

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

Rev. Geoff Ross Sunday, December 24, 2017. St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church

How many shopping days are left until Christmas? Guys, there’s still enough time to get everything done, or is there too much time? I doubt that’s what your children would say that: I’m pretty sure they can’t wait any longer; that they’re counting the days, watching and waiting, for Christmas to come. And why not? What’s not to get excited about: candy, cookies to enjoy, presents waiting for them under the tree, fun, family, and lots of food. To them Christmas can’t come soon enough! But what about us adults? Are you eager for Christmas or a little jaded about the whole thing? Did all the shopping you had to do, the concerts, worship services you attended, all the house cleaning and decorating, cooking, baking you did, parties, and guests, wear you down? You are watching and waiting for Christmas, too, just like the children. Maybe you just want Christmas to come – and go/be over and done with – just as quickly.

The People of God/Israel watched and waited. Century after century they waited and hoped and watched. God promised to send to his people a Helper, a Saviour – the Messiah, the Anointed One – to save and rule His people. A Messiah who would come to give good news to the poor, set the captives free, heal the blind/deaf. When the Messiah came, the lame would walk, the hungry would be fed, and the humble and lowly would be raised up. All those who were lost would be saved. No wonder God’s people watched and waited. The coming of the Messiah would be better than Christmas – at least, Christmas as we know it!

But for centuries they waited, and the Messiah did not come. Did they eagerly wait and watch faithfully or, like many of us, did they get jaded/give up hope? Against this ennui God sent Prophets to call His people to repentance and restored faith, and to keep the hope of His promise alive/fresh in their minds/hearts. The prophets wondered over the ‘Who/What/When?’ clues God revealed to them about the Promised One. Slowly, through the centuries, God’s gift was unwrapped, yet also remained a mystery. Like a puzzle being slowly assembled, one piece at a time, they learned that the Messiah would be a prophet like Moses, a King like David; He would be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace. His kingdom would endure forever, yet the Anointed One of God would suffer and die like a lamb led to slaughter. Like a sacrificial lamb He would bear the sins of the people. This new ruler would come from Bethlehem. A star would rise over Israel. The promised Messiah would be a child, a son born of a virgin. He would be called Emmanuel—God with us! The Promised One would be God, Himself, with us!

God also watched and waited – and remembered His promise to send the Saviour. And then it happened! Just as the Prophet Isaiah – in the Call to Worship – said: when the Promised One comes, the sentinels/watchmen of Israel would sing for joy, and that they would see the Lord Himself coming to dwell among to his people. The pieces of the puzzle came together, and the final piece slid into place. God Himself – in the flesh –

was coming to redeem his people, came, born among us, as one of us. The mystery was unwrapped, and wrapped again in swaddling cloths and laid in a manger in Bethlehem. A star proclaimed his birth. The promise was kept. The long-awaited Messiah was born in Bethlehem; His name is Jesus.

When the time was right, the promised was fulfilled. For the past three weeks we've heard how John the Baptist came to prepare the way of the Lord. In today's Luke reading John's father, Zechariah, praises God for remembering his covenant promise that God would deliver us from our enemies, that we might "*serve him without fear, by being holy and good as long as we live.*" And this is exactly what Jesus was born to do as we heard in the angel's message to Joseph in the Matthew reading: through his birth – then death on the cross, and through his resurrection, Jesus came to deliver/save us from our sins/death, giving us the hope of eternal life.

All through these long – or too short – weeks of Advent, we have kept watch. And while we may have become jaded/too busy with our preparations and neglected to repent/prepare our hearts for the true reason for the season, we still have time to join in the wonder/celebration of our Lord's birth! Like Scrooge, we haven't missed it! Restored, forgiven, saved from our sins by the watched for Messiah – the One we need – who was born to be with us, suffered, died for us. Friends, this is the one true gift of Christmas: because of the incarnation the resurrection could happen – and because of this/through faith in Christ Jesus, we have nothing to fear. The Christ Child of Bethlehem can't come soon enough! Amen.