

Fourth Sunday in Advent – December 24th, 2023
ARE WE THERE YET?

Prayer

Lord, help us to understand the patience you've shown to us, your wayward children forgiving our sins again and again and in waiting until just the right time to send us your Son. Teach us what you expect of us as we live in the tension of an imminent yet delayed return of Jesus in glory. AMEN

Patience

Are we there yet? How many of you parents have heard that plaintive cry from a child or grandchild while traveling? And the typical response is to encourage patience. Let's explore how God has been patient with us.

Advent

Advent is that period of waiting, of anticipation, that starts the new church year and covers the four Sundays before Christmas. While we now use the color blue for the paraments, many of us grew up with purple, as can be seen in the color of these advent candles. Purple also makes a strong tie between the period of Advent – waiting for Christmas – and Lent – waiting for Easter. In fact, some of my Eastern Orthodox friends call Advent the Lesser Lent (as opposed to the Greater Lent of Easter) or the Nativity Fast.

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For us Lutherans, in the Western tradition, Advent signifies preparation for a threefold coming of Christ: firstly, in the Incarnation at Bethlehem, then in a sacramental presence in the Lord's Supper, and thirdly at his Second Coming and final judgement. Let's first take a look at the anticipation of the incarnation as reflected in the Hebrew Scriptures and the patience of those waiting for the coming of the Messiah.

Old Testament

There is a theme of sin in the present and a redemption to come in many of the key texts that foretell of the coming birth of Jesus.

Starting back in Genesis, Adam and Eve had one job – to not eat of the Tree of Good and Evil. As we know, they failed, and because of that failure, we live in a world that has been corrupted, that includes sin, disease, decay, and death. But immediately after God pronounces His curse, He promised redemption (Gen 3:15):

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.

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Later in Genesis we can read the account of Noah. At that point, the world has become so sinful that God did what amounts to a reboot of creation (Gen 6:8-9, 11-12, 17-18). Here is the short version:

But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. . . .Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God.

Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth.

For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life under heaven.

Everything that is on the earth shall die. But I will establish my covenant with you.

Peter connects the dots with the implicit promise God made to Noah to save him and family from the coming destruction: (1 Peter 3:20-21):

. . . they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely

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through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ

In the middle of Genesis, God singles out a childless elderly couple – Abram and Sarah and gives them a promise (Gen 26:4):

I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring, all the nations of the earth shall be blessed,

If you remember, they were impatient and tried to 'help God out,' with disastrous consequences, creating sibling rivalries that persist to this day. In **His** time, God did fulfill His promises, both by the miracle of Isaac's birth as well as the eventual birth of the Messiah, through whom the entire world would be saved.

In the book of Samuel, we see that Jesus's ancestor David committed horrible sins – adultery, lying, and murder (2 Sam 11 & 12), yet God promised to establish the throne of David's Kingdom forever (2 Sam 7:13, 16) and to never take His love from David (2 Sam 7:15). The

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promised kingdom is not an earthly one, but a heavenly and eternal one, with Jesus reigning forever.

I could go on, but I think you get the picture. God makes promises and is faithful to keep them, even when we aren't. So, once the promised Messiah was born, how impatient were those who had the privilege of walking with Jesus?

New Testament

The disciples were ordinary people, and, like many of us, misunderstood the nature of the kingdom that was to be established. They were impatient, wanting Jesus to use His power and might to create a temporal kingdom to smite their enemies as we hear in Luke (9:54):

*And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said,
"Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven
and consume them?"*

And in which they could have power and prestige, recorded by Mark (10:37):

*And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand
and one at your left, in your glory."*

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Not until after the resurrection of Christ from the dead and the coming of the Holy Spirit did they finally get the picture of an eternal, spiritual kingdom and their place within it.

In the two millennia since Jesus redeemed you and I by this death and resurrection, His followers have been living in the tension of an imminent but also delayed return in glory. Many are impatient and misunderstood God's timing – Jesus did say "Behold, I am coming soon" but Peter (2 Pet 3:8) reminds us that God's sense of time is different than ours:

But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

During this long-delayed return, many became impatient and tried (and failed) to predict the second coming of Christ. The Wikipedia entry titled "Predictions and Claims for the Second Coming" lists nearly fifty documented instances such efforts. At the root of it, we want to know, to be in control, and are **NOT** willing to be patient and to take Jesus at His word (Matthew 24:36):

But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.

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Here and Now

In addition to waiting for the second coming, we here at Redeemer are in our own special season of waiting – waiting for God to provide us with a new Senior Pastor. Many, if not most of us, are disappointed that we had our first two calls returned. As the Psalmist says (Ps 37:34):

Wait for the Lord and keep his way, and he will exalt you to inherit the land; you will look on when the wicked are cut off.

While we wait, we can rejoice in knowing that (Gal 4:4-5):

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

We can rejoice in that we were indeed adopted at our Baptism, that our sins are indeed forgiven as we hear the words of absolution, and the Christ comes to us and is indeed FOR US whenever we join Him at his table and receive His very body and blood for our salvation.

Come, taste, and see that the Lord is indeed good!

AMEN