



Lakeside Sermons

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina

Jody C. Wright, Senior Minister

DECEMBER 2, 2018

THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

“HANGING OF THE GREENS”

LONGING TO BELIEVE: DESIRE

ORGAN PRELUDE: *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme* (Wake, Awake, a Voice Is Calling) J. Bach

WORDS OF WELCOME AND CONCERNS OF THE CHURCH

ORGAN MEDITATION: *Es ist ein Ros entsprungen*

Johannes Brahms

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 Leslie, Matt, Elizabeth, Maggie, and Matthew Paszek

The Hebrew people always yearned for God to reveal himself so that their faith would be secure.
King David, both poet and ruler, spoke for the Hebrew people when he sang:

*O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you;
my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.*

Time and time again, God did reveal himself in a variety of ways and David was able to
proclaim:

*I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory.
Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.
So I will bless you as long as I live*

Today we light the candle of Desire. During these days of Advent, we also long to believe. May
the prayer of seekers throughout the ages be ours: "Come, O come, Emmanuel." And may we share
their affirmation of faith as well: "Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel shall come!"

LITANY OF PREPARATION

Robert Sykes

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

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

Deacon: 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.

Deacon: 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.

Deacon: 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.**

Deacon: 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

Elizabeth Edwards

In this season of expectation and preparation, of waiting and longing, O God, break into our world that we might experience your coming once again. God of light, lift the shadows of our doubt and illumine our path toward Bethlehem. Open our hearts to seek you and our minds to receive you, that we might worship you in spirit and in truth. In the Name of the Christ who is both the source and object of our faith and who taught us to pray together saying, "Our Father..."

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: "O Come, Divine Messiah" James Biery

O come, Divine Messiah, the world in silence waits the day when hope shall sing its triumph,
and sadness flee away. Dear Savior, haste! Come, come to earth. Dispel the night and show
your face, and bid us hail the dawn of grace. O come, desired of nations, whom priest and
prophet long foretold, will break the captive fetters, redeem the long-lost fold. O come in
peace and meekness, for lowly will your cradle be: though clothed in human weakness we
shall your Godhead see. Anna Jane Murray, violinist

THE OLD TESTAMENT LESSONS: Psalm 25:1-7 Sara Raper

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.
O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame;
do not let my enemies exult over me.
Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame;
let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.
Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths.
Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long.
Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old.
Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions;
according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O Lord!

Jeremiah 33:14-16

Richie Cobb

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The Lord is our righteousness."

PRAYER

Ronnie Tripp

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

Ginger Maynard

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

Ramsey Ward

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):

"Away in a Manger"

CRADLE SONG

144 (stanzas 1&4):

"O Little Town of Bethlehem"

ST. LOUIS

162 (stanzas 1&3):

"What Child Is This"

GREENSLEEVES

THE BLESSING OF THE POINSETTIAS

Dick Berry

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: "What Can I Give Him?"

Tim Sharp

In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan, earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone; snow had fallen, snow on snow, on snow, in the bleak midwinter, long ago. Our God, heaven cannot hold him, nor earth sustain; heaven and earth shall flee away when he comes to reign. In the bleak midwinter a stable place sufficed the Lord God Almighty, Jesus Christ. Enough for him whom cherubim worship night and day; mother Mary cared for him, a manger full of hay. Enough for him whom angels, fall before, the ox and ass and camel which adore. Angels and archangels may have gathered there, cherubim and seraphim thronged the air; but his mother only, in her maiden bliss, worshiped the beloved with a kiss. What can I give Him, poor 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 can I give him? Give my heart.

Christina Rossetti

OFFERTORY PRAYER

Allison Willcox

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: Muzette

Jean-François Dandrieu

THE DOXOLOGY

AWAY IN A MANGER

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.

THE BLESSING OF THE CRECHE

Jaye Biggs

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.

CHILDREN'S ANTHEM: "Infant Holy, Infant Lowly" Traditional Polish Carol/arr. Ken Berg

Infant holy, infant lowly, for his bed a cattle stall; oxen lowing, little knowing Christ the Babe is Lord of all. Swift are winging angels singing, noels ringing, tidings bringing, Christ the Babe is Lord of all, Christ the Babe is Lord of all. Flocks were sleeping, shepherds keeping vigil till the morning new; saw the glory, heard the story, tidings of a gospel true. Thus rejoicing, free from sorrow, praises voicing, greet the morrow: Christ the Babe was born for you. Christ the Babe was born for you.

THE BLESSING OF THE CHRISMON TREE

Lori Joyner

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.

ANTHEM: "Star in the East"

The American Vocalist 1849/ed. Brad Holmes

Hail thou blest morn, when the great mediator, down from the regions of glory descends. Shepherds, go worship the babe in the manger, Lo for his guard the bright angels attend. *Brightest and best of the sons of the morning, dawn on our darkness and lend us thine aid. Star in the East, the horizon adorning, guide where our infant redeemer is laid.* Cold on his cradle the dew drops are shining, low lies his head, with the beasts of the stall. Angels adore him in slumber reclining, maker and monarch and savior of all. Say, shall we yield him, in costly devotion, odors of Edom and offerings divine. Gems from the mountain and pearls from the ocean, myrrh from the forest and gold from the mine.

THE GOSPEL LESSON:

Luke 21:25-36

"There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. "Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

Longing. It’s a good word. It is something we all do from time to time. For many weeks, most of our children (and not a few adults) have been longing for Christmas to arrive with all of its festivity, songs, food . . . and, of course, the man in red and the presents he brings. This longing involves excitement and a desire to move the days along quickly.

Some of us, more likely the more “mature” among us, long for “days of yore,” to borrow lyrics from “Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas.” We grow nostalgic for a former time which now seems simpler, happier, and ideal. Without a doubt, part of this longing is for those who are “dear to us” but who are no longer “near to us.”

At some point or another, we have all known that longing that settles somewhere deep within us and is almost physical. It is that yearning for someone to come home or come back or show up for the first time. It is a desire that lovers and parents, sisters and brothers and friends feel when someone special is away.

There is also that longing which sits very much on the surface and is subject to our whims and wants and the not-so-subtle allure of advertizing. This kind of longing is driven by things we want—or think we want—rather than by what we need. It is the kind of longing that fuels the commercialization of Christmas and is easily satisfied—only to be replaced by some other desire we are told we have.

What do you long for? What is it that your heart desires? What is that aching that will not go away, that itch that cannot be scratched, that longing that persists? What do you long for?

Obviously, we each answer that question differently depending on our circumstance in life. By our very presence here, I think we all share the longing to believe. Whether or not they ever cross the threshold of any place of worship, every human being longs to believe in something. We want to believe there is something in the world or beyond the world that is bigger than we are. We want to believe that there is some purpose in life and some means of understanding what life is all about. We want to believe that we matter in some way to the universe if not to God. We want to believe that there is Truth with a capital “T,” truth which will endure eternity. We want to believe that there is a God and that God is in control and that God really does know our name and care about what happens to us. We long to believe.

Advent is about longing. It has its roots in the deep history of the Hebrew people who trekked for years in the wilderness waiting to enter the Promised Land. They longed for a homeland of their own. They longed for power to protect themselves and resist their enemies. They longed for prosperity and abundance. They longed for peace and security.

Their desire flickered in those years of darkness when life was heavy upon them. At times they followed after false gods and empty promises. At times their longing would lead them to reaffirm their faith and promise never to forsake God. Often they simply waited and wondered and longed to believe that God would send a messiah someday.

Earlier, we heard Sara read a portion of Psalm 25, a psalm that begs God for reassurance and faith, a prayer that pours out the longing to believe. We also heard Richie read God’s answer to his people through the prophet Jeremiah. It is a reassuring declaration of God’s promise to send the Messiah who will lift up his people and bring righteousness to the land.

And then, a few moments ago, we heard Jesus, whom we believe to be the Messiah, say some rather frightening things about signs in the sky and distress on earth signaling that the kingdom of God is near. With hurricanes wreaking havoc on our coasts, with fires incinerating entire towns, and with earthquakes churning buildings into rubble, what are we to think? What are we to believe? What are we to long for now?

Jesus' words can be and have been frightening to many people. In some cases, they have pushed people toward belief, thinking a quick confession of faith might spare them any suffering that might be headed their way. At other times, they have turned people away from faith because they cannot reconcile suffering and a God of compassion.

We have to pay attention in order to "get" what Jesus is saying. In essence, his message is to pay attention. Look around. Notice what is going on. Look at the sky, listen to the wind, feel the earth beneath your feet. What do you see and hear and feel and smell? What does the world tell you?

The world tells you that the kingdom of God is near. The people around you, if you pay attention and listen and watch, will tell you that the kingdom of God is near. If you long to believe, if you want to know what is true, you have to pay attention to God in the world.

Helen Hayes, "the First Lady of American Theater," starred on Broadway, in movies, and on television. She won Oscars, Tonys, an Emmy, and a Grammy. She was popular and influential and was, for the most part, quite self-sufficient. Sadly, her daughter Mary contracted polio and eventually died. In a *This I Believe* segment on Edward R. Murrow's radio show some sixty years ago, Ms. Hayes explained what happened to her:

While Mary was still sick, I used to go early in the morning to a little church near the hospital to pray. There the working people came quietly to worship. I had been careless with my religion. I had rather cut God out of my life, and I didn't have the nerve at the time to ask Him to make my daughter well—I only asked Him to help me understand, to let me come in and reach Him. I prayed there every morning and I kept looking for a revelation, but nothing happened.

And then, much later, I discovered that it had happened, right there in the church. I could recall, vividly, one by one, the people I had seen there—the solemn laborers with tired looks, the old women with gnarled hands. Life had knocked them around, but for a brief moment they were being refreshed by an ennobling experience. It seemed as they prayed their worn faces lighted up and they became the very vessels of God. Here was my revelation. Suddenly I realized I was one of them. In my need I gained strength from the knowledge that they too had needs, and I felt an interdependence with them. I experienced a flood of compassion for people. I was learning the meaning of "Love thy neighbor...."

...

This was the meaning that had been missing before: the realization that I was a living part of God's world of people.¹

¹Helen Hayes, "A Morning Prayer in a Little Church," *This I Believe*, Jay Allison and Dan Gediman, eds., (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2007), 116-117. As heard replayed on *The Bob Edwards Show*, NPR, June 4, 2010.

Did you catch the “Advent” moment in that story? She said, “I prayed there every morning and I kept looking for a revelation, but nothing happened. And then, much later, I discovered that it had happened, right there in the church.” All of that longing and desiring and wanting . . . and she had to wait to realize what God had already done. Advent teaches us that often you have to desire faith, you have to pay attention to what God is doing, and you have to be patient.

Jan Richardson reminds us that longing and patience often dwell together. Sometimes Patience envies Longing for always looking forward, always anticipating the next thing, always eager for something else. In turn, Longing often envies Patience for being restful, soothing, and a relief from the heat of desire.² The two gifts help each other. Longing provides the energy and openness for faith while patience provides guidance and wisdom.

Centuries ago, Augustine spoke our truth eloquently: “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you” (*Confessions, Book I*). Like King David, there is within us all a desire to know God, even if we do not at first identify that yearning as one that is for God. Likewise, God has a desire for us and comes to us—in the person of Jesus and in a myriad of other ways. Advent is about paying attention to the desire within us. Advent is about paying attention to the world around us. Advent is about being patient as God reveals God’s self to us. Advent is about longing for Emmanuel . . . and discovering God has been with us all the time!

²Jan Richardson, “Longing Stands Next to Patience,” a poem from *In the Sanctuary of Women*, (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2010), 177-78.

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 125: "Come, O Long-expected Jesus"

Hyfrydol

BENEDICTION AND CHORAL AMEN

ORGAN POSTLUDE: Noël and Variations *Tous les Bourgeois de Châtres*

Claude Balbastre

*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
Anna Anderson
Accompanist
Bo Browder
Acolyte

Elizabeth Edwards
Associate Minister
Phil Valera
Guest Organist
Michael Waters
Torch Bearer

Amy Shortt
Minister of Music
Anna Jane Murray
Violinist
Chase Joyner
Crucifer