

Expecting (the first Sunday of Advent)

We have all been told about the Latin origin for the word Advent. We understand that it is a time of expectancy and anticipation. Today is the first Sunday of the period leading up to our celebration of the birth of Jesus. On the church calendar, Advent extends from four Sundays prior to Christmas until Christmas Eve.

Advent is a season of the liturgical year observed in most Christians as a time of expectant waiting and preparation for both the celebration of the birth of Christ at Christmas and the return of Christ at the Second Coming. Advent is the beginning of the liturgical year. (So, Happy New Year!)

The anticipation of the Second Coming so often is eclipsed by the attention that is focused on the birth of the Messiah. Both events are a part of the reality of Jesus. He came as a child born to a young girl in Bethlehem and He will come again as king descending from heaven on the clouds. This morning, we will take a few moments to review and refresh our memory about the initial advent. The time when Jesus first came to earth. Today, we will look at some of the key players in the birth of Christ and note how they reacted to the news of their part in the coming of the Messiah.

Much of our scripture will come from the first chapter of Luke. The birth of Jesus was preceded by the birth of His cousin who would serve as a prophet to prepare others to hear the message of Jesus. As we begin, we find that God's angels were very busy during the months leading up to the birth of Jesus. Let's open our Bibles to the first chapter of Luke and begin with the 5th verse. In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah; and he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. They were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in years.

Now it happened *that* while he was performing his priestly service before God in the *appointed* order of his division, according to the custom of the priestly office, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And the whole multitude of the people were in prayer outside at the hour of the incense offering. And an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. Zacharias was troubled when he saw *the angel*, and fear gripped him. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John. You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. It is he who will go *as a forerunner* before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Zacharias said to the angel, "How will I know this *for certain*? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years." The angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. And behold, you shall be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time."

The people were waiting for Zacharias, and were wondering at his delay in the temple. But when he came out, he was unable to speak to them; and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple; and he kept making signs to them, and remained mute. When the days of his priestly service were ended, he went back home.

After these days Elizabeth his wife became pregnant, and she kept herself in seclusion for five months, saying, “This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked *with favor* upon *me*, to take away my disgrace among men.” (Luke 1:5-25 NASB)

The first indication that the promise of a redeemer was imminent was the conversation between Gabriel and Zacharias.

So, a birth is predicted and we see two reactions. Zacharias was skeptical. He was given a sign that was not taken away until he agreed to name the child John. Elizabeth said that God had “looked with favor” on her. When a couple did not have children, it was always assumed to be that the wife was barren. So, when Elizabeth was to have a child, it took away that stigma.

Now we look at Mary. Mary was a young girl. She may have been only 13 or 14 years old. She was pledged to Joseph for marriage. As mentioned earlier, this pledge was more binding than an engagement.

Mary was visited by the angel Gabriel. Gabriel had some news that was exciting and puzzling at the same time.

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged (some translations may use the word betrothed. Betrothed; is the first stage of marriage in Jewish culture, usually lasting for a year before the wedding night. It is more legal than engagement as we know the term.) to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary. And coming in, he said to her, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord *is* with you.” But she was very perplexed at *this* statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was. The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.” (Luke 1:26-33 NASB)

Some people refuse to believe that Mary was a virgin. They do not accept the “virgin birth” of Christ. To those skeptics, I offer two points to consider. First, more than 700 years before this conversation occurred, Isaiah prophesied:

Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14 NASB)

Now some people claim that the word virgin could easily be translated as “young girl.” Well, let’s look at the second point. Mary asked a very pointed question of the angel.

Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” (Luke 1:34 NASB)

If Mary had already been with Joseph, then she certainly would not have asked this question. She would have been shamed by being “found out.”

Now let’s notice the reaction of Mary to the startling news. **“And Mary said, “Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word.” (Luke 1:38 NASB)**

Mary accepted the news from the messenger of God. She was humble in accepting her role in God’s plan for the Messiah to come to earth through her.

Now, there is one other person to consider as we look at these events as they unfold. What about Joseph? Just imagine that you are engaged to a young woman and you find that she is expecting

a child. You know beyond all doubt that the child is not yours. What would you do? The very thoughts that just went through your mind are most likely the same thoughts that Joseph had. **Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL,” which translated means, “GOD WITH US.” And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took *Mary* as his wife, but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus. (Matthew 1:18-25 NASB)**

So, how did Joseph react to this startling news? **“And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him,”**

Joseph accepted what the angel told him and did not send Mary away. Rather, he stayed on and was the earthly father of the son of God.

Today, we have seen how four different people reacted to the news as God revealed the coming of Christ. The birth of Christ is the first advent. The Second Advent will be when Christ returns to claim his church.

We are given a description of what we may expect when Christ comes again.

And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.” (Acts 1:9-11)

Christ will not be born but will come out of heaven in similar manner in which he left to return to heaven.

How should we react to his second coming?

Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you; and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also *do* for you; so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints (1 Thessalonians. 3:11-13 NASB)

We should be growing in our love for one another and all people as we await His coming. We should take comfort in anticipating His coming.

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 NASB)

These words are often read at funerals. The apostle Paul wants us to find comfort in the fact that Christ will be coming back. He will be coming for His church.

As we enter into this season of advent, let celebrate the birth of our savior and anticipate His return to take us home. Truly this is an exciting time for His church.