



Lakeside Sermons

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina

Jody C. Wright, Senior Minister

DECEMBER 3, 2017

THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

EVERLASTING LOVINGKINDNESS: GOD'S JOURNEY TO US

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

WORDS OF WELCOME AND CONCERNS OF THE CHURCH

ORGAN MEDITATION: Interlude on *The Coventry Carol* W.S. Lloyd-Webber

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 Elva Hux and Sheila Whitley

The Christian life is often described as a journey of finding our way to God. Truly our faith is a quest of discovering God. God's story, however, is different. As scripture tells us, in the beginning, God set out on a journey to find us and become a part of our lives. The very act of creating life was the first step on a journey to share life with us. Today we light the candle of Hope.

Because of God's everlasting lovingkindness, his journey into our lives proceeds day by day. In the coming of Christ, God continues to create life in us and for us, giving us all the hope of life that is full and complete.

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 ADESTE FIDELES

Glory to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit;

Praise we the Trinity – Three in one;

Sing alleluia! Welcome the Messiah;

O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him,

O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!

THE INVOCATION AND LORD'S PRAYER

Rev. Edwards

God of hope, we gather in this season of watching and waiting to give thanks that your everlasting love stopped at nothing to journey to us, save us, and claim us as your own. Come to us once again, speak to us, and fill us with your grace and power. Because of your coming, may we leave here a changed people, ready to journey with you to offer your light and hope for all the world. In the name of the One who comes to dwell among us and who taught us 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: "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.

THE OLD TESTAMENT LESSON: Genesis 2:4-9, 18-23, 3:8a

Rob Martin

These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created. In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground— then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.

And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner." So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner.

So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken."

They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze

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PRAYER

Casey McAuliffe

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

Chandler Lamm

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: "People Look East"

Hal H. Hopson

People, look east. The time is near of the crowning of the year. Make your house fair as you are able, trim the hearth and set the table. People look east and sing today: Love the guest is on the way. Furrows be glad. Though earth is bare, one more seed is planted there. Give up your strength the seed to nourish, that in course the flow'r may flourish. People look east and sing today: Love the rose is on the way. Birds, though you long have ceased to build, guard the nest that must be filled. Even the hour when wings are frozen God for fledgling time has chosen. People, look east and sing today: Love the bird is on the way. Stars, keep the watch. When night is dim one more light the bowl shall brim, shining beyond the frosty weather, bright as sun and moon together. People, look east and sing today, Love the star is on the way. Angels, announce with shouts of mirth Christ who brings new life to earth. Set ev'ry peak and valley humming with the word, the Lord is coming. People look east and sing today: Love the Lord is on the way. People look east and sing today. Rejoice!

THE BLESSING OF THE GREENERY AND WREATHS

Deb Parker

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"

AWAY IN A MANGER

159 (stanzas 1&2):

"There's a Song in the Air"

CHRISTMAS SONG

150 (stanzas 1&3):

"Hark! The Herald Angels Sing"

MENDELSSOHN

THE BLESSING OF THE POINSETTIAS

Paul Strange

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

Marion Weathers

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 on *Veni Emmanuel*

Mark Pichowicz

THE DOXOLOGY

GREENSLEEVES

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.
This, this is Christ the King, whom shepherds guard and angels sing:
Haste, haste to bring him laud, the Babe, the Son of Mary!

THE BLESSING OF THE CRECHE

Allison Ramsey

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

Dorrie Wright

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: "O Come, Redeemer of the Earth"

Brian L. Hanson

O come, Redeemer of the earth, and manifest your virgin birth. Let ev'ry age in wonder fall: such birth befits the God of all. Begotten of no human will but of the Spirit, you are still the Word of God in flesh arrayed, the promised fruit to man displayed. O, Morning Star, come end our night. Cast out our sin and shed your light. The darkness of our mortal state with endless beams, illuminate! All praise, eternal Son, above whose advent shows your matchless love, whom with the Father we adore, and Holy Ghost forevermore. Amen.

THE GOSPEL LESSON:

Luke 1:26-38

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to 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 holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

MEDITATION:

"God's Journey to Us: Creating Life"

Jody Wright

It is fascinating that the two stories which tell us so much about God each begin with two people and God and the creation of life. The second creation story in the book of Genesis draws us a picture of a barren land bereft of plants and animals. Out of the nascent dust, God made a man and planted a garden in which he might live. In the garden God formed all of the living creatures of earth for the purpose of providing companionship for the man. Not a one of them was adequate, however. So God created another human from the man and the man called her "Woman." They lived in this garden teeming with life and enjoyed the company of God who would take evening strolls with them in the garden. It appears that God himself desired companionship.

The other story is the one we just heard, often called the Annunciation because of the message the angel Gabriel delivered to a young woman named Mary. In this story we discover that God is once again visiting earth, once again seeking out human companions, and once again creating life. The parallels are, as I said, fascinating.

In both cases, we know the rest of the story. They are both stories about faith. The creation story teaches us about God's desire for our lives and the ways in which our wrongheadedness derails those desires. The man and the woman were forced to leave the Garden and figure out how to live in the world that we know so well, one in which we work and struggle, play and rejoice, daily discovering more about ourselves and God.

The stories of Adam and Eve have taught us to think about faith as a journey to find God and, once found, to walk again with God. We know from experience that life for us is a journey often on unknown roads which lead us to new insights. What I read in the Bible, however, suggests to me that before we ever take the first step of our faith journey, God is already on the move to find us. Genesis describes God creating humanity and then trying to figure out the best life for us humans. In the Gospel story, God once again comes to us first and announces his plan to become one of us. God is always on the move toward us before we ever think of trying to find or follow God.

This Advent, we are going to think together about the ways in which God journeys to us and what that means for our faith. Today, we focus on how God comes looking for us and then creates life for us and within us.

Why does God journey to us? We know why we set out on a journey to find God. It might be to find greater insight about life or to find answers to those questions we cannot otherwise resolve. It may be to find our way to eternal life or to become closer to God. But why does God bother to come to us? What is God's journey all about?

It appears that God is also seeking relationship. God is seeking companionship. I doubt God is lonely in the ways we get lonely, but God does seem to want to be closer to his greatest creation than we are often willing to be. I think God desires to love. I think that God is love as the Gospel proclaims and that God's love seeks someone to love.

The Hebrew word that describes this God-love is *hesed*. It doesn't always translate cleanly into English because our words tend to be more specific while God's *hesed* is broad and comprehensive. Some of the words we use to describe this love are steadfast love, mercy, kindness, righteousness, grace, loyalty, favor, and devotion.¹ It is the love of God which gives life, sustains life, and ultimately receives life back. The important thing to know about this love, a love that sets it apart from the ways in which we tend to love, is its character. Listen to the Psalmist describe God's love in Psalm 136:

Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, For His lovingkindness is everlasting.
Give thanks to the God of gods, For His lovingkindness is everlasting.
Give thanks to the Lord of lords, For His lovingkindness is everlasting.
To Him who alone does great wonders, For His lovingkindness is everlasting;
To Him who made the heavens with skill, For His lovingkindness is everlasting;
To Him who spread out the earth above the waters, For His lovingkindness is everlasting;
To Him who made the great lights, For His lovingkindness is everlasting:
The sun to rule by day, For His lovingkindness is everlasting,
The moon and stars to rule by night, For His lovingkindness is everlasting.
...
Who remembered us in our low estate, For His lovingkindness is everlasting,
And has rescued us from our adversaries, For His lovingkindness is everlasting;

¹Will Kynes, "God's Grace in the Old Testament: Considering the *Hesed* of the Lord," *Knowing & Doing*, C.S. Lewis Institute (Summer 2010).

Who gives food to all flesh, For His lovingkindness is everlasting.
Give thanks to the God of heaven, For His lovingkindness is everlasting.

Psalm 136:1-9, 23-26, NASB

This translation of the psalm describes God's lovingkindness as everlasting. Other translations use the terms steadfast and enduring. It is that steady, unwavering, deliberate, and dependable love of God which compels God to journey to us, to desire a relationship with us, to want only the best in life for us.

Advent is about God coming to find us and offering us this everlasting lovingkindness. God journeys to us in love to create life in and for us.

The stories of creation and the stories of God's history with his people are clear in making the point that God desires that our life be good, full and complete, abundant in possibilities and resources. It is in the Gospel story, however, that we understand the true purpose of God's journey to us. Sally Lloyd-Jones describes it this way:

God's world is shining all around us. The skies, streams, trees, animals—without needing any words at all—are telling us God is powerful and wise and beautiful. But they can't tell us everything. They can't tell us the most important thing. They can't tell us about his love. His Wonderful Never Stopping, Never Giving Up, Unbreaking, Always and Forever Love!
The love that made the stars. That moved heaven and earth to be near us. That came down to live with us.
No. To really see God's love, we must look at Jesus.²

Out of this everlasting lovingkindness, God journeys to us over and over to create life, not only in the form of new humans, but life within and for us. Biological life is only one of the gifts God gives us. The character and resilience and experience of life, however, are what set our lives apart. In Christ, God journeys to us to create life in and for us.

The wonder of it all is that God invites us to be co-creators. The only way we can experience the fullness of life is if we, too, are creating life in all that we do and say. Our attitudes, our actions, our thoughts, and our desires ought to be life-giving. If we do things that in any way diminish the life of another person, we are not fulfilling God's desire for us.

Our news is full of instances in which people selfishly choose to harm rather than create life. Using power or intimidation, influence or fear to satisfy our own desires at the expense of another person is not life-giving. We must have an attitude of respect for one another as a fellow child of God and to protect and build up one another rather than to use another person for selfish gain. If we twist the truth, ignore human need, trample on the rights of others, enrich ourselves at the expense of the welfare of others, or fail to protect and care for God's gift of creation to us, we are not living in a way that creates life. Jesus himself said that he came so that we might have life, full and complete (John 10:10). Our response to God's gift of everlasting lovingkindness is to offer that same gift to one another.

Advent offers us the opportunity to reflect on why God continues to come to us rather than wait for us to come to him. God's everlasting lovingkindness will not allow him to sit still and wait. It sends him on a journey to find us and offer us life! Thanks be to God! Amen.

²Sally Lloyd-Jones, *Thoughts to Make Your Heart Sing* (Grand Rapids: Zonderkidz, 2012), 200.

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 Suisse, Grand Jeu et Duo

Louis-Claude Daquin

*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
Chase Joyner
Acolyte

Elizabeth Edwards
Associate Minister
Reynolds Cobb
Torch Bearer
Mark Pichowicz
Organist

Amy Shortt
Minister of Music
Spencer Edwards
Crucifer