

## 2025 Advent Study (Week 3)

### “It’s Not What You Think”

*-It was never going to look like hope-*

*Text: Matthew 2:25-35*

God bless each of you with both a greater understanding of the *real* Advent and a greater appreciation for what our Savior had to endure to do for us what he has. Amen.

The theme for our Midweek Advent services this year has been: “*It’s not what you think.*” Our goal is to recognize a general misconception of the Advent of our Savior (what it was not) and then provide a realistic picture of what it really was – applying that reality to our own lives.

First, we looked at the actual world that Jesus entered, which was nothing like the clean, sterile, sweet-smelling image many of us picture. The fact that Jesus entered the filthy mess that he did assures us that he does not and will not avoid our own personal messes. He will not refuse to enter our lives because of the mess we have made of them. Jesus came into the world not to save the good and clean. He came to save sinners – like us.

The second misconception was that the coming of Jesus, in fact the whole process of our redemption, was going to be easy. From first to last it was anything but. We were thereby reminded not only to expect hard things in a world broken by sin, but to humbly trust and obey the God who loved us enough to sacrifice his own Son. That loving God will not allow us to be burdened unnecessarily, nor burdened beyond what we can bear.

Our final Advent study this evening under that same theme “*It’s not what you think*” is that God’s plan for our salvation *was never going to look like hope.*

The text that will guide and instruct us this evening is found in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter of Luke’s Gospel:

ESV(**Luke 2:25-35**) ***Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. <sup>26</sup> And it had***

***been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. <sup>27</sup> And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, <sup>28</sup> he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, <sup>29</sup> “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; <sup>30</sup> for my eyes have seen your salvation <sup>31</sup> that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, <sup>32</sup> a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.” <sup>33</sup> And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. <sup>34</sup> And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed <sup>35</sup> (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”***

This is God’s Word. We ask for the Holy Spirit’s guidance in our study this evening as we pray, ***“Sanctify us in the truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth.”***

I wonder if anyone here has ever been in a situation that you regarded as “absolutely hopeless.” I’m not talking about the feeling wives often seem to get when dealing with husbands, I’m talking about the feeling that something unimaginably terrible is going to happen and that there is not a single thing anyone can do to prevent it. It’s right to refer to that as “a feeling” because as Christians we know for a fact that “*with God, nothing is impossible.*” But it can sometimes *feel* that way.

The fact is, God has dramatically addressed this *feeling* of hopelessness over and over again in the Bible. Scan down through the pages of our Bible and you will find countless examples of situations that must have appeared hopeless, but weren’t. Abraham and Sarah would never have a son. They were far too old. It was hopeless. Abraham’s great-grandson, Joseph was dumped into a pit and then sold into slavery by his own brothers. He was later falsely accused and thrown into prison. Hopeless. 400 years later Joseph’s descendants were hopelessly enslaved in Egypt with no chance that they would ever again know freedom. When they nonetheless were finally freed from their Egyptian captivity, they found themselves hopelessly trapped between the Red Sea and the Egyptian

army. Fast forward another 450 years or so and the nation of Israel is again plunged into hopelessness. The army is routed by the Philistines, King Saul and his son Jonathan are killed in the battle, as are the sons of the High Priest, the Ark of the Covenant is carried off as war plunder, and the High Priest himself falls over backwards and breaks his neck when he hears the news. No king, no heir, no High Priest, no army, no Ark – hopeless. Fast forward another 400 years and what remains of the Jewish nation is carried off into exile by the army of Babylon - hopeless. Three men are cast into the fiery furnace. Daniel is thrown into the lions' den. The Messiah is shamefully executed on a Roman cross. His followers, one and all, scatter and hide in fear. All hopeless.

We're starting to get the message, aren't we. Hopelessness is a feeling, and it's a feeling that can only survive when it excludes God from the equation.

Humanly speaking, some situations in life can and do appear to be hopeless. The problem is not only that we exclude God from our reckoning, it is that we lack the imagination of the All-Powerful Creator of heaven and earth. We lack a comprehension of his problem-solving abilities. Who would have ever imagined God's solutions throughout history? A 90-year-old woman has a baby. A slave and prisoner becomes ruler. The Red Sea parts and then collapses on the enemy army. A shepherd boy slays a giant with a stone and becomes Israel's great king. Always there was hope because always there was God. Only hope didn't always look like hope.

How can we then be surprised that when it came to the arrival, the Advent, of our Lord Jesus, the Great Hope of Israel didn't look anything like hope. We should have *expected* that it was never going to look like hope.

Israel longed for deliverance from their earthly masters. With that expectation, what did they, what would *we*, expect that great, promised Deliverer to look like? What would have given us immediate hope and assurance? Strength, of course. Power, stature, charisma, and majesty. And God sends a baby to a stable. With nobody parents from nowhere Galilee.

Fast forward 12 years to the time described in our text. The Jews were required to dedicate their firstborn to the Lord, which is what brought Joseph and Mary to the temple in Jerusalem. There they encountered Simeon, who looked at the Child and recognized hope. How did he? How could he? He looked with the eyes of faith, with eyes that trusted not in the power of man but in the promise of God. Joseph and Mary were still having trouble seeing that hope, for we read that Simeon's words shocked them.

Yet though Simeon recognized Jesus as the great Hope of all mankind, his words reaffirmed the fact that it was never going to look that way – not to human eyes. In fact Jesus' enemies were never to see anything at all other than the poor, suffering, servant Jesus. They saw most of his followers abandon him when he said things they didn't like or understand. They saw his inner circle run away in fear. They saw him beaten, mocked, and humiliated. They saw him die an ignoble death. And that's the last they ever saw of him. They did not see him transfigured on the Mount of Olives. They did not see him after he had risen from the dead. They did not see him as he ascended into heaven. The only time they will see Jesus as he truly is will be when they see him return in glory on the Last Day. Even then they will not see him as the symbol of hope, for then it will be far too late.

Although Simeon recognized Jesus as the great Hope of mankind, he prophesied in our text of the veiled nature of that hope. He spoke of a Hope that would not look like hope: ***"Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed <sup>35</sup> (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."***

Simeon's prophecy didn't sound very hopeful, did it. The sort of hope we would *expect* to see wouldn't involve "falling," or "opposition," or a sword piercing his own mother's soul. It would look like the rising of all Israel (not the rising of some and the falling of others), it would look like universal acceptance (not something opposed), and it would look like something that would bring pure joy to the hearts of all (not sorrow). The real Advent and the real Jesus didn't look anything like the hope mankind

expected. Jesus himself warned us of this in our Scripture reading this evening: ***“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you.”***

What are we to learn from all of this? How are we to gain by applying this realization to ourselves and our own lives?

First, know that the ability to see true hope, when and where it is actually to be found, is a gift that must be given to us by God himself. Again from this evening’s Scripture reading: ***“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”***

How are we to apply this to our own individual lives? Recognize that true hope can only be based on that which God himself has promised. Christian hope is defined as *confident expectation in what God has promised*. That’s why our eyes, our senses, our reason cannot be trusted. Everything made by man eventually fails. That which our God promises can never, will never, fail. Our Bibles reaffirm this truth over and over again. That means that nothing that our God has promised could ever be hopeless.

Going forward, see the ever-changing scenes of your life with eyes trained by that Holy Spirit that lives within you - trained to see hope where the world does not. The Advent of our Savior is our great object lesson. There the unbelieving world saw only failure and a resulting hopelessness. You see it as a success story without equal, for you see the arrival of the Savior, who opened heaven’s door. Hopelessness simply cannot coexist with that promise from our God. Amen.

## The Weekly Meditation –

### "It's Not What You Think"

Dec. 3: It was never going to be neat and clean

Dec. 10: It was never going to be easy

Dec. 17: It was never going to look like hope

**The Third Hymn** *(Posted on the Hymn Board and projected)*

**The Prayers of the Day**

**The Lord's Prayer**

**The Benediction** *(Spoken by the Pastor)*

*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ*

*And the love of God the Father*

*And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

**Congregation:** *(Sung)* **Amen.**

**The Closing Hymn** *(Posted on the Hymn Board and projected)*

**Silent Prayer**

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# ADVENT 2025

## "IT'S NOT WHAT YOU THINK"

- Please return this bulletin to the Entry Table to be used next week -

**St Paul Lutheran Church  
Bismarck, ND**

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Midweek Advent Services – 2025

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn *(Posted on the Hymn Board and projected)*

**Pastor:** In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

**Congregation:** Amen

**P:** The Advent mission of John the Baptist was to call the people to repentance. Applying that message also to ourselves, we confess our sins to God our Father, seeking His assurance of our forgiveness, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**C:** Holy and merciful Father, I confess that I am by nature sinful and unclean, and that I have disobeyed you in my thoughts, words, and actions. I have done what is evil and have failed to do what is good. For this I deserve your punishment, both now and in eternity. I confess my sins, repent of them, and trust in my Savior Jesus for forgiveness. Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner.

**All (sung):** Lord have mercy upon us. Christ have mercy upon us. Lord have mercy upon us.

**P:** God, our heavenly Father, has been merciful to us and has given His only Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. By His command and authority, I assure each of you that your personal debt of sin has been paid in full. God, for Jesus' sake, has forgiven you.

**All:** Hymn 446 *(Stanzas 1-2)*

## The Scripture Reading for the Day

**(December 3)** <sup>ESV</sup>(**Romans 8:18-25**) For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

<sup>19</sup> For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.

<sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. <sup>22</sup> For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. <sup>23</sup> And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. <sup>24</sup> For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

**(December 10)** <sup>ESV</sup>(**John 16:15-22**) All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you. <sup>16</sup> "A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me." <sup>17</sup> So some of his disciples said to one another, "What is this that he says to us, 'A little while, and you will not see me, and again a little while, and you will see me'; and, 'because I am going to the Father'?" <sup>18</sup> So they were saying, "What does he mean by 'a little while'? We do not know what he is talking about." <sup>19</sup> Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him, so he said to them, "Is this what you are asking yourselves, what I meant by saying, 'A little while and you will not see me, and again a little while and you will see me'? <sup>20</sup> Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. <sup>21</sup> When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. <sup>22</sup> So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.

**(December 17)** <sup>ESV</sup>(**John 14:23-29**) Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. <sup>24</sup> Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me. <sup>25</sup> "These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. <sup>26</sup> But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. <sup>27</sup> Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. <sup>28</sup> You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I will come to you.' If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. <sup>29</sup> And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe.

## The Confession of Faith – (The Christmas Creed)

***I believe in God the Father Almighty,  
Who sent His Son to be my Savior;***

***I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, my Lord, the long-promised Messiah, Who came as foretold, being conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, announced by the angels, worshipped by the shepherds, adored by the Wise Men, Who lived to suffer, die, and rise again, To free me from all sin, from death, and from the power of the devil;***

***And I believe in the Holy Spirit, Who has brought me to faith in my Savior, and by whose continuous work in my heart, I rejoice in my salvation, walk in Christ, show forth His praises, and will one day live and reign with Him eternally.  
Amen.***

## The Second Hymn *(Posted on the Hymn Board and projected)*