

I.N.I.

Fourth Sunday in Advent
Dec. 24, 2017
Gal. 4:4-5; Is. 2:2-5; Is. 55:6-7

In Christ Jesus, the Son of God who has come to bring about Peace between us and His heavenly Father and to usher in the New Era of Grace, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

It is customary for all people, believers and unbelievers alike to focus their thoughts on the past and to look forward to the future as the end of the year arrives and a new year is about to begin. This past year has been a dawn of a new era, the era of Trump. Like him or not, he has pretty much saturated the news everyday. His foreign policy is different from the past presidents. His economic policy is giving Americans a new tax code with a smaller rate, unemployment is low and the stock market is the highest it has ever been. The future looks pretty bright.

But this dawn of a new era of financial gain and prosperity is nothing compared to the far, far greater, far more encompassing gain and prosperity that is to come.

After 2,000 years of divine promises, the Messiah is on His way to usher in a brand new era of history, history without time, an eternity in heaven with perfect peace. When that day comes it will not be business as usual: all transportation, companies, banks and everything else will stop and that day will bring about unimaginable horror for the one who is not prepared, for the one who does not trust in Jesus---but for the believing child of God, the one who is prepared, who trusts alone in Christ as Lord and Savior there will be untold joy and blessing. We need to ask ourselves. Am I fully prepared?

Two thousand years ago a similar event transpired that changed the course of history and people's lives, the first coming of our Savior as a Baby in Bethlehem. This morning we will look back at that great event---the **Dawn of the New Era of Grace** and then look ahead to Christ's second coming---the **Dawn of the New Era of Glory**.

I: When did it/When will it arrive? At just the right time!

Let us rise for the reading of our first text: Galatians 4:4-5 **BUT WHEN THE FULLNESS OF THE TIME HAD COME, GOD SENT FORTH HIS SON, BORN OF A WOMAN, BORN UNDER LAW, TO REDEEM THOSE WHO WERE UNDER THE LAW, THAT WE MIGHT RECEIVE THE ADOPTION AS SONS.**

We know when 2018 will arrive. We tear off the calendar pages, x-out the days, count down the hours, minutes and even seconds to January 1, 2018. The huge ball of lights drops in New York's Times Square. A new year will begin. But when the Dawn of the New Era of Grace began it came according to God's timetable, not man's.

The clock already started ticking some 4,000 years before that when God Himself proclaimed the first Gospel promise in the Garden of Eden to Adam and Eve after the fall into sin when He said to Satan: **AND I WILL PUT ENMITY BETWEEN YOU AND THE WOMAN, AND BETWEEN YOUR SEED AND HER SEED; HE SHALL BRUISE YOUR HEAD, AND YOU SHALL BRUISE HIS HEEL.** Genesis 3:15

Days, months, and years passed as God repeated His promise to Abraham: **IN YOUR SEED ALL THE NATIONS OF THE EARTH SHALL BE BLESSED.** Genesis 22:18 More years passed and God added details to His promise: **THE SCEPTER SHALL NOT DEPART FROM JUDAH, NOR A LAWGIVER FROM BETWEEN HIS FEET, UNTIL SHILOH COMES; AND TO HIM SHALL BE THE OBEDIENCE OF THE PEOPLE.** Genesis 49:10 More months and years were x'd off God's calendar and the Holy Spirit prophesied the Savior's very thoughts and words as He hung on the cross through the pen of David in Ps. 22: **I AM Poured OUT LIKE WATER, AND ALL MY BONES ARE OUT OF JOINT; MY HEART IS LIKE WAX; IT HAS MELTED WITHIN ME. MY STRENGTH IS DRIED UP LIKE A POTSHERD, AND MY TONGUE CLINGS TO MY JAWS; YOU HAVE BROUGHT ME TO THE DUST OF DEATH.** The Lord God also through David prophesied of the Messiah's resurrection from the dead. We read in Ps. 16:10 **FOR YOU WILL NOT LEAVE MY SOUL IN SHEOL, NOR WILL YOU ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO SEE CORRUPTION. YOU WILL SHOW ME THE PATH OF LIFE; IN YOUR PRESENCE IS FULLNESS OF JOY; AT YOUR RIGHT HAND ARE PLEASURES FOREVERMORE.**

More years of the calendar were torn off and God prophesied through Isaiah of the Messiah's

miraculous birth: **BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL CONCEIVE AND BEAR A SON, AND SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL.** Isaiah 7:14 We don't have the time to read all of the other prophecies in Isaiah concerning the Savior's birth, suffering, death and resurrection found in Is. 9; 53; 61 and 63. Still more years passed and the time grew ever closer for the long awaited event and Micah prophesied: **BUT YOU, BETHLEHEM EPHRATHAH, THOUGH YOU ARE LITTLE AMONG THE THOUSANDS OF JUDAH, YET OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH TO ME THE ONE TO BE RULER IN ISRAEL, WHOSE GOINGS FORTH HAVE BEEN FROM OF OLD. FROM EVERLASTING.** Micah 5:2 Another few centuries passed and within 400 years of the fulfillment of this promise the Lord through Malachi declared: **BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER, AND HE WILL PREPARE THE WAY BEFORE ME. AND THE LORD, WHOM YOU SEEK, WILL SUDDENLY COME TO HIS TEMPLE, EVEN THE MESSENGER OF THE COVENANT, IN WHOM YOU DELIGHT. BEHOLD, HE IS COMING, SAYS THE LORD OF HOSTS.** Malachi 3:1 That was the last written prophecy we have that God gave in the Old Testament.

Then in the fullness of time, at just the right moment in God's timetable, the event took place that shook the world. God became man by being conceived in Mary's womb by the power of the Holy Spirit and nine months later the God-Man Jesus was born in Bethlehem to a virgin mother.

It was the right moment politically: Judah had lost its scepter and no longer ruled itself. Rome was now in control.

It was the right moment historically: There was relative peace in the known world at that time, there were good Roman roads, and one Greek language for the spread of the Good News of the Savior. God had planned it all to occur at just the right time.

And it was the right moment spiritually: The majority of the Jews' had fallen into unbelief through work righteousness and the Gentiles so-called "wisdom" had turned out to be "foolishness." The time was perfect for the Savior to come, to be placed under the Law and to redeem all of mankind by His perfect life, suffering, death and resurrection.

Now, today, it is also the right time for us to proclaim that there is a world-wide need for salvation. These events happened for you and for me and for all people. The Savior has come and is with us daily in His Word and Sacraments and shall come again. When? At just the right time according to God's calendar. For over 2,000 years man has been x-ing off days and tearing off calendar pages and everyday we draw ever closer to the glorious return of our resurrected Savior. When will the New Era of Glory begin? When all time is fully come, when it is God's time. What will it bring?

II: What did it/will it bring? Peace and prosperity!

Let us rise and read Isaiah 2:2-5 **NOW IT SHALL COME TO PASS IN THE LATTER DAYS THAT THE MOUNTAIN OF THE LORD'S HOUSE SHALL BE ESTABLISHED ON THE TOP OF THE MOUNTAINS, AND SHALL BE EXALTED ABOVE THE HILLS; AND ALL NATIONS SHALL FLOW TO IT. MANY PEOPLE SHALL COME AND SAY, COME, AND LET US GO UP TO THE MOUNTAIN OF THE LORD, TO THE HOUSE OF THE GOD OF JACOB; HE WILL TEACH US HIS WAYS, AND WE SHALL WALK IN HIS PATHS. FOR OUT OF ZION SHALL GO FORTH THE LAW, AND THE WORD OF THE LORD FROM JERUSALEM. HE SHALL JUDGE BETWEEN THE NATIONS, AND SHALL REBUKE MANY PEOPLE; THEY SHALL BEAT THEIR SWORDS INTO PLOWSHARES, AND THEIR SPEARS INTO PRUNING HOOKS; NATION SHALL NOT LIFT UP SWORD AGAINST NATION, NEITHER SHALL THEY LEARN WAR ANYMORE. O HOUSE OF JACOB, COME AND LET US WALK IN THE LIGHT OF THE LORD.**

There are many who are really looking forward to the New Year expecting even greater prosperity economically. But when the Messiah came there was not economic prosperity to look forward to but spiritual blessings beyond compare. Isaiah prophesied for the people of Jesus' day and also tells us today what to expect: **PEACE AND PROSPERITY!**

Not physical and financial but spiritual peace and prosperity. The angels proclaimed that peace and prosperity to the shepherds on the night of Jesus' birth. **THEN THE ANGEL SAID TO THEM, DO NOT BE AFRAID, FOR BEHOLD, I BRING YOU GOOD TIDINGS OF GREAT JOY WHICH SHALL BE TO ALL PEOPLE. FOR THERE IS BORN TO YOU THIS DAY IN THE CITY OF DAVID A SAVIOR, WHO IS CHRIST THE LORD. AND THIS SHALL BE A SIGN TO YOU; YOU SHALL FIND A BABE WRAPPED IN SWADDLING CLOTHES, LYING IN A**

MANGER. AND SUDDENLY THERE WAS WITH THE ANGEL A MULTITUDE OF THE HEAVENLY HOST PRAISING GOD AND SAYING: GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST, AND ON EARTH PEACE, GOOD WILL TOWARD MEN! This Baby had come to bring about a peace between God and man, to secure a oneness between the Creator and His creatures, to restore the paradise that was lost, to give us the spiritual riches of eternal life. He did this by His work. He kept the Law of God perfectly, meeting God's demand of Justice. He then suffered and died paying for the punishment for all of our sins forever.

The battle with sin, death, Satan and hell has been won by Christ. He has promised us, **PEACE I LEAVE WITH YOU, MY PEACE I GIVE TO YOU; NOT AS THE WORLD GIVES DO I GIVE TO YOU. LET NOT YOUR HEART BE TROUBLED, NEITHER LET IT BE AFRAID...THESE THINGS I HAVE SPOKEN TO YOU, THAT IN ME YOU MAY HAVE PEACE. IN THE WORLD YOU WILL HAVE TRIBULATION; BUT BE OF GOOD CHEER, I HAVE OVERCOME THE WORLD.**

Even as we have to face the daily onslaughts of the devil, this wicked world and our own sinful flesh, we have the powerful Word to defend us and to give us the ability to say "NO" to sin and "YES" to righteousness. What riches beyond compare we have been given---God's holy Word, grace, spiritual wisdom, peace, mercy, forgiveness, promise of everlasting life, joy. With Christ in our hearts through faith and keeping His Word in our hearts through the consistent hearing and reading of it we can be assured of a peaceful and prosperous 2018.

But there is even more. When Christ comes again, all the blessings we now have will pale in comparison to the perfect peace of eternity---the Glory of holiness and righteousness and seeing our Savior face to face in all of His splendor and might. Then we will have perfect wisdom and know God even as He knows us and have perfect love for one another and for our Triune God forever. What wonders to eagerly look forward to. But how do we know we will be ready for all of this? We need to be prepared.

III: How do we prepare? Seek the Lord!

Let us rise: **Isaiah 55:6-7 SEEK THE LORD WHILE HE MAY BE FOUND, CALL UPON HIM WHILE HE IS NEAR. LET THE WICKED FORSAKE HIS WAY, AND THE UNRIGHTEOUS MAN HIS THOUGHTS; LET HIM RETURN TO THE LORD, AND HE WILL HAVE MERCY ON HIM; AND TO OUR GOD, FOR HE WILL ABUNDANTLY PARDON.**

We prepare for the Messiah by seeking Him and His Word, by becoming Christ-sufficient which is the opposite of self-sufficient. The one who relies on himself for his salvation, who trusts in his own works, his own prayers, his church attendance and offerings, his love for others will be totally unprepared for our Savior's second coming. We not only live in an evil world, but we have an evil living within us: our own sinful nature, a corrupted heart and flesh that wants only what is for self. Relying on self can only lead to sin and unbelief and to certain eternal destruction. God's demand of perfection cannot be attained by us; we cannot even begin to keep God's commands as He demands---perfectly in thought, word and deed.

The only way to be prepared is the same way John the Baptist encouraged the people of his day to prepare for Jesus' first coming: **REPENT AND LOOK TO THE MESSIAH, JESUS FOR FORGIVENESS AND LIFE!** John told the people of his day: **REPENT, FOR THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND!** Christ had come; the time was now to be prepared with a heart of repentant faith. Some did, others didn't. Some pretended and came only with their outward show but with no heart of faith.

How about us? **TIME IS RUNNING OUT!** Judgment Day could be at any time. Christ's return is imminent. He will come like a thief in the night when we least expect Him. Are you ready, are you prepared? Or are you pretending? No one but you can answer that question and no one will know but you and the Lord Jesus on Judgment Day. The author to the Hebrews declares, **FOR THE WORD OF GOD IS LIVING AND POWERFUL, AND SHARPER THAN ANY TWO-EDGED SWORD, PIERCING EVEN TO THE DIVISION OF SOUL AND SPIRIT, AND OF JOINTS AND MARROW, AND IS A DISCERNER OF THE THOUGHTS AND INTENTS OF THE HEART. AND THERE IS NO CREATURE HIDDEN FROM HIS SIGHT, BUT ALL THINGS ARE NAKED AND OPEN TO THE EYES OF HIM TO WHOM WE MUST GIVE ACCOUNT.**

The Lord through the prophet Zephaniah warned the people of his day with these words: **AND IT**

SHALL COME TO PASS AT THAT TIME THAT I WILL SEARCH JERUSALEM WITH LAMPS, AND PUNISH THE MEN WHO ARE SETTLED IN COMPLACENCY, WHO SAY IN THEIR HEART, THE LORD WILL NOT DO GOOD, NOR WILL HE DO EVIL...THE GREAT DAY OF THE LORD IS NEAR; IT IS NEAR AND HASTENS QUICKLY.

Turn in repentance to the Lord as He reveals Himself as our loving and forgiving Savior in His Word. Trust the Lord who has freely and fully pardoned us from all of our sins. Then we will be prepared and ready, not only for 2018 but for an eternity with our Savior in heavenly glory and splendor.

Amen.