

## I.N.I.

First Sunday in Advent  
December 1, 2013  
Luke 1:5-25

In Christ Jesus, the Coming One, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

**ADVENT!** Most of us know by now that this word comes from the Latin and means “to come.” Advent is the season of the Coming, the Coming of Jesus. And Jesus is the Coming One! He was the prophesied coming One of the Old Testament.

We celebrate His miraculous **COMING** to earth as a little baby in the person of Jesus, the great gift from our Heavenly Father.

We celebrate and praise God for Jesus’ **COMING** into our hearts through faith worked in us by the Holy Spirit.

And finally Jesus is the **COMING ONE** to whom we look forward with all of His holy angels on Judgment Day.

What better theme then to have for the Advent season but this: **HERE HE COMES!** We are going to be basing our four meditations on the record of the Lord’s own preparations for the first Christmas as found in the first chapter of Luke’s Gospel. Four responses will be discussed:

### **PREPARE! BELIEVE! REJOICE! BEHOLD!**

Our services for these next four Sundays will be a bit different than usual. There will be no Scripture readings and the sermon will be divided into several parts with the confession of sins or a confession of faith or even a hymn interspersed. We also will have you, the congregation, taking part in reading the sermon text as we go through it.

So our thought for this morning is **PREPARE!**

Let us rise and read together Luke 1:5-10

How does one prepare for the coming of the Lord Jesus? Luke’s telling of the first preparations prior to Christ’s birth begins with these two people: Zacharias and Elizabeth. People about whom this was said: **AND THEY WERE BOTH RIGHTEOUS BEFORE GOD, WALKING IN ALL THE COMMANDMENTS AND ORDINANCES OF THE LORD BLAMELESS.**

Was that perhaps an overstatement on Luke’s part? Or perhaps a good place to begin--preparing for Christmas--not with gift lists and party preparations, with decorations for the home and church and many trips to the mall or purchases on-line; but

### **WITH A LIFE OF ONGOING FAITHFULNESS IN OUR WORK AND WORSHIP**

Being righteous before God, of course, is a gift of God’s grace. It is not something we can do or have been able to accomplish on our own. It is what Christ has done for us, which we are then led to believe and trust in. Those who believe the Good News of God’s forgiving love in Christ Jesus are righteous in God’s eyes, washed from their sins, cleansed from their iniquities and declared righteous in Christ.

That is why Luke writes that Zacharias and Elizabeth were both righteous before God. They believed in God’s promise of the Coming Savior and they showed it by walking in the way of God’s commandments, conforming their life to His will. May our own Christmas preparations begin here as well with ongoing faithfulness that is evident in our life of obedience to God, putting His will first in our lives.

From these verses we see both Zacharias and the people engaged in worship. Zacharias was faithfully performing his duties as the priest from the division of Abijah. The lots were cast to see which jobs the priests were to do. Zacharias’ lot fell to offering incense and prayers in the Holy Place. This was a great honor. Because there were so many priests to choose from and there was such a short time of service for each division of the priests, the chance to offer prayers and incense in the Holy Place probably came once in a lifetime. One can imagine Zacharias’ excitement, nervousness and joy as he faithfully performed his work and his worship on that particular day.

The people too were busily engaged in work and worship. The work of serving their Lord through their worship. They were praying outside of the Holy Place waiting for Zacharias to come out with a closing blessing.

May this also be how we **PREPARE** for Christ’s coming by being busily engaged in our callings, working at whatever the Lord has given us to do, and doing it faithfully to His glory. Always being

aware that in whatever profession or occupation we may be in we are in a loving relationship with our Lord and Savior and looking upon whatever it is we do, as being done in the service of our Lord. May we also be busy with our worship, taking the time and giving of our hearts in sincere devotion, worship and praise to our Lord: offering up the sweet smelling incense of our songs of praise, honor and glory to our Savior God not only during this Advent season but through all the seasons of our lives.

Let's do just that by rising and joining together in confessing our Christian faith by reading together the words of the Nicene Creed found on page 22 in our Hymnal and then singing our next hymn.

## II:

Let us rise and join together in reading Luke 1:11-17

Why was Zacharias so filled with fear? Not only because the appearance of the angel surprised him, not only because he did not know what message he was about to hear, but also because he, a sinner, was in the presence of a holy creature of God. But the message he heard relieved his fear for he heard that he and his wife were going to give birth to a son who would prepare the way for the Coming Messiah by preaching repentance; a turning away from sin and a turning to the Lord. And that is our second way of preparing for the Coming One.

### **WITH A REPENTANT HEART, TURNING TO THE LORD OUR GOD.**

Repentance involves a complete change of heart and direction on the part of the individual. This was John's calling. Being filled with the Holy Spirit he preached a message of repentance and conversion. Such a spiritual revival was badly needed in Palestine, since there was so much formalism and ritualism (going through the motions of worship) and not enough genuine repentance and faith. The spirit and power of Elijah would be resting upon John as his preaching would turn the hearts of the fathers to the children; meaning the parents hearts were turned to their children realizing their real responsibilities in bringing up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Parents are not to just teach their children the outward observance of rules and regulations, the performing of rituals and niceties (knowing when to say please and thank you), but parents are to teach their children the Word of God which will lead them to a sincere confession of their sins, true godly repentance and a reliance upon Jesus alone as Lord and Savior.

This calling of John also applies to us the disobedient sinner, who by the conviction of the Law would be turned to the wisdom of those who are justified. By the preaching of repentance the way is prepared for Christ and the Gospel of forgiveness. May we prepare our hearts for Christ's coming by taking a fresh look at ourselves and at our relationship with Jesus. Have we been turned away from serving self, living in selfishness and looking for earthly pleasures to serving Christ and serving others for Christ, living in His Word and looking for the eternal pleasures and joys to come?

**NO ONE** can appreciate the birth of Jesus, in fact **NO ONE** can truly understand the birth of Jesus, without first being led to a confession of his sins. Without a knowledge of our sins and their condemning nature we would not see in the baby Jesus, a Savior who is Christ the Lord!

Let us rise and moved by the power of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, examine ourselves and with repentant hearts confess our sins and seek full and free forgiveness alone in Christ. Our confession of sins is found on page 15 of our hymnal.

## III:

Let us remain standing and join in reading together Luke 1:18-25.

Before we shake our heads in disgust over Zacharias' doubting the angel's promise, let us examine our own record. Have you noticed times in your life when the Lord has blessed you and you should have been praising Him for it but instead you found yourself questioning God's timing — "why now and why not sooner?" Or doubting His real loving goodness in the matter of His will and His wisdom — "why this way and not that way? Is this really going to be good for me? Can I really trust this? How can I be sure He'll see me through this?"

What a blessing that when we express these doubts and faithless feelings the Lord does not strike us dumb as He did Zacharias. We should learn that these are the times when we should **BE STILL, BE SILENT AND KNOW THAT THE LORD IS GOD!** God's great promise to you and me will be fulfilled in His own good time. God's granting us health, goods, money, friends, family, jobs and all of the other things of this life are in His control and He dispenses them as He knows best.

During these Advent days of preparation may we be led to prepare for Christ's coming

**WITH A HEART THAT DOESN'T DOUBT GOD'S PROMISES BUT SIMPLY CLINGS  
TO HIS WORD IN CHILD-LIKE TRUST.**

And what about the people? They waited and they wondered. That too is a good description of proper Advent preparation. As the silence continued and there was this long delay, the people waited and they wondered what could have happened to Zacharias? What has he been doing all this time? But when he came out and made signs to them because he could not speak, the people perceived, that he had seen a vision in the temple. They went home with a wondering heart, pondering all that had happened, but understanding that it had come from God. And as they went back to their daily routine of life, they no doubt patiently waited for the fulfillment of that vision that Zacharias had seen.

So too, we wait, we wonder. Not just wait for Christmas, for the celebration of the birth of our Savior, but also wait for our Savior's promised return.

We also wonder. With wonder and amazement we look into that manger and see in that new born baby: **TRUE GOD AND TRUE MAN, THE ONLY SUBSTITUTE SAVIOR OF ALL OF MANKIND.** We wonder how God could be so loving, so gracious to us sinners that He could give up, sacrifice His own Son. We wonder how the Son of God could be so loving to us sinners that He would be willing to give up His glory and divine majesty and take our place as a human being, placed under the Law and suffer and die for us, in fact be damned for us.

And as we look forward to His return, we wonder why the seemingly long delay, why has it been so long, almost 2,000 years? We also wonder what it will be like?

But through the vision of God's revealed Word we also perceive, we understand through faith. God's love is perfect and beyond our comprehension. God's grace is undeserved. His patience is enduring, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

Elizabeth also waited, waited for this promised child, John the Baptist, to be born. Waited for her reproach of being childless to be taken away. Many preparations still needed to be done.

The birth of our Savior; His coming in human flesh is that way for us, too. The Lord Jesus has taken away our reproach of our sins through His shed blood. Much preparation remains as we prepare to celebrate His first coming and as we look forward too His second, but now the waiting and the preparing is exciting and full of joy and anticipation not full of fear and doubt. Amen.