

SERMON: “Keeping Watch: *Watching for the Child.*”

Rev. Geoff Ross Sunday, December 17, 2017. St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church

Two weeks ago we began the season of Advent talking about how throughout history people have been keeping watch for the promises of God to come true/be fulfilled. We heard how they had waited/prepared for the darkness (sin/despair/fear) to end, for the Day of the Lord to dawn. We heard how generation after generation kept watch/waited for the promised One who would save/redeem God’s people to come; promises made by God, through prophets, promises told/retold, remembered; then, over time, forgotten. Then we were told that the watching/waiting was about to come to an end: to an unknown – yet faithful – elderly couple God sent an “*angel of the Lord to Zechariah*” to tell him that Elizabeth were going to have a baby – a son they “*must name John*” – who would be filled with the Holy Spirit/be a prophet sent to “*get [the] people ready for the Lord.*” The child they had hoped for would be the one to proclaim the good news to God’s people: at last, God was fulfilling His Word! The waiting/watching was over! God’s Promised One was coming to save His People!

[1st Baby:Happy/scared/excited/terrified. Waited/watched Lessons/Didn’t help! Wasn’t ready/No Name/Car Seat]

In the few lines I read at the opening our service this morning from Isaiah 7, we heard about King Ahaz – you know, the son of Jotham and the father of Hezekiah: that Ahaz; the one who ruled over the kingdom of Judah long after King David and Solomon, after Israel had divided into two kingdoms – the northern kingdom, Israel/southern, Judah. During Isaiah’s time, Ahaz – and the people of Judah – lived in fear; Syria and the northern kingdom had joined forces and were about to attack Judah and ‘replace’ Ahaz as the king. Afraid, Ahaz prayed for a sign – a sign of hope, that his reign was not in vain, that God was ‘on their side.’ And God responded: He promised that out of the house of David (Ahaz’s ‘house’) “*a virgin is pregnant and she will have a son and will name him Immanuel.*”

In his fear – we’re told Ahaz’s heart “*and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind*” – Ahaz wanted a sign that God was with them – but a baby!?! Judah was about to be attacked and conquered: this wasn’t time for a baby! Even if the baby was Immanuel – “*God with us*” – it wasn’t the way Ahaz wanted God to be with him; Ahaz wanted a warrior “*Lord, strong and mighty, a Lord, mighty in battle.*” (Ps 24:8) Sure, “*Immanuel*” – God with us – was a name of comfort, meant to give Ahaz and Judah confidence – after all it was a name that fearful and worried people had longed/needed to hear: the promise of God’s presence, with them. Ahaz wanted a “sign” but couldn’t see it when God gave it to him: the result was the fall of Jerusalem and his kingdom.

[Have you asked for a sign? like what you got? Was it what wanted/needed?]

The Good News is that you don’t have to ask: God has already given us what He promised long ago to Ahaz – through Isaiah and the other prophets – in child/person,

Jesus. Paul, in our first reading says this when he recounts for those listening – those longing to hear about God’s promises/promised One – how *“long ago in many ways and at many times God’s prophets spoke His message to our ancestors. But now at last, God sent his Son to bring his message to us.”* God’s promised sign – a baby that embodied God’s grace/love/power, whose death/blood would wash away our sins, and would sit in glory with God in heaven; the one that John the Baptist was born to proclaim – came. This is why the third Sunday of Advent is the Sunday of Advent Joy. [Baby=Joy – cravings/McD’s/pineapple – SER/laughing]

Centuries after Ahaz, after the Prophets prophesied/proclaimed and the Psalmists sang of God’s promises of something better/eternal, of peace/joy/love given as only God can give; a joy that changes hearts – a virgin was visited by the angel Gabriel who told her she would give birth to the Son of God. This was the baby those watching for the Child were waiting for, the One who would inherit a kingdom that would endure forever, a baby conceived by the Holy Spirit, Emmanuel – God with us – born to live with us to die for us. Ahaz didn’t live to see the baby he didn’t think he needed but as Paul’s message makes clear; Emmanuel – this watched for Child – is what/who we need – He’s more than we could ask for/ever hope to have. The sign is clear but this sign is more than a sign, it’s both a promise made and fulfilled. As we continue through Advent know that as we keep watch for the Child to come, come!, Friends, keep watch in joy for God’s promise is fulfilled for you in the child promised to Mary, Emmanuel – God with us/you. Amen.