss of a spouse or family member's whose absence is now more obvious.

Do we have to talk about this? Maybe you're thinking, "I'm closing this devotional, I need more happy in my life, I don't want to think about the sad." Don't close this devotional!

Don't shut down on me. Keep reading and let's walk together through the story of intense grief contained in the midst of our familiar Biblical stories.

"Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: 'A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.'"

Matthew 2:16-18

Christmas is about weeping. Christmas is about lamenting. Christmas is about the deepest answer to our deepest sorrow.

“Why did God do it that way?” Few questions perplex me more than this one. I don’t actually know all of the reasons for why God unfolded His redemptive plan the way He did. I don’t know why the birth of Jesus resulted in the death of such a great number of children. But I do know that God did not forget about those mothers. I do know that the baby that fled to Egypt would be the answer to the deep pain and longing of the mothers who had lost.

The above passage is found in Matthew right after the wise men deceive Herod by returning home another way. They know Herod is after the newborn king, so they avoid Jerusalem on the way back. Then Joseph receives a vision of an angel telling him to flee with Mary and Jesus. Then, because Herod doesn’t know exactly which baby is the king, he just kills them all. Every. Single. Male. Child. Dead.

All week long we have focused in these readings on fulfilled prophecy. This is one those mothers wished had never been fulfilled. The original quote is from Jeremiah 31:15. Ramah was a city in Israel that was on the route of exile. The image here is of thousands of children being separated from their mothers and the mothers following the captors 5 miles north of Jerusalem to Ramah, crying out in weeping and lamentation all along the way. The outcry is so loud that those in Jerusalem can hear them in Ramah. We’re talking about intense grief. In

Jeremiah's day it was the grief of mothers who lost their children to exile. In Matthew's day it was the mothers of Bethlehem who had their children murdered. What about in our day?

So what do we do with our grief at Christmas? Pretend it doesn't exist? Drown it out with Christmas music? Treat it with Christmas sugar and carbs? No. We are called to grieve and lament, even at Christmas.

This summer, I preached a series on the Biblical basics of lament. Psalm 13 is a great demonstration of the process. First, turn to God. That means don't ignore the pain or look to the world for solutions. Turn to God for the answer and comfort. Second, state your complaint. Is that okay? Can we actually complain to God? David says we can in Psalm 13:1-2. Express your concerns to Him. Third, ask. In Psalm 13:3 we see David saying, "consider me and answer me." Don't be afraid to ask God for healing, comfort, wisdom, peace, joy. Ask Him for what you need. The fourth step is simply: turn to trust. David says, "I have trusted in your steadfast love" (Psalm 13:5). Once you have brought your pain and concerns, keep walking in trust.

Remember what Paul tells us about grief. "We do not want you to grieve as those who have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

Don't ignore the feelings of loss this Christmas, give them to God and ask Him to help you move forward in hope. Spend some time in Psalm 13 today reflecting and lamenting.

PART TWO

AVAILABLE 12.11.22



FELLOWSHIP
BIBLE CHURCH