

**“Come Thou long expected Jesus
Born to set Thy people free
(Charles Wesley, 1744)”**

We have entered a very sacred season within our calendar-year wherein we celebrate the wonder of the advent of our Savior. The apostle stated it most succinctly, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory... (John 1:14).” We believe that the greatest of events on the stage of human history took place when the promise of God to Abraham to give a redeemer to mankind was fulfilled in the incarnation of the Son of God, Jesus who is the Christ, the Messiah.

Perhaps there is no greater musical piece that captures the meaning of Christmas more than George Frederick Handel’s “Messiah.” It found its way into the public arena in April 1742 in Dublin, Ireland, through an event to raise money for three charities, two for debtors released from prison and one for Mercer’s Hospital. The present three-part structure of the piece (the prophetic promise of a redeemer, the passion of the redeemer, and the triumph of the redeemer ending in the “Hallelujah Chorus”) debuted in London the following year. Handel begins to tell the story of the Messiah, where we also begin this short series, with selections based on Old Testament passages alerting the listeners that Jesus was promised centuries before He came among us. Scene one of Part I is based on Isa. 40:1-5 and scene three on Isa. 7:14. Handel grasped what we all have come to realize: the Hebrew Scriptures is a “Book of Anticipation,” a “Book of Hope.” Someone is coming to deliver us!

The goal today is to focus on the promises that a Savior would come for us. The saints before He came could easily have sung, “Come thou long expected Jesus,” just as we do once again. They pined for His first coming, but we His final coming when we shall gather with all the redeemed to sing the great “Hallelujah Chorus” forever!!

In the great “Book of Anticipations” there are two interconnected themes: the fact of a coming redeemer and the way He will redeem His people. We turn to a few of these passages this morning.

Genesis 3:15

The place to begin is with the need for such an anticipated one, the profound and durative quest suggestive of the dire importance of such a one. The

promise, deeply obscure, is given in the context of the fall of Adam and Eve. We are told two things: the fact of a conflict through the centuries and the eventual triumph of a male child.

Two things are said of the serpent's punishment, one thing physical and the other eschatological. First, the serpent, indwelt by the devil, would be banished from blessing, humbled into perpetual dust and would slither on the ground. Second, the "serpent" and God would enter constant temporal conflict. The "serpent" would oppose God, but God would eventually crush him. The conflict is seen throughout Genesis (Cain and Abel, but Seth prevails; Isaac and Ishmael; Jacob and Esau). There will be a constant struggle. The "seed of the serpent" is not literal as in little snakes; it prefigures humans who act like their father, the devil.

What is envisioned here is a constant struggle between good and evil, the woman's seed and the serpent's seed, throughout human history, that is, as long as time exists there will be conflict. The consequence will be brutal at times through the centuries. (Strikes on the head and on the heel can be fatal.) While we know that the seed of the women will prevail over the "serpent," the forces arrayed against God are not the specific point of this passage. The point is the consequences of judgment, not final outcomes.

Genesis 5:29

This chapter traces the genealogy from Adam to Noah, the son of Lamech. What is most interesting for our purposes is that Noah's name means "rest." Lamech viewed his son as one who would reverse the effects of the curse! This suggests that the earliest OT saints lived in hope and anticipation.

Genesis 12:1-3 (15:1-6, 17:1-8)

Here is the greatest covenant in the Holy Scriptures. God promises a Semite, a son of Noah's son Shem (5:32, 11:10) a land, a seed, and a blessing. From this promise all the other covenants spring! Out of the one covenant (the Abrahamic) unfolds the message of the Bible.

The promise of blessing to Adam and Eve (Ch.1) is now carried forward to the patriarch; the parallels connect the two events. God promised Adam a place, fertility, and rulership. Here the promise to Abram is a place (a land), fertility (a great nation), and kingship. This promise of a ruling son was fulfilled in Christ according to Paul. "Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as referring to many, but rather to one, 'And to your seed,' that is, Christ (Gal. 3:16)."

Genesis 21:12

The son through whom the promised seed would come is Isaac.

Genesis 27:27-29

Isaac granted the blessing to Jacob. The deliverer would be an Abrahamic Semite via Isaac and Jacob. Later, Balaam blesses a son of Jacob without naming him, “A star shall come forth from Jacob and a scepter shall rise from Israel (Num. 24:17).”

Genesis 49:10

When Jacob nearing death blesses his sons, the only son of Leah to be blessed is Judah, Jacobs fourth born son. From Judah will come a kingly deliverer; the Messiah will be a Semite; a son of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and a Judahite.

“Until Shiloh comes” is a difficult phrase to understand. Most are agreed that it refers to David and the establishment of the Israelite empire. Old Testament writers drew on this passage to envision David’s greater royal Son (Ps. 45; 72; 89; 110; 132; Hos. 3:5; Amos 9:11—5; Isa. 9:6-7; 11:1). New Testament writers see David as a shadow that prefigures the reign of the Messiah, “the lion of the tribe of Judah” (Rev. 5:5). Shiloh means “bearer of rest,” an apt prefigure for Jesus. “Between his feet” was a reference to his reproductive organs, and here it means his descendants.

Verses 11-12 must be read from a poetic perspective, not with a strictly literal mindset. It seems that when “Shiloh comes,” nature will be tamed, no longer rebellious. Wine, the symbol of blessing and prosperity, will be abundant; and His character (v. 12) will be that strength and power

Isaiah 7:14

This is a rather amazing passage in that it is set in the reign of the godless Ahaz, King of Judah. Though at a terrible time of foreign invasion by the Syrians, God offers comfort, but the king will not listen. God promises deliverance within a year despite Ahaz’s lack of faith. Before a young woman can become pregnant and deliver a child, the Syrians will no longer menace the nation.

Matthew quotes this passage (1:23) as prophetically fulfilled in the birth of Jesus. Ahaz’s son, Hezekiah, was a symbol of a greater deliverance to come. Ahaz’s maiden figure is fulfilled in Mary’s virgin birth. While Hezekiah was evidence of the presence of God to deliver, Immanuel (God with us), Jesus is its ultimate fulfillment!

Isaiah 9:1-6

This passage is quoted in part by Matthew (4:13-17) at the beginning of our Lord's ministry in the Galilee and is a fulfillment of Isaiah's words.

Unfortunately, as in Isaiah's day, the people of Galilee rejected the "greater prophet" to experience judgment once more, but not all of them.

1) The promise of an end to gloom, but the coming of light, vv.1-2
The introductory verse (actually, 8:23 in the Hebrew text) is perhaps better translated, "There will be no more gloom for the land which was anxious." This makes the line positive, fitting the context better.

The reference to the humiliation of Zebulun and Naphtali refers to the Galilee that Tiglath-pileser III conquered in 734-733, making it a vassal state to Assyria. "Way to the sea" refers to the region of Dor on the Mediterranean coast south of Mt. Carmel, "beyond the Jordan" to the Golan Heights east of the Sea of Galilee; and "Galilee of the Gentiles" refers to the area southeast of the Sea of Galilee.

The "darkness" refers to judgment, the "light" to a coming Davidic king.

2) The promise of joy and gladness, vv.3-5
Abundance will replace loss, and joy will replace despair. This was partially fulfilled in the first coming of the Child-King but will be fully manifest when He reigns over all the peoples on the earth forever. That day will be characterized by the abolition of war, as the instruments of battle are destroyed in fire.

3) The promise of a King, vv.6-7
The reason "for" joy is the coming of a special Child.

a) His function, v. 6a
This Child will be royalty; He will bear the signet of rule. "Child" suggests His ancestry, "Son" His maleness.

b) His character, v.6b
Three couplets describe the character of this Child-Governor. The list begins and ends with the idea of rule. The initial couplets tell us of His person, the latter His rule.

"Wonderful Counselor" means an extraordinary strategist.

“Mighty God” can mean a warrior, but kings were referred to in this manner because they represented God to their subjects (Ps. 45:6) and this fits with v.7.

“Everlasting Father” suggests parental compassion and care.

“Prince of Peace” means that in His coming He will bring everlasting peace and blessing.

c) His reign, v.7

The intense devotion of the Lord for His people will be the cause of this dominion of everlasting peace. It will be uniquely in the sovereign power of God to accomplish.

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

This is one of the amazing passages in the Bible. It is the longest of the so-called servant-songs, descriptions of the Lord’s Servant, and the most quoted passage in the Greek Scriptures of the New Testament. Remember that Isaiah is writing these things 700 years before the advent of the Servant.

1) Exalted, 53:13

2) Humiliated, v. 14

3) Triumphant, v.15

4) The despised and rejected servant, 53: 1-3

5) The vicariously suffering Servant, vv. 4-6

6) The obedient and innocent Servant, vv. 7-9

7) The crushed, efficacious servant, vv. 10-12

Micah 5:2

This remarkable passage told the OT saint that the Messiah would be born in an obscure village, Bethlehem-Ephrathah, 700 years before his coming. So small was the village that Micah had to use a hyphenated term. Of his character and position, it is stated:

V. 2b: He will be a king, a ruler (the House of David).

V. 2c-d: He will be from eternity.

V. 4: He will be a shepherd to His people (Remember John 10:11).

V. 5: He will bring peace.

Applications:

1. I do not know how a person can read the Bible seriously and not be amazed at its combination of profundity and simplicity. The Bible has one central

message and that is redemption through the Christ: Promised in the Hebrew Scriptures, given in the Gospel accounts, gathering His people in the Epistles, and returning to dwell among them forever in the Revelation. It contains numerous books and literary genres (history, poetry, prophecy, letters) written over a span of 2000 years by many authors, yet one message. This is a book like no other in all human history; it deserves our serious attention!

2. God's ways are unperceivable to us except in retrospect. It reminds me of the lines of a wonderful Welsh hymn. "Immortal, Invisible God only wise. In light inaccessible, hide from our eyes. Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light, nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might..." Simply because we cannot see God at work at times, does not suggest that He is idle, uncaring, or inept. God is silently orchestrating a brilliant master plan for the ages. You and I not infrequently find ourselves confused because, in our pain and frustration, we cannot see the hand of God. We must all remind ourselves that there is a realm of reality more real and enduring beyond our ability to grasp.
3. The purpose of the centuries from the divine perspective is to gather a people to glorify Him now and forever. The "real" story behind human events is a divine drama; human history from a divine perspective is about redemption. You and I are a tiny part of the scarlet thread that is weaving its way down the years that began in Genesis and will end in Revelation 21-22. God is gathering a family. Just think, He has determined to make all of us members through Christ of that family! When we get sad or feel lonely, this will lift your spirits.
4. Though it often seems that wrong prevails over right, error over truth, and wickedness over righteousness, that will never be the outcome. Since Genesis 3 a cosmic conflict is being waged between the "seed of the serpent" and the "seed of the woman." The child of the woman, ultimately Jesus, will prevail. While evil often seems to prevail, it will not and cannot ultimately. Bad and difficult things happen to us because we are part of this cosmic struggle, but the Lord will have the final and victorious word. Henry Wordsworth Longfellow wrote a poem in 1863 (shortly after his wife's death and his son entered the Civil War) that subsequently became a well-known Christmas carol. "And in despair I bowed my head: 'There is no peace on earth,' I said, 'For hate is strong and mocks the song of peace on earth, good will to men.' Then pealed the bells more loud and deep: 'God is not dead, nor doth he sleep; The wrong shall fail, the right prevail with peace on earth, good will to men.'"
5. The picture presented in the OT of the coming of the redeemer is rather beautiful. Though they might have grasped the Messiah figure only vaguely, the portrait is still rather comforting. When He comes they thought of Him as

a shepherd leading His people, a “father” comforting them, a wise counselor directing them surrounding them in peace. Well, He has come! Is that portrait of the savior you experience of Him? Is He not worthy of listening to? Has He not brought you comfort? Is He not the one who has brought us peace?

6. The image of the Messiah in the Jewish mind was a ruler-deliverer-king. What the OT saint could not grasp is how He would also be a suffering servant. How could the savior suffer and die, yet rule over a kingdom? You and I have that figured out through a perspective that they could not grasp. What binds the OT and NT saints in a common faith is not so much the content of faith as it is the object of faith. They, like us trusted in the promises of God, and so do we though we have a clearer appreciation of His promises through the incarnation and the testimony of the apostles.
7. I think at Christmas time we should ponder the wonder that we have a God who has made us promises and those promises are sure even though we must wait for their fulfillment. Like the OT saint we live in faith awaiting the fulfillment of God’s promises. After centuries of anticipation, Christ came to provide for us salvation and now it has been many subsequent centuries, and He has still not returned to grant us our final and complete deliverance from sin and death. As the OT saint waited patiently in hope and trust so should we. Is that true of you? The fact of His first coming is the assurance of His second.