



Lakeside Sermons

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina
Jody C. Wright, Senior Minister

NOVEMBER 27, 2016

THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

COMPLETELY FOREVER: CHANGED BY THE COMING OF CHRIST
THE HANGING OF THE GREENS

ORGAN PRELUDE: Prelude on The Holly and the Ivy Herbert Sumsion

WORDS OF WELCOME AND CONCERNS OF THE CHURCH

ORGAN MEDITATION: Voluntary in A Maurice Greene

CHORAL INTROIT French Melody, 15th Century
O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel, that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

PROCESSIONAL CAROL 119: "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" VENI EMMANUEL

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT WREATH Jessica, Herb, Connor, and Edward Evans
Long years ago, a worshiper entered the sanctuary of God and sang:

I will praise the Lord as long as I live;
I will sing praises to my God all my life long.
Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help.
When their breath departs, they return to the earth . . . their plans perish.

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the Lord their God,
who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them;
who keeps faith for ever;
who executes justice for the oppressed;
who gives food to the hungry.
The Lord sets the prisoners free;
the Lord opens the eyes of the blind.
The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down;
the Lord loves the righteous.
The Lord watches over the strangers;
he upholds the orphan and the widow,
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.
The Lord will reign for ever

Today we light the Candle of Hope.

Like the psalmist so long ago, we come today to sing a triumphal song of praise to God
for the hope which comes with the Christ Child, a hope which changes our lives forever
. . . completely forever.

LITANY OF PREPARATION

Elizabeth Edwards

Minister: How shall we prepare this house for the coming of the King?

People: With branches of cedar, the tree of royalty.

Minister: How shall we prepare this house for the coming of the eternal Christ?

People: With garlands of pine and fir, whose leaves are ever living, ever green.

Minister: How shall we prepare this house for the coming of our Savior?

People: With wreaths of holly and ivy, telling of his passion, death, and resurrection.

Minister: How shall we prepare our hearts for the coming of the Son of God?

People: By hearing again the words of the Scriptures foretelling the saving work of God.

Minister: For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.

People: Glory to God in the highest!

THE GLORIA PATRI

GLORIA

**Glory be to God the Father, Glory be to God the Son,
Glory be to God the Spirit, Ever three and ever one.
Gloria in excelsis Deo. Gloria in excelsis Deo.**

THE INVOCATION AND LORD'S PRAYER

Rev. Edwards

O God of Israel, with expectant hearts, we your people have gathered to prepare for Christ's coming. Even as we rest in the comfort of familiar sights and sounds, we anticipate Christ's birth with surprise and wonder as we watch and wait for signs of your hope. In our places of questions and fears, of scarcity and confusion, wherever dreams unravel and there seems nothing to which we can cling, your gift of hope is the thread that is strong enough to hold life together. So we pray even now for a hope that will transform us completely, that will change us forever. We pray for the hope that is ours through the coming of Christ who is our hope for today and for all our days to come, and who taught us to pray together, saying,

Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom and the power
and the glory for ever. Amen.

CHILDREN'S ANTHEM:

"Prepare Ye"

Karin Thomas Shovic

Prepare ye the way of the Lord! He is coming to save us, redeem us, forgive us. Prepare ye the way of the Lord! Isaiah the prophet once said: "The glory of the Lord shall be revealed."

Isaiah the prophet once said: "Hallelujah, he is coming! Hallelujah, Christ the King. Prepare ye the way of the Lord! Wonderful Counselor, The Prince of Peace. Prepare ye the way of the Lord.

THE OLD TESTAMENT LESSON: Isaiah 52:7-10

Juno Brantley

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns!" Your watchmen shall lift up their voices, with their voices they shall sing together; for they shall see eye to eye when the Lord brings back Zion. Break forth into joy, sing together, you waste places of Jerusalem! For the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord has made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

PRAYER

Georgia Morris

O God, you sent your Son to be King of kings and Prince of peace. Grant that this Christmas he may be born not only in our memories but anew in our hearts. Help us to come to this festive season seeking him, as did the shepherds of old, that we may go home a new way — new creatures in Christ. O Lord, we stand before you as one from whom no secrets are hid.

- May your beauty transform our ugliness.
- May your love drive out our hate.
- May your goodness penetrate our evil.
- May your mercy forgive our unworthiness.
- May your hope calm our fears.
- May your humility shame our arrogance.
- May your joy invade our sorrow.

O God, may the star which first pointed the way be the light that will lead us out of darkness. Amen.

THE BLESSING OF THE HOLLY AND THE IVY

Dexter David

Because holly and ivy bear their berries in the dark, cold winter months, our ancestors hung them in their homes to symbolize the hope and expectation of spring. Today we use holly as a reminder of Christ's passion during the otherwise joyous Christmas celebration. Legend has it that a shepherd brought a sprig of holly to the stable on Christmas night as a gift to the Christ child. Its leaves glistened in the moonlight, and its berries were snow white. As the Child reached to receive the gift, the berries suddenly turned a deep red. For Christians today, the prickly leaves represent the crown of thorns which Christ wore during his crucifixion and the berries represent the blood he shed for us. The ivy represents our human weakness clinging to divine strength. May God bless the holly and ivy that grace our sanctuary that we may remember his great sacrifice for us.

ANTHEM: "Sans Day Carol"

Cornish Traditional Carol/arr. John Rutter

Now the Holly bears a berry as white as the milk and Mary bore Jesus, who was wrapped up in silk. *And Mary bore Jesus Christ our Savior for to be and the first tree in the greenwood, it was the holly. Holly, holly, and the first tree in the greenwood it was the holly.* Now the Holly bears a berry as green as the grass and Mary bore Jesus, who died on the cross. Now the Holly bears a berry as black as the coal and Mary bore Jesus, who died for us all. Now the Holly bears a berry as blood is it red then trust we our Savior who rose from the dead.

THE BLESSING OF THE GREENERY AND WREATHS

Barbara Valentine

In many ancient civilizations it was believed that all objects possessed spirits. Since it was believed that most trees possessed kindly spirits, it became customary for people to bring home sprigs and branches of trees in order that their homes might be blessed by their presence. When Christianity came into existence, the newly converted pagans refused to give up this custom, so it eventually became part of our tradition. As we decorate our homes and places of worship, the evergreens symbolize God's eternal and everlasting love for us, even after death. The wreaths, round with no beginning and no end, symbolize the victory and glory of the fulfillment of scripture in the coming of Christ.

CAROL MEDLEY

- 147 (stanzas 1&3):
- 125 (stanzas 1&2):
- 150 (stanzas 1&3):

- “Away in a Manger”
- “Come, O Long-expected Jesus”
- “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing”

- AWAY IN A MANGER
- HYFRYDOL
- MENDELSSOHN

THE BLESSING OF THE POINSETTIAS

Mary Frances Raper

Poinsettias add a special glow to the pageantry of the Advent season. This plant blooms at Christmas in Mexico, where it is known by its native name, "flower of the Holy Night." The legendary account bears out the appropriateness of the name. A small boy had no gift to bring to the Christ Child's manger bed in the village church. As he trudged toward the church, scuffing his feet in the dust of the road, he decided he could at least offer the Holy Infant the branches from a bush that grew beside the way. Quickly he stripped off some of the branches and made his way to the church where he reverently placed the green leaves at the manger. As he knelt there, the other children jeered and mocked his offering. Rising tearfully, he looked once more at the branches, only to find that where his tears had fallen bloomed a brilliant red star-shaped flower. Today the Poinsettia is the most popular of Christmas plants, for even without the legend, Christians see in the flaming star of its red bracts the star of Bethlehem. May God remind us that the sincerest gifts are those of the heart which always give birth to new life.

ANTHEM: "In the Bleak Midwinter"

Gustav Holst/arr. Donald Moore

In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan, earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;
snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow, in the bleak midwinter, long time ago.
Angels and archangels o'er the stable there, cherubim and seraphim gathered in the air;
But his mother only, in her maiden bliss, worshiped the beloved, worshiped with a kiss.
O what can I give him, poor though as I am? If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
if I were a Wise Man, I would do my part; what I can I give him: give him my heart.
What I can I give him: give him my heart.

OFFERTORY PRAYER

Joe Whisnant

During this season of waiting and anticipation, we are reminded to stay awake for the coming of your Son, O God. Jesus' love often comes into our lives in quiet, unexpected ways. Today, we generously respond to this compassion and commit ourselves to living in a manner worthy of your love. In anticipation of the coming of Jesus, the Savior, we pray. Amen.

ORGAN OFFERTORY: Improvisation

Mark Pichowicz

THE DOXOLOGY

THE FIRST NOEL

Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise God all creatures here below.
Praise God above ye heavenly host. Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel, born is the King of Israel.

THE BLESSING OF THE CRECHE

Greyson Tillman

After Jesus was born in the stable in Bethlehem, his parents bundled him in soft cloths and made a bed for him in a manger. What a humble beginning it was for the Son of God! That which held feed for animals also cradled the "Bread of Life." Later, as Jesus traveled about teaching and healing, he had no place to call "home" and likely spent a few nights in other borrowed stables. The manger reminds us that the Son of God was also the "Son of man," that he who was divine was also human. May all who contemplate this mystery be filled with awe and wonder and bow down in humble worship as did the shepherds and Wise Men.

ANTHEM: "A Place to Keep Your Son"

Matthew H. Corl

A watching, waiting people look for signs from above. We keep awake, expecting the coming of your love. We know good news shall be here soon, a blessed one shall come; prepare in us a warm heart, a place to keep your son. A voice cries out, "Get ready, prepare a way for God; be ready for his coming, the coming of our Lord." We know good news shall be here soon, a blessed one shall come; prepare in us a warm heart, a place to keep your son. Rejoicing in your spirit, our deepest joy in you; the world is ever changing, but you are ever true. We know good news shall be here soon, a blessed one shall come; prepare in us a warm heart, a place to keep your son. We hear the angel's greeting, "O hail, you blessed one, for you shall bear a Savior and he will be God's son." We know good news shall be here soon, the blessed one is near; we'll make for him a warm heart, we'll hold your own son dear.

THE BLESSING OF THE CHRISMON TREE

John Derbyshire

The most popular legend holds that the first Christmas tree was cut down by Martin Luther, who brought it home and decorated it with candles to symbolize the stars that lit the Bethlehem sky on the night of Jesus' birth.

The Chrismon Tree is an evergreen that symbolizes the eternal life which our Savior offers to us all. On it are tiny white lights that speak of Him Who is light of the World. The Chrismons (which stand for Christ monogram) proclaim the Name, the Life, and the saving acts of Jesus the Christ. May God enable us to see the entire drama of redemption and love as we look upon this tree and draw us into a life of service and witness.

SOLO:

"O Christmas Tree"

Traditional Carol

O Christmas Tree, how faithful are your branches! So green when summer breezes blow; still green amid the winter snow. O Christmas Tree, how faithful are your branches! O Christmas tree, O tree of green, unchanging. Since evergreen you stand, we know God doth eternal life bestow. O Christmas Tree, O tree of green, unchanging.

Bo Browder, soloist

THE GOSPEL LESSON:

Luke 1:26-38

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!"

But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was.

Then 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 bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end."

Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren.

MEDITATION:

"Completely Forever: Hope, A Triumphal Song"

Dr. Wright

On January 15, 2009, U.S. Airways Flight 1549 experienced numerous bird strikes which shut down the plane's engines and forced an emergency landing. Dubbed "The Miracle on the Hudson" because the plane ditched into the river and managed to stay afloat until all passengers and crew were

safely evacuated, the incident brought unsolicited fame to the two pilots. Captain Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger and his co-pilot Jeffrey Skiles were lauded as heroes because they maintained their composure and skillfully saved the lives of all people aboard.

This past September, in an interview with Charlie Rose, Captain Sullenberger talked in detail about what happened in the two hundred and eight seconds he and his co-pilot had to assess their options and engage a plan. Those three and a half minutes made a difference in every life on that airplane and on hundreds of other people related to them. As the interview concluded, Charlie Rose made an observation about the experience: "It changed your life forever," he said. And Captain Sullenberger replied, "Instantly, completely forever."¹

There are those experiences that change our lives forever, but they may only be a detour or different path taken along the same journey. Our lives are different, but the eventual outcomes may well be the same. There are other experiences or events, however, which make all the difference in the world. As Captain Sullenberger confessed, they change our lives "completely forever."

Throughout the Advent season we will be exploring and celebrating an experience that truly changed life "completely forever." The coming of Jesus Christ into the world and into our lives has indeed made all the difference in how we live and what life means for us. In particular, the coming of Jesus as God among us has "completely forever" changed our hope, our love, our joy, and our peace. Jesus has changed our lives.

Mary certainly experienced that instantaneous change when the angel informed her that she would have a son, but no ordinary son. Her child would be none other than the Son of God, the long-yearned for Messiah, the hope of the ages.

On this first Sunday of Advent, we are supposed to be filled with anticipation of the coming of Christ, not only our annual celebration of Jesus' birth but also Christ's return at the end of the age. I suspect, however, that many of us, jaded by the battering ram of bad news, the accumulation of disappointments, and the breathless pace of life at which we find ourselves living, feel much like those Jews of first century Palestine who had begun to give up hope that anything would ever change for the good. Rome controlled their lives. Disparities in living conditions were great. Even their faith felt more like bondage than the freedom God had long ago promised. Hope was in short supply.

Almost two decades ago, Michael Downey wrote about his own loss of hope. He recounted a visit to his elderly friend, an aging woman who had been a spiritual guide for him and many other people. Well advanced in years, she had heard and experienced it all, and he knew that if she did not have the answers he craved, she would at least listen to the questions he asked. Sitting in her near-dark apartment, he emptied his heart:

"What happens when what you once believed no longer seems believable?"

"What happens when what you have staked your life on no longer seems reliable?"

"Faith says yes, and all our hope is anchored in what we have affirmed, what we have said yes to. What happens to hope, to our sense of future, when we can believe no longer?"

"Can you have hope, hope in God, when faith in God is gone?"

¹*The Charlie Rose Show*, September 9, 2016; available online at: www.charlierose.com/videos/29005.

"The questions poured out from the very heart of me," Downey recounted. "Indeed it seemed that I had lost everything, even and especially my most deeply cherished and firmly held convictions about God."² These questions, Downey said, were born, not out of "abstract theological concern," but from years of loss, tragedy, and hurt, his own and of people known and unknown to him.³

By this time the January sun had slipped lower on the horizon and darkness had wrapped itself around the two friends. No light was visible in the room, but he could still see his dear friend. Finally, she spoke: "When you can no longer believe, that's precisely when hope begins."⁴

"When you can no longer believe, that's precisely when hope begins." I think that is what Isaiah was trying to say when he lauded the messenger of God who would bring his people good news. I think it was the message of the angel when he showed up at Mary's door and told her the most unbelievable news she had ever heard. It was the response of Zechariah when he was told his elderly wife would have baby who would grow up to prepare people for the coming of the Messiah. And it is the message for us today who live in a world of broken promises, impossible dreams, and unmet needs.

Michael Downey discovered his hope in the Incarnation, God's dwelling with us. British poet John Byrom discovered his hope in the same place a couple of hundred years earlier. In his poem titled, "A Hymn for Christmas Day," he wrote,

Trace we the babe, who has retrieved our loss,
From his poor manger to his bitter cross;
Treading his steps, assisted by his grace,
Till man's first heavenly state again takes place:
Then may we hope, the angelic thrones among,
To sing, redeemed, a glad triumphal song;⁵

In other words, we follow the Christ Child from birth to death, walking in his steps, helped by his grace, and realize that he has retrieved for us everything that we humans have given up. Our hope then becomes a triumphal song of Immanuel, God with us.

You may find yourself at a point where you don't believe what you once did. You may have given up believing and resigned yourself to merely lip-syncing the words. You may have stopped believing in God because you feel that God has stopped believing in you. You may still believe but wonder where God is in the midst of all that is happening to you and to our world. That is where your hope begins. When you are honest enough to admit that you don't know anymore, when you wonder what is the point of it all, you open the door for God to enter and sing those triumphal words again:

"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end."

²Michael Downey, "Gifts Constant Coming," *Weavings* (November/December 1999): 26.

³Downey, 27.

⁴Downey, 26.

⁵John Byrom, "A Hymn for Christmas Day," *Classic Hymn & Carols*, John Betjeman, ed. (London: Batsford, 2012), 168.

Christ's coming changes our hope completely forever. We discover a Savior who came for all time and all people, not only for Jews who lived two millennia ago. We learn that God in Christ has something to say about how we live together today with questions, concerns, and dilemmas never conceived in the first century. We experience a new hope born, not of someone else's understanding of God, but from our own encounter with the living Christ. It is when we begin to let go of the hope offered by the world that we discover hope born with a child who grew up to be the Savior of the world.

This Advent, this celebration of Christ's coming, in the midst of all our questions, in the cauldron of life's uncertainties, in the dim light of our doubts, may we discover our true hope, a hope which will change our lives forever, completely forever. Amen.

CONFESSION OF FAITH

Minister: Let us decorate this tree with symbols of our faith.

The Chrismons we use represent the life and inspiration of the church in times past, the witness of the church today, and the hope of the church for generations to come.

People: As we share these symbols, let us confess what we believe.

Minister: We believe in God.

People: Father, Creator, Sustainer.

Minister: And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

People: Alpha and Omega, Light of light, Prince of Peace, King of kings, Lord of lords. Immanuel: God with us.

Minister: Jesus! Born of the virgin Mary, born in Bethlehem, cradled in a manger. Heralded by shepherds, Magi, and angelic hosts.

People: Glory to God in the highest and on earth . . . peace.

Minister: We believe in the Holy Spirit.

People: Comforter, Heavenly Dove, Spirit of Love.

Minister: We believe in the church.

People: The Body of Christ, the communion of the saints, the people of God.

Minister: We believe in the Word of Life.

People: Sent from God: living, transforming, and challenging.

Minister: We believe that Christ has conquered life and death.

People: That he was crucified, dead, and buried: the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Minister: We believe in the resurrection.

People: Offering life everlasting!

Minister: Bursting forth with hope!

People: Hallelujah!

Minister: Let us offer our lives to God.

People: In gratitude for the gift of love and life, we offer ourselves to God. Amen.

RECESSIONAL CAROL 140: "Hail to the Lord's Anointed"

SHEFFIELD

BENEDICTION AND CHORAL AMEN

ORGAN POSTLUDE: First Sunday in Advent

Alexis Chauvet

The poinsettias and wreaths that adorn the sanctuary and the doors of the church are given to the glory of God and in memory or in honor of loved ones. Please see the memorial brochure for a listing of these gifts.

THE MINISTRY OF WORSHIP

Jody C. Wright
Senior Minister
Edward Evans
Acolyte

Elizabeth Edwards
Associate Minister
Barkley Browder
Torch Bearer
Mark Pichowicz
Organist

Amy Shortt
Minister of Music
Beth Seagroves
Crucifer