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The Days of Prophecy

First week of Advent

Scripture: various

Sermon Series: *The First Days of Jesus*

Topic: Advent, Prophecy



Introduction

Today is the first Sunday of Advent. Therefore, we will step out of our series in Colossians and begin a four-week Advent series entitled “The First Days of Jesus.” We will spend our time considering the events and people surrounding the birth of Jesus. Today we’ll look at the prophecies that pointed the coming of messiah and how they related to Jesus. Next week, we’ll consider the role of John the Baptist in preparing hearts to receive Jesus. The week after we’ll ponder the virgin conception. On the 23rd we’ll think about those who proclaimed Jesus’ birth, such as the angels, shepherds, and magi. Then on Christmas Eve we’ll focus on the birth of Jesus.

Adventus

The word Advent comes from the Latin word *adventus*, which means 'coming' and refers to the first coming of Jesus when he wrapped Himself in human flesh and was born in Bethlehem. Advent is celebrated around the world by Christians on the four Sundays before Christmas.

Advent is a season marked by both *anticipation* and *longing*. We begin to anticipate celebrating the birth of Jesus at His first coming, but we also begin to long for His second coming. Jesus has already come in the flesh. However, at His departure He promised He would come again. Advent is the season where we celebrate the fact that He has already come in the flesh, but we long for Him to make His return. We need to be reminded that He has planned to return.

He Will Come Again

On the night before His death, Jesus promised His disciples that He would come again.

John 14:1-3

"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. ² In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."

There are many hearts in this room who today are troubled. There are many of us who feel that the trouble is about to overwhelm us. Some of us are barely here, but we are here. If this is you, then you need to hear these words of Jesus. He knows your troubles. He loves you. He has not abandoned you. He wants you to keep believing; to keep believing in God and to keep believing in Him. If He seems a bit distant, then remember He's preparing a place for you. He loves you deeply. It's as if He is saying to you, "I'm getting things ready for your arrival and when everything is ready, I will personally come and get you so that you can be with me where I am."

Do you hear that? You, whose life is filled with trouble, He loves you and He wants you to be with Him. Yes, it's true. Jesus loves troubled people—even the ones who don't want anyone on the outside to know the depths of the trouble that swirls and rages on the inside. Jesus loves His troubled children. Troubled children are all He has. He would say to you,

John. 16:33

"In this world you will have trouble, but take heart, I have overcome the world."

When Jesus came in the flesh the first time, He overcame all the sources of trouble in this world. He may seem far away today, but He's preparing a place for His children. And if He is preparing a place for His children, then He *will* come again to get them.

This fact is important for us to remember. We know it's important because the two angels who attended Jesus' ascension into heaven, on the fortieth day after His resurrection, made sure it was the last thought on disciples' minds as they watched Jesus rising up into the clouds.

Acts 1:11

"Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

Advent is the season to be reminded of this truth. Advent is the time to be reminded of what Jesus accomplished at His first coming and to remember that He promised to come again. He said He would come again and Jesus has never yet broken a promise.

Does Jesus Have the Power to Return?

But how do we know that Jesus can keep His promise to return? How do we know that He possesses the power to return to earth for a second time?

There is evidence in Scripture that should give us hope that He does indeed have the power and ability to return. There are many prophecies in Scripture that were fulfilled in Jesus' birth. These prophecies point to the truth that God was powerfully at work in and through Jesus.

Thus we have solid evidence for believing that Jesus is God's messiah and thus that He possesses the power needed to keep all His promises. So as we consider the First Days of Jesus we must first consider the prophecies that pointed to the coming of messiah and see how they were fulfilled in the events surrounding Jesus' birth.

The Beginning of Jesus

This week I reviewed the beginning of all four gospels. The purpose of the Gospels is to tell the story of Jesus' life and ministry. As I read each of them again, I discovered something I'd never noticed before. All four gospels begin long before the birth of Jesus. Matthew begins by going back to Abraham, Mark opens by quoting Isaiah—who lived 700 years before Jesus, Luke starts by telling the story of John the Baptist—who was born 6 months before Jesus, and John essentially quotes Genesis chapter one. The point appears to be that *the beginning of the story of Jesus actually began long before His birth.*

Jesus is the most important human being who has ever been born. The day of His birth ought to be joyously celebrated by every human, every angel, and every other creature whom He created. Yet, so many of us fail to see His significance. However, it is not because we lack the evidence. God has given us many pointers to the importance and significance of Jesus, if only we will have eyes to see. If anyone does not see the importance of Jesus, it's certainly not because there is no evidence.

God Announces His Work Beforehand

When God is at work in significant ways that He wants the world to stop and take note of, He announces it beforehand. This was the purpose of the prophets, to receive God's word from Him and then tell people what He had said and what He planned to do.

Amos 3:7 (ESV)

"For the Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets."

When God wants to distinguish His work from our work, He lets us know in advance exactly what it is that He's about to do. In fact, this is THE quality that distinguishes God from all other so-called gods and men. God says to Israel and their false idols.

Isaiah 41:22-23 (ESV)

²² Let them bring them, and tell us what is to happen. Tell us the former things, what they are, that we may consider them, that we may know their outcome; or declare to us the things to come. ²³ Tell us what is to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods;

Then again,

Isaiah 46:9-10 (ESV)

⁹ remember the former things of old;
for I am God, and there is no other;
I am God, and there is none like me,
¹⁰ declaring the end from the beginning
and from ancient times things not yet done,
saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,'

God is the only being who is able to announce in advance what He intends to do and then has enough power to cause it to happen exactly as He said it would. This is why Old Testament prophecies are so important. They help us know when God is doing something and when he is not. Moses gave this instruction to the people of Israel to help them discern when God was speaking and when He was not.

Deuteronomy 18:22 (ESV)

²² when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him.

In other words, if someone says, "God told me such and such is going to happen," then the way to know if that word was truly from God is whether or not it actually comes about the way

it was announced. For example, when the people of Israel were standing at the shore of the Red Sea and they looked behind them and saw the entire Egyptian army racing toward them with weapons drawn, and Moses said,

“Don’t worry. Stand your ground and be amazed at the salvation the LORD is about to work for you, for the Egyptians you see coming after you today, you will not see alive tomorrow or ever again, for the LORD will fight for you, so be quiet and watch Him at work.”¹

When the next day dawned the dead bodies of the Egyptians were lying still on the opposite shoreline. It turned out exactly as Moses had said. God worked salvation for them and they didn’t have to lift a finger. The word that Moses spoke about their salvation happened exactly as predicted. That was the work of God. He announced it beforehand and then He powerfully accomplished exactly what He predicted. *God is the only person who is able to make a plan, announce it in advance, and then has the power to carry out the plan exactly as He predicted.*

When this happens we can be certain that God is at work and not man. We can make plans but we do not have the power to bring them about exactly as we intend. Only God does. He announces His plans in advance and then, when He decides the time is right, He exercises His power to bring His plans about.

Joy (in Sorrow) For Us this Advent

This is why Advent is such a wonderful season. This is why this season can bring you great joy today, even if your life is filled with sorrow.² God announced beforehand that He would send someone whom He would anoint to reverse the curse on this earth, one whose heel would be bruised while crushing the head of Satan, one who would carry the blessings of Abraham to all the families of the earth, one who would be a descendant of David and king forever, one who would be born of a virgin, born in Bethlehem, and yet grow up in Egypt and Nazareth. Advent is the season for celebrating the coming of this One and looking forward to His return. There are good reasons for understanding that Jesus is the fulfillment of all that God spoke before. The good reasons for being joyful in Jesus since He is the one through whom God’s word is fulfilled and His power is demonstrated.

God At Work Through Prophecy

God was at work long before we knew He was at work. It is hard for us to see, but God has been at work in the world since the day He created it and He always announced beforehand what He intended to do. Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s plans.

¹ Ex. 14:13-14.

² 2 Cor. 6:10.

First, on the day that Adam & Eve sinned, God announced His intention to reverse the curse of sin. He announced His intention of crushing Satan's head through the bruising of the heel of His anointed one. On that day, God said to Satan,

Genesis 3:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ "I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel."

Then, in the NT it is written,³

Hebrews 2:14 (ESV)

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,

Jesus is the only man who entered death without ever having sinned. Therefore, when He had made full atonement for the sins of all those who would put their trust in Him, He rose victoriously from the dead, thus destroying Satan's hope of condemning the people of God. Jesus fulfilled God's promise. Jesus lost His life for three days, but Satan has now lost his head for eternity. Jesus reversed the curse. He took upon himself the curse of sin and turned death into the doorway of eternal life for anyone who will go to God through faith in Him.

Second, God announced His intention to send one through whom He would extend the blessings of Abraham to all the nations of the world. God said to Abraham,

Genesis 22:18 (ESV)

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

And Peter explains that Abraham's blessings come to us through Jesus.

Acts 3:25-26 (ESV)

²⁵ "You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' ²⁶ God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness."

³ See also Gal. 4:4-5.

When a person, through Jesus, turns from his sins and turns to God through Jesus, then God pours out upon that person all the blessings He promised to Abraham. Jesus is the fulfillment of the blessings God promised to Abraham. These blessings are available to all nations.

Third, God announced beforehand that He would send one who is Heir to the throne of David.⁴

Isaiah 9:7 (ESV)

⁷ Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

God fulfilled that promise through Jesus' genealogy. Jesus was a descendant of David and a rightful, legal heir to David's throne.

Matthew 1:1

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Jesus' genealogy recorded in Matthew's gospel is different because Matthew traces Jesus' legal lineage, which demonstrates His right to be the heir of the throne of David.⁵ This passage is critical in understanding that God was always at work throughout time working out His promise to Abraham through each of his descendants all the way up to Jesus. We tend to ignore these kinds of passages when we come to them. Yet all of God's word is true and describes actual events that took place in history.

Genealogy of Jesus & the Binumarien Tribe

I am reminded of an amazing story.⁶ In the 1970's a young family with Wycliffe Bible Translators moved to Papua New Guinea to live among a the Binumarien tribe. They learned the language and began translating the Gospel of Matthew, but they, like most of us, ignored the first 17 verses of Matthew, which is Jesus' genealogy, and started with



⁴ See also 2 Sam. 7:13.

⁵ Luke's genealogy is different in that he traces Jesus' physical lineage all the way back to Adam.

⁶ Source: <https://creation.com/binumarien-people-find-bible-true> accessed 28 November 2018.

the birth of Jesus in verse 18. The translation of the whole book took about a year and throughout that time the tribe remained open but skeptical about Jesus. They doubted that He was a real person.

Finally, the translation of Matthew was complete, complete that is except for the first seventeen verses. So the missionary and his language helper worked their way through the boring genealogy of Jesus. As they worked, the missionary noticed that his helper was unusually quiet, but very attentive to their work. When they finished, the helper rose to leave and told the missionary that there would be an important tribal meeting that night and that he must come and bring the portion they had just translated. The missionary was curious. This was unusual behavior, but he agreed to attend the meeting.

When the missionary arrived at the meeting house, it was packed. In fact, he had never seen so many of the tribe gathered together in one place before. All eyes were on him and there was an odd tension in the room. The language helper asked him to read the passage out loud that they had translated that morning. The room grew silent. The missionary started to read.

‘These are the ancestors of Jesus Messiah, a descendant of King David and of Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac; Isaac was the father of Jacob; Jacob was the father of Judah and his brothers; Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah; ... ’

As he read, the tribal people began to stir and move closer to him. Slowly they pressed in around him and began looking at what he was reading. Soon the missionary was completely surrounded and he grew increasingly nervous. Then he finished reading and slowly looked up. All eyes were wide open and transfixed on him.

One man, with a deep look of incredulity, asked, “Why didn’t you tell us of this before?” The missionary didn’t know how to respond. Another man said, “No one bothers to write down the ancestors of spirit beings.” Another concluded, “Jesus must be a real man on this earth then. He’s not just white man’s magic.” Then the chief responded, “Then what the missionary has taught [about Jesus] us is true.” The whole tribe then embraced Jesus as God’s messiah and savior.

The OT prophecies are true because God’s word is true. The genealogy of Jesus reveals the fact that Jesus is a son of David and a son of Abraham. He is the rightful and legal heir to God’s promise to Abraham and heir to the throne of David. Seven hundred years before Jesus was born, Isaiah wrote that messiah would reign forever on the throne of David. In Jesus, this prophecy is fulfilled.

Fourth, God announced beforehand that His chosen one would be born of a virgin. Again this prophecy was written by Isaiah 700 years before Jesus' birth.

Isaiah 7:14 (ESV)

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

When the time was right, God sent an angel to Mary to effect His plan. And he said to her,

Luke 1:31 (ESV)

And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.

Luke 1:34 (ESV)

And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

Luke 1:35 (ESV)

And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.

What's the explanation for this? Matthew says,

Matthew 1:22

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken, by the prophet: [Isaiah]

God announced in 700 B.C. that He would send His anointed messiah through a virgin conception and he fulfilled His prophecy and plan in and through Jesus.

Fifth, God announced through the prophet Micah, also writing about 700 years before Christ, that His messiah would be born in Bethlehem.

Micah 5:2 (ESV)

2 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.

This just happens to be where Jesus was born.

Luke 2:4-6 (ESV)

And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David,⁵ to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. ⁶ And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth.

God planned and announced hundreds of years beforehand that His messiah would be born in the city of Bethlehem and this prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus.

Sixth, God announced through the prophet Hosea, writing about the same time as Isaiah, that His chosen Son would, like ancient Israel, be brought out of Egypt. To accomplish this part of His plan God sent an angel to direct Joseph to flee to Egypt for safety from king Herod.

Matthew 2:13-15 (ESV)

¹³ Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." ¹⁴ And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt ¹⁵ and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son."

Seventh, God announced, about 600 years before Jesus, through the prophet Jeremiah, that there would be those who oppose the coming of His messiah and thus there would be weeping mingled with joy at His arrival. This prophecy was sadly fulfilled through the evil jealousy of king Herod.

Matthew 2:16-18 (ESV)

¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:

¹⁸ "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."

There's more⁷, but perhaps this will suffice to demonstrate that God was powerfully at work before the first days of Jesus, announcing beforehand specific details about the circumstances surrounding the birth of messiah, all of which were fulfilled in the first days of Jesus. God even used those who were his enemies to fulfill His plan. Surely it cannot be argued that the enemies of God colluded with Him in some conspiracy to manipulate Old Testament writings in

⁷ "He shall be called a Nazarene" Mt. 2:23.

order to falsely affirm that Jesus was messiah when He was not. This is not what happened. What happened in and through Jesus is that God was powerfully at work demonstrating His glory and His mercy in providing a Savior for this undeserving and broken world. There are dozens of prophecies that are fulfilled in Jesus. Rejoice in His power. Rejoice that messiah has come in the flesh. Choose to rejoice in Him even if these days, for you, are filled with sorrow.

Our God is great and there is no one like Him.