

"The Prophecy Candle"  
Genesis 3:15; Isaiah 7:14; Micah 5:2; Isaiah 9:6-7;

December 5, 2012

1st Advent Service

Do you remember when you were a kid and how excited you felt at this time of year? You couldn't wait for Christmas to come and to receive all the presents. Do you remember really wanting something special -- like a bicycle -- and your parents promising to give it to you? You believed that promise and you waited with excitement and anticipation. Finally, Christmas morning came. You got up and ran to the Christmas tree and there it was -- a brand new shiny bicycle. You were overjoyed and thrilled because your parents kept their promise and you received what was most important for you.

Advent is a time for promises. Just as your father maybe promised you a bicycle for Christmas and kept his promise, so also our Father in heaven has promises for us which He also keeps. These promises are called prophecies. Our Advent wreath has four candles. The first one is called the "Prophecy Candle" and symbolizes all God's promises concerning the coming Savior.

Long ago, God made His first promise to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. They had given in to temptation and sinned. They broke their relationship with God and earned death forever for themselves and their descendants (us included). But God didn't stop loving them because of their sin. God made them a promise. He promised to send Someone born from the woman. The devil would hurt that Someone and even kill him. Yet He would first crush Satan's head, overcome sin, destroy death and restore fellowship between God and humanity again forever.

As time went on, God made that promise clearer. God made more promises. He sent men called "prophets" to speak for Him and give those promises to people. Those promises described more about WHO this Savior would be.

Recently, we read some of those prophecies. Isaiah prophesied that the Savior would be born in a special way. A virgin would give birth to Him without the aid of a human father. He would not be

an ordinary man. His name would describe who He is – EMMANUEL - God with us. The prophet MICAH told where this miraculous birth would take place: in one of the tiniest towns of Judah, (named) Bethlehem. Later, Isaiah would say more about this child born for us and given to us. He would be called “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” He would take the throne of His forefather David and reign forever.

At first, the Jewish people were like children before Christmas - very excited and eager because of a Savior and God’s clear promises to send Him. But time passed. Many years went by. The people forgot about the promise from God. They ignored the prophets and their message. They concentrated on this life's problems and pleasures. Some strayed away and worshiped false gods. They were not good wait-ers and many missed the Savior’s birth and missed the Savior’s blessings.

We celebrate Christmas because of that birth and because of those blessings. We remember God kept all of His promises. Jesus, the Son of God, was born – God with us – just as the prophet promised. He was born from a virgin – just as the prophet promised. He was born in Bethlehem – just as the prophet promised. The cute little baby laid in a manger. But He would grow up and be laid on a cross. There, on the cross, the devil would bruise heel through His suffering, but Jesus would crush Satan’s head by His dying. His death was the sacrifice for all our sins. Because our sins are gone, God is reconciled with us and we are reconciled with each other. Jesus’ resurrection from the dead on the other great Christian holiday – Easter – is proof of that.

We have believed those promises – those prophecies. God gave us faith because of our baptisms to receive all those blessings – forgiveness, new life, and eternal salvation. We enjoy reading the Christmas prophecies because we know what they mean and we now have what they promise.

But our 1<sup>st</sup> candle – the Prophecy Candle – has two meanings tonight. That candle represents the prophecies about Jesus’ birth. We look back to see their meaning and receive their blessings. But God has more promises. That candle also represents the prophecies about Jesus coming again.

We look to the future with hope for those blessings – Jesus bringing us to home in glory for all eternity.

Those promises – we have to wait for. We are like the Jews. We are not good wait-ers. We start out excited about Jesus coming again when we learn about it in Sunday School as children. We might be excited in an Advent service about future promises, but those promises seem so far away. We want things right now. People have always acted that way, but our new technology makes the problem worse. We have to have things immediately – through the internet, email, Facebook, or Tweeting. If we don't have it now or can't see when it will come, then we disbelieve or doubt.

So, we forget these promises. We ignore the preacher and his messages about those promises. We concentrate on this life's problems and pleasures. Some stray away and no longer worship God with us. We will not miss the Savior's return like people missed the Savior's birth. Jesus was born in poverty and weakness which very few people saw. But Jesus will return in might and glory for the entire world to see. If we do not wait in faith for Him to come, we will miss out on His Kingdom.

Advent is a time to look to God's future promises with faith. Wait with hope and expectation. As God kept His promises in the past, God will keep His promises in the future. As God promised to send Jesus to be born as a baby in Bethlehem, so God promises to send Jesus to come with a glorified body on the Last Day. As God promised that Jesus would be the Savior of the world, God promises that Jesus will be the Judge of the world. As God promised forgiveness and new life to all who believe in the Savior's work on the cross, God promises a place in heaven to all people who trust in the Judge who will come again.

Many people make many promises. Many people break many promises. That's the reason we are so wary when we see promises that seem too good to be true. Let the Prophecy Candle remind you of all God's promises about the Savior, Jesus Christ. All of those promises seem too good to be true. But God keeps His promises – all of His promises. He promised to send His Son,

Jesus, to be born on Christmas Day and save us from sin, death, and the power of the devil. He kept that promise. He promises to send Jesus again and bring us to the place He has prepared for us in heaven to live forever. He will keep that promise. Believe that and live with excitement, eagerness, and hope. Amen.