

“Peace”

The Rev. S. Shane Nanney – December 19, 2021

Micah 5:2-5 and Luke 1:39-45

For the past several weeks, we have been building on the expectation of Advent. Each week as we have lit another candle during Advent, we have taken one step closer to Bethlehem . . . one step closer to the birth of our Lord. And it has all been aimed at the Coming of Christ. Like a child waiting to open a present, we look to the future with great expectations.

Christmas Eve is a special time as we finally tip over into Christmas Day. At that moment we are on the cusp between expectation and celebration, between darkness and light, between Advent & Christmas. For those who have been waiting, whether a child for its presents, or a faithful servant for his/her Savior, the time of waiting is coming to an end.

And it is during this time that we remember what it was like before Jesus came, when there was only darkness, and the prophets like Isaiah waited for the light to come. We are now moving from darkness into light, words echoed in the prophecy of Isaiah that ‘THE PEOPLE WHO WALKED IN DARKNESS HAVE SEEN A GREAT LIGHT.’ And it is with great hope and great expectation that Isaiah writes and proclaims the coming of our Lord, knowing that the time of waiting was soon coming to an end.

The gospels pick up where the prophets leave off. While the prophets looked forward with great anticipation, the gospels looked back into the past . . . much like we do today and see the fulfillment of the prophecy in Jesus Christ. His birth was not a random act, not a random birth that God decided to use, but a planned event. That Christmas night so long ago fulfilled that which had been written... FINALLY, THE ROD OF THE OPPRESSOR HAD BEEN BROKEN AS A CHILD WAS BORN WITH AUTHORITY ON HIS SHOULDERS, AND HE WAS CALLED WONDERFUL, COUNSELOR, MIGHTY GOD, EVERLASTING FATHER, AND THE PRINCE OF PEACE.

And it is because of this wonderful fulfillment of prophecy that we look back each year and remember the prophets and feel their anticipation, we remember the disciples and the gospel writers, and stand in awe at the fulfillment of the prophecies, and we remember that fateful night, and we celebrate with Mary &

Joseph, the shepherds, and the wisemen as we move from that period of expectation to that period of great celebration.

For many, the period of celebration ends on December 25. For some it will end as quickly as the wrapping paper hits the floor. But we as Christians know better because the period of merriment goes on for much longer. The celebration of Jesus' birth only BEGINS on Saturday. The weeks to come will find Christians all over celebrating Christmas as a joyous time where Jesus has come. And that transition happens officially on Friday. Today, we are almost there; the anticipation is almost complete. Friday, as we usher in the celebration, we take those official steps from anticipation to celebration as the official start of Christmas. No more Advent . . . no more candles to be lit . . . no more period of waiting . . . instead the arrival . . . and the celebration.

So, with this in mind, I ask a simple question. How will this Christmas affect you? What difference will Jesus make to the way you spend the next few days, other than extra family gatherings, extra food and drink and perhaps extra time off from work.

Has the birth of Jesus changed your life? Does his life continue to change yours, as his presence among us, transforms us as individuals, as a church, and as a community?

As we move from expectation to celebration – I urge you to remember what it is we are celebrating. As we return Friday, let us remember the reason for Christmas. Let us remember the symbolism to all the decorations. Let us know that all the celebrations, all the traditions, all the Christmas events are centered around Christ.

As you look to the **Christmas tree**, try to see the symbolism . . . we have Christmas trees because the pure green color of the stately fir tree remains green all year 'round, depicting the everlasting hope for humanity.

As you look to **the star**, try to see the symbolism . . . the star was the heavenly sign of promises long ago. God promised a Savior for the world, and the star was the sign of fulfillment of His promise.

As you look to **the Advent candles and the candles around your house**, try to see the symbolism . . . that the candle symbolizes Christ who is the light of the world. When we see this great light, we are reminded of Him who displaces the darkness.

As you look to the **wreath**, try to see the symbolism . . . that the wreath symbolizes the real nature of love, that God's love for us never ceases.

As you look to **holly leaf and holly berries**, try to see the symbolism . . . that the holly plant represents immortality. It represents the crown of thorns worn by our Savior, and the red of the berries represents the blood shed by Him.

As you look to the **gifts beneath the tree**, try to see the symbolism . . . that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift.

As you look to **the candy canes**, try to see the symbolism . . . that the candy cane represents the shepherds' crook. The crook on the staff helps to bring back stray sheep to the flock . . . Just as Jesus restores each and every one of us to God's flock.

As you look to **the angel** atop of Christmas trees, try to see the symbolism . . . that it was the angels that heralded in the glorious news of the Savior's birth, as they sang, "GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST, ON EARTH PEACE AND GOOD WILL TOWARD ALL."

Finally, as you hear **the Christmas bells**, try to see the symbolism . . . that as the lost sheep are found by the sound of the bell, it should bring humanity to the fold. The bell symbolizes guidance and return.

All of these things which seem like just simple Christmas decorations . . . carry with them a small piece of the truth. THAT ON THIS DAY IS BORN FOR YOU A SAVIOR . . . WHICH IS CHRIST THE LORD. AMEN.