

Series:	Reference:	Title:	Date:
Advent	Luke 1:42-45	The Power of Hope	12.03.17
Website Writeup:			
Elizabeth's greeting of Mary illustrates the delight of the expectant heart in Christ's appearing. It is a greeting of Hope. Hope which we expect in the coming of Christ as Advent begins! Expectation feeds hope. Hope births gratitude. And Hope pays off!			

Color changes in text indicate slide changes

-SLIDE PERSON: PLEASE RECORD THE SERMON-

Over the next four weeks, during this Advent Season, we're going to look at the Power of Hope, Peace, Joy & Love, in that order - all to understand what the Kingdom coming at Christmas means.

Advent is the expectation of the arrival, appearance, or emergence of a notable person, thing, or event. The approach of Christmas, for followers of Jesus worldwide, is known as the season of Advent. It's a time in which we anticipate, remember & celebrate the arrival of Jesus into the world's landscape & history.

In-breaking, the title of our series, is defined as exactly that, a breaking in, an inroad, invasion, or incursion.

In the Christmas story, we find all three definitions of Advent happening at one time: the arrival of Jesus (a notable person), the activities surrounding His birth (a notable event), and lastly, the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God. So we see, at the birth of Jesus, an inroad occurred into the human plight. Hope, peace, joy & love have come with power in the form of a child into our needy human condition.

The entire Bible is about the world-shaping saga of God's redemptive purpose for humankind. The Scriptures allow us to watch God's strategy unfold for a breaking through into the resistant, stubborn, entrenched human heart. It may surprise us to know, Jesus, whom we often speak of in terms of love, goodness & kindness, was also bent on *destruction!* But what did Jesus come to destroy? What was His battlefield, His point of in-breaking, or incursion?

1 John 8:8b tells us, *"The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work."* In-breaking is about the way God makes His advance – confronting darkness & shining light into the heart of the world He loves. Darkness can't hold back light. Open the door into a dark room from a lit hallway & light slices through the dark. It's the same with Christ's entrance into the world - something profound happened, light cut through the darkness of the human heart & into history!

In John 1:1-4a, we read these words concerning Jesus in which he's characterized by the phrase, 'The Word': *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind..."*

So the life which Christ brings is the light which cuts through the darkness of the human condition. He's characterized by 'The Word' since Hellenistic Greeks were enamored

with the idea of Gnosis, Knowledge, Truth. John's proclaiming to them this Knowledge or Gnosis they so desperately search for has come into the world by way of incarnation - Gnosis, Truth, or Knowledge in the form of man; God in the form of a man, Jesus. Something unheard of & a little absurd for them; John's upsetting the applecart with his words, setting their minds to consider the person of Jesus.

To set the stage...we find ourselves in the book of Luke. Several miracles have already occurred; minor in-breaking's, if you will. With the first, maybe we imagine the hallway door just unlocked on our dark room, as the birth of John the Baptist is foretold early on in chapter 1. Foretold to his father Zechariah by the angel Gabriel as he performs his priestly duties in the Temple. He's dumbfounded at the angel's words, and as a result is unable to speak until the baby's born. Dumbfounded since his wife's well along in years, clearly unable to have children.

And with the second small in-breaking, maybe we're just turning the doorknob on our hallway door as Elizabeth does become pregnant, and as a result all her disgrace in community is wiped away! Jesus...already bringing renewal & wiping away shame.

Then with the third small in-breaking, we simply crack open the door & begin to push as Gabriel appears to the virgin Mary, Elizabeth's cousin. He proclaims she'll have a child although she's not yet consummated her marriage with Joseph, her husband-to-be.

Gabriel states, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end" (Luke 1:30-33).

Excitedly, pregnant Mary hurries to pregnant Elizabeth's home which is where we begin today as these two women meet & share their great news.

Luke 1:42-45, "In a loud voice she (Elizabeth) exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"

That last sentence is important revealing two women who've believed God's promises - holding onto the light of hope only to see it pay off in the end. Elizabeth's especially unique in that she's older, without children, and seemingly unable to have them. Elizabeth's greeting of Mary illustrates the delight of the expectant heart in Christ's appearing. Which brings us to our first point today - **expectation feeds Hope.**

As a matter of fact, expectation's the soil which nourishes the root of hope - and if anyone in the Bible had hope, it was Mary & her older cousin, Elizabeth. We're never far from hope, it simply eludes us when we forget how good God's been to us. We forget because we've not rehearsed God's goodness. Looking backwards to his faithfulness, let alone forward, trusting in his promises.

This is why the idea of remembrance is so prevalent in Scripture. Do a word search on *remember* in Scripture & you'll be reading for days. A word repeated constantly from cover to cover; Genesis to Revelation. The rainbow in the sky after a heavy rain's set as a

remembrance. God says he'll remember his covenant between his people on occasions too numerous to list.

God remembered Rachel; he listened to her & enabled her to conceive & wiped away her shame in Genesis 30. In Exodus 2 God heard the groaning of his people & remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac & Jacob.

In Deuteronomy 4 it states, "...be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them. Remember the day you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, when he said to me, "Assemble the people before me to hear my words so that they may learn to revere me as long as they live in the land & may teach them to their children."

In Deuteronomy 7 God reminds Israel as she's facing her enemies, "*do not be afraid of them; remember well what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh & to all Egypt.*" As a matter of fact, in Judaism & Christianity there are systematic holidays, ceremonies, liturgies, and the like, which recall the past history of God's faithfulness to his people as he enacted righteousness, justice & fulfilled his promises over history.

God's people have always longed for God's righteous just kingdom to be established in full. A kingdom of peace governed by God's just nature. Julie Cowen, our resident theologian, sent me a nice reading this week in this area. *The writer states, "Justice is the manifestation of God's righteous character in the world - the execution of God's righteousness. Justice is the expression of God's righteousness through right action."*¹

And in stories like the one of Egypt, Pharaoh & Israel, we see God's justice enacted on behalf of his people. Even on behalf of Egypt given that a person in the act of oppressing others isn't reflective of their Creator, being what they were intended to be - they're missing the mark.

If you remember I said a few weeks ago that Martin Luther King Jr. felt this way about white oppression of blacks - his goal wasn't just to lift African Americans out of oppression. His methods & ideas weren't militaristic & hateful. He wasn't there to conquer whites, but to liberate both black & white - that is, to also save white oppressors from the sin of oppression. To free them to be what God intended them to be; to value all life as God does.

That in turn is a good picture of the world we live in - it's not fully as it was intended to be as of yet. With the incursion of Christ into the world, light has shown, the darkness can't overcome it. Light slices through continually swallowing up the darkness as God's kingdom reign advances. The future promise is, it will fully envelope the world - but right now we live in the *Already & Not Yet* era of the kingdom of God in history. It's already come, but not yet fully come.

And in this time, God's people are to act in righteousness, synonymous with acting justly; to manifest God's righteous character in the world. As a matter of fact that is this churches signature verse after which we're named, *Micah 6:8 - "He has shown you, O*

¹ *Social Justice Handbook*, Mae Elise Cannon, p20.

mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly & to love mercy & to walk humbly with your God.”

The writer I quoted earlier continues in that section to say, “When justice completely exists on this earth, everything will be the way that God intended it to be. The righteous actions of Christ followers is the execution of faith. As believers practice good works, they become agents of justice.”² Amen to that!

As a matter of fact when Jesus begins his ministry he proclaims this kingdom come in righteousness & justice to John (Elizabeth’s son) through John’s followers - *“Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.” (Luke 7:22-23)* This is our current & future hope as we live in the already awaiting the not yet.

The Psalmist writes (119:49-52), *Remember your word to your servant, for you have given me hope. My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise preserves my life. The arrogant mock me unmercifully, but I do not turn from your law. I remember, Lord, your ancient laws, and I find comfort in them.*

In Luke 23 the criminal crucified next to Jesus asked, *“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”* Jesus promised him while hanging on the cross gasping for air, *“Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”*

We celebrate the Lord’s Table monthly as a remembrance of Christ’s sacrifice on that cross. Remembering, looking back on the past blessings & promises of God throughout history is a healthy habit. It births hope for the future. And today we remember the promise found in Isaiah 9:6, *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.* We remember this promise given years earlier concerning the in-breaking of Christ into the world! The promise of a just & righteous king who will rule the world bringing peace & harmony once & for all!

Hope’s future oriented, but it’s rooted, fed & upheld by the past. Past promises kept. Past experiences of the divine. As Rob puts together his puzzling image of God he spoke of last week, those pieces are cut from a long history of God’s promises kept to his people. Kept to Rob, who’s one piece of that larger puzzle which is the church, coming together in a hopeful picture of Christ on earth, birthing hope as we seek to act justly, love mercy & walk humbly. As we seek to model God’s justice manifesting his righteousness in the world.

Mary & Elizabeth had hope. They were expecting great things from God through the children in their wombs. That hope though had been born out of long established promises & experiences with God throughout history. *So Elizabeth says, “Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!”* They were swimming in expectation which fed their hope. The great missionary, William Carey, once said, *“Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God.”* Good advice to live by.

² *Social Justice Handbook*, Mae Elise Cannon, p20.

If you're not hopeful about your future, go back, listen to what God's done; what he promises for your future. Listen to & memorize Jeremiah 29:11, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you & not to harm you, plans to give you hope & a future." That hope bears out a strength which enables us to withstand anything life throws our way. We're in the birth pains of life, 'the Already & Not Yet', and beautiful things lie ahead as we are obedient in our journey with Jesus.

When you're married with children, whenever you get together with other parents, the conversation at some point always gets dominated by the wives concerning children & childbirth. It's when the husbands go silent for two reasons, (1) is that we didn't experience childbirth firsthand, so we can't relate to the feeling. And (2) because we're desperately afraid to say something which could be construed as insensitive.

That situation occurred last Saturday night as we went out with friends. Kim recalled the sense of elation & hope she felt despite the pain she was experiencing birthing our children. That hope enabled her to endure any amount of pain & suffering for what was to be gained by it. Christ's coming isn't just an equivalent picture of Kim's expectation leading to hope in childbirth, it surpasses it.

And as expectation feeds hope, we also find hope births **gratitude**; something which Thanksgiving always brings about. We open social media, or turn on the TV & hear of people's gratitude; to whom, or to what, is always the question however.

Gratitude's something the Bible's taught us for millennia, "...Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 5:18-20).

Consider all you have. Too often coming out of Thanksgiving we're driven backward & taught to think of what we don't have during the Christmas season. Black Friday & Cyber Monday tell us very clearly. Our inboxes chocked full of emails exhorting us to spend the next dollar here or there on what we don't yet have. I saved all the catalogs we get in the mail for just one week! Each one of them declaring to me what I don't have, and what I should want. If I listen too closely, I might be depressed, or feel badly about myself.

But it's good, not only for my emotional well-being, not to listen, but my bank account as well! It's a good habit to count your blessings, especially in a season when some are wrought with despair for what we feel we lack, or comparing ourselves to the Jones's next door. Bill Maloney of *The Vigilantes of Love* wrote a song to this end, called *Double Cure...* It speaks of future hope in Christ in the battle of distraction now.

So tired of all my toys
They never last for long
They keep beaming dreams & wishes
To a big dish on my front lawn

Bet you all have got a story
You're just aching to tell
Haven't we thrown our coinage

Down the wishing well?

So go & call your neighbor
Proceed with all due haste
Go grab your wife & sweet family
See, there is no time to waste

We're gonna drink out of that fountain
On a hill called double cure
I wanna show you my allegiance, Lord
Yes I wanna be a son of Yours

Ask me why I love Him
He gave riches to this poor man
Yes, and I will one day see that face
Over yonder shore

So tired of all my toys, They never last for long, They keep beaming dreams & wishes, To a big dish on my front lawn - so true! They pale in comparison to the gift of Christ at Christmas; the hope of new life in a baby in a manger. The hope of a world governed by righteous justice.

What do you already have? I don't know about you, but I have a family, friends & church who love me. A job, warm bed, a home, plenty to eat, freedom, laughter, sweetness, I have 9 beautiful chickens which give me so much joy. Four beautiful kids which give even more. I get to live with my parents in their golden years creating memories. I'm able to backpack some of the most incredible places on earth & sleep out under the wondrous heavens above. I'm able to ride my motorcycle with the wind blowing through my dreads! I've got my health. And...as Will Farrell said in *Taledega Nights*, I've got a 6lb 8oz baby Jesus & a smokin' hot wife! Life might seem mundane at times, but I've got a lot! I've got a God who broke into history to die for me, who overcame death, rising from the grave, making room for me in his eternal home. I'm the Prodigal Son, with my heavenly father hiking up his robe running to greet me - No matter what comes my way, I've got hope & I'm grateful for all blessing shed upon me!

So expectation feeds hope. Hope births gratitude. And we can also say **hope pays off!** Elizabeth, had been practicing gratefulness & hopefulness her entire life, though childless. Again, she said of both her & Mary, "*Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!*" And he did! In persevering, she becomes both a sign & wonder, showing that even a heart longing for an unfulfilled desire can be settled in her heart toward God. That even when you don't get what you think you need when you think you need it, God will provide with exactly what you need when you do need it - surpassing paltry desires.

Elizabeth declares, "*The Lord has done this for me..., in these days he has shown his favor & taken away my disgrace among the people*" (Luke 1:25). As Rob works to put



together his puzzling image of Jesus he shared about last week, that hope will pay off. It already has & will continue to do so. As Philippians 1:6 states, be confident of Christ's work, *that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus*. Until that final fulfillment of the Kingdom of God where righteousness & justice reign in totality.

I was privileged to share a charge at Dawn & Scotts reception last week. They'd been married in another state & I couldn't be at the wedding. They came back to do a reception with people unable to travel. And we all got to watch the wedding video.

Dawn & Scott are in their mid-forties. They could've complained for years about not having a spouse. They could've grown bitter & angry towards God, but didn't. They used their time, trusting in God's promises to them, building a ministry so large they couldn't have a regular wedding party - just too many people they'd touched by discipleship. A parade of people ambled past them each receiving a flower - each one with a story to tell of Dawn & Scotts influence on their lives.

And when that day of marital union finally came about with just the right person, it was so evident God was there, if it weren't so joyous, it would've been frightening. It was so right, beautiful, perfect - a picture of two people who'd walked strongly with God in expectation which feeds hope, which births gratitude, and who saw hope pay off!

All of our stories are different. Not one the same. God's working. In this advent season as we await, celebrate & remember the arrival of Jesus, of his in-breaking into the world & our personal lives, ask God to break into your own attitudes which feed the "bitter complaint" within. Welcome the Holy Spirit to train you in gratefulness no matter your circumstance - it's the seedbed of Kingdom hope.

Today we celebrate our unity in Christ, the in-breaking of hope in the world through prayer. For the rest of the service the mic's open to anyone who feels God has placed a prayer on their heart for this church & community. So between each song, feel free to come sit in the front row & if the mic's open, don't be shy, grab it & pray away!

Ice Breaker:

What's the first thing you do on Christmas day, or what is a unique Christmas tradition in your family?

Discussion:

Group Leaders: This will be a unique week in your groups. I am sending this early so that people can begin preparing early. Feel free to cut & paste the following into an email to your group now so that they can be thinking & preparing - they'll need the following information to go from as they do.

Dear Group Members:

In the Christmas story, we find all three definitions of ADVENT happening at one time: (1) the arrival of Jesus (a notable person), (2) the activities surrounding His birth (a notable event), and (3) the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God.

We will have begun in this weeks sermon looking at the power of HOPE.

1 John 8:8b tells us, *"The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work."*

In John 1:1-4a, we read these words concerning Jesus in which he's characterized by the phrase, *'The Word': "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind..."*

In Luke 1:42-45 Elizabeth, Marys older cousin is recorded as saying, *"In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"*

Elizabeth & Mary both were *expectant in hope*, which birthed *gratitude* in them, which they saw *pay off* in this story.

Having read all this, come to group prepared to share a few minutes each how...

1. ...you've seen Christ destroy the devil's work in your life?
2. ...His Truth has brought you light & life?
3. ...have you trusted in God's promises which brought you expectation, birthing hope & gratitude, and specifically how that has paid off for you?
4. Finally, for *what* are you grateful & hopeful in light of Jesus' Advent into your life?

Feel free to answer all of these, or focus more fully on one or a few.

After each person shares, we will take some time to pray over each one.

Happy preparation!