

Longing for Hope

Longing for the King – Crossroads Advent 2009

November 29, 2009 – Mark Bickel

TEACHING NOTES

Intro (2 min.)

- Welcome to the first Crossroads of Advent! Throughout time the church has traditionally set aside **the 4 Sundays before Christmas** to set our focus on the coming of Christ. It is a time to remember the many centuries of preparation and longing for Christ.
- **Each week we want to begin** our time together **meditating both on the longing and the fulfillment in Christ**, letting those meditations lead us into worship.
- **Today I want us to begin with a song**, a song that reflects the longing of Israel for a savior and the longing of the people of the world for Hope.
- **Then I want to take us back in time**, to before the worlds even began, a look into the very heart of God himself and at the longing of His people through time.
- So for the next **30 minutes put down your notebooks, sit back and join us on a journey** around the world and back to the foundations of time itself.

***** Start “O Come, O Come Emmanuel” Youtube Video *** (3 min.)**

{While video playing turn off all lights}

***** Start Single Candle Video *** (3 min. for next sections)**

ACT 1: God of Eternity

In the **depths of time**, when the world was yet formless and void, there was in the midst of all a light, and that light was **a relationship** both beautiful and holy. It was the relationship of the one, true, self-existent God within the three parts of his godhead. There was the Father, from whom all blessings flowed, and the Son, through whom redemption is accomplished, and the Spirit, whose indwelling makes God’s presence felt. In the mind of God there arose a grand vision, of **a universe filled with majesty and wonder, with creatures great and small, and with a special race of creatures that would love, worship and obey him**. On these later creatures he would pour his love and blessings for all eternity. Yet, even as he planned for the unfolding of this world there was a problem. If he forced his special creatures to love him; then their love would not be genuine and real. Yet, if he allowed them **choose** to reject him; he would then be forced to cast them out from his holy presence forever. Thus a plan was made to create a world that would be **free to grow and groan and change through time**. Then, at the fullness of time, the light would dawn as God himself would step into his world to redeem it, reshaping it into something even grander than the original design.

They began with the **angels**, beings who would stand in the presence of the godhead forever, worshipping and praising the great name of the Lord and serving at times as his ambassadors to the world. Somewhere, in the midst of time, one of those angels grew jealous, deciding he would rather be God himself. His name would be known as **Satan**, the deceiver and devourer. He corrupted a host of other angels who all rebelled against God, and were cast out of his presence. They were left to roam the world until the day of judgment when they will be condemned to torment forever.

***** Start Creation Video *** (< 2 min. for next section)**

ACT 2: God of Creation

At a **time appointed by God**, a time we recon as **the beginning**, God manifest his plan in physical form, creating in the midst of the void a world and a planet within that world called earth. For **six days** he poured forth his creativity bringing forth light and forming earth and sky and sea, filling them with every variety of plant and animal and fish and bird. He then made his prized possession, **man himself, made in the image of the trinity, created male and female for his glory**. He gave his entire world to man, making him caretaker and vice-regent to rule under his headship. Yet God was far more than a wonderful watchmaker, instead he came and **walked with man**, talking with and caring for him, creating woman when he saw man was alone, and providing for his every need. He gave just **one restriction**; one tree out of the whole earth man was not to eat from lest he die. Yet that was enough. Satan came in the form of a serpent and deceived man. First **Eve decided she knew better than God**. Thinking God was holding out on her she ate of the forbidden tree. Then she offered it to her husband Adam, who also ate, **plunging all mankind into sin and condemning all mankind to death. The light was overtaken by the darkness.**

***** Go to Darkness *****

ACT 3: God of Redemption – The forming of a People

In nakedness and shame they now hid from God. Yet God had **foreseen** it all and he had a plan. He was about to **start another story**, a story that he would weave into the story of the creation and the fall and work out through time in a way that would surprise even the angels. In place of the deserved story of eternal death he was to write **a new, gracious story, a story of light and of love, a story of hope and redemption and eternal joy.**

***** Start Advent Candle Video *** (4:50 minutes for next section – Abel to Judges)**

– O Come, O Come Emmanuel 1 with lighting of 1st 2 advent candles

When God finds man hiding in sin and shame he does three things. First, even as Adam and Eve blame each other and God for their shame, the Father **questions them**, showing them clearly their own guilt. Then he **pronounces curses** on the human race. Not the curse of instant death as was expected, but rather a life of hardship and toil and conflict ending in both physical and eternal death. But that is not the end - **God then gives hope**, giving a wonderful promise that one day the seed of the woman will crush the serpents head. With this renewed vision God reaches down and kills an animal to make clothes for Adam and Eve, leading them to a new home to begin again their journey with God.

To Eve comes a son, **Abel**, maybe this is the one, the one who will crush the serpents head! But as Abel makes his sacrifice to God his brother **Cain** grows jealous and kills him, after which God casts out Cain. So what of the promise? For answer God gives another son, Seth, to continue the line of Adam, but Seth is not the promised one. Nor are his children, or the generations after. Instead man runs from God, becoming so distant that the thoughts and intents of his heart are evil all the time. **Man grows so evil God wipes out all creatures from the earth** in a massive 40 day flood. Yet he saves Noah and his family and a few of each creature to make a new start, promising never to destroy all by flood again. **The light is growing**, the expectation is growing, the promise may be just around the corner!

Yet **the pattern continues** - God walks with man and blesses him, man rebels against God and is judged, yet God is gracious and keeps a remnant safe to redeem in later generations. The light grows in the darkness, yet still so small only a few ever see it. We see it in **Abraham** as he is promised a son who will be the first of a nation as vast as the sands of the seashore and who will bless all the nations of the earth. We see it in **Jacob** being chosen and **Essau** rejected. We see it in the **sin and jealousy of Jacob's sons**, with some disqualifying themselves from the inheritance, while others repent and are changed. And we see the **light growing and the promise approaching as God provides redemption from famine through Joseph**. In each generation the longings and expectations grow. Through the patriarchs who set out on God's journeys never seeing the promised end, to the people groaning for **400 years of captivity** in Egypt waiting for a deliverer to finally come. Yet, no matter how dark it gets, God is always watching and waiting to act on behalf of the remnant He is preserving..

As God's people groan under Pharaoh's oppressive hand God is growing them, growing them from a family of 12 to a nation of millions. After 400 years of longing and crying out to the Lord He now hears and reveals his glory anew. He raises up **Moses** in the house of Pharaoh to confront Pharaoh with a series of miraculous signs, demanding God's people be set free. God then **hardens Pharaoh's heart** so he will not concede until God sends an angel of death to pass over all Egypt killing every first born male child. God uses this to judge and to finally break them so they will gladly send away his people, even giving them gifts as they go! He also uses this as a **powerful sign for Israel**, as he promises to **pass over** their homes and not kill anyone within, provided they sacrifice the best of their lambs and place the blood on the doorpost. Thus implementing the Passover meal, which will become **a lasting feast in Israel** in remembrance of God's deliverance and eternal covenant. A covenant that will one day lead God to sacrifice his own son, using his blood as the atonement for sin. **The light is growing amidst the darkness!**

God displays his glory for all of Israel in manifold ways. Opening the **red sea** so they can pass through on dry ground, and closing it on top of Pharaoh and his armies. Leading them with a cloud for shade by day and fire for light by night. Feeding them in the desert with manna every morning and water from the rocks when they are thirsty. Meeting with Moses to guide and govern the people. And eventually bringing them to **Mount Sinai**, where he engulfs the Mountain in his **glory** and graciously gives his **commands**, so that his people know how to love and serve him as well as how to live in harmony among themselves. And then, most amazing of all, telling Moses that he no longer wants to just be seen in the clouds and mountains, but rather that **God himself, the creator and ruler of all, wants to dwell in the very camp of his people**. He wants a **tabernacle** constructed so he can be in the midst of the people, and he will appoint priests to enter his presence on behalf of the people. For their sins he will allow the priests to bring sacrifices, allowing the **blood of goats and sheep to mediate on their behalf**. What other God has ever done such great, marvelous and loving things for a people so undeserving?

And yet, in the very midst of the greatest miracles and show of love the world has ever seen, we see **the heart of the people turn against God**. They **grumble** about the manna, they complain when thirsty, they try to overthrow Moses and the high priest, they cry out to go back to Egypt, and they go as far as to stand at the base of the very Mountain where God is displaying his glory and build a **golden calf** to worship instead! **And yet God, who is rich in mercy, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love listens to Moses' plea on their behalf** and does not slay them all in the desert. He is **a God who punishes sin**, and so in this case allows them to wander 40 years until that generation dies. But he takes the few faithful of that generation, and all the next generation, and he does indeed bring them into **the promised land of rest**, a land flowing with milk and honey.

Under **Joshua** they conquer the land, with God again showing his miraculous care and protection throughout. But after Joshua they begin to once again do what is right in their own eyes. They decide not to wipe out the last foreigners, but to marry their wives and start adopting their practices and gods. And so God **sends judges**, to call the people back to himself and to fight for his name in the land. And so the cycle continues for generations to come – **God shows his mighty hand, the people follow-him, then they get proud and rebel and he judges them, then they come back to him and he again blesses until they again rebel**.

ACT 4: God of Redemption – The forming of a Kingdom

**** Continue Advent Candle Video *** (4:10 minutes for next section – Kings, Prophets, Exile, Post-exile)*

– O Come, O Come Emmanuel 2 with lighting of last 2 advent candles

Eventually this cycle reaches a climax as the people cry out for a king ‘like all the other nations’. They are **not content to have God as king**. Or even to have occasional judges and prophets appointed by God to act on his behalf. They want a king, and they want one handsome and strong and rich and powerful like everyone else has. And so God grants them this request in **Saul**, who quickly degenerates into a self-serving coward who will not face God’s foes and who eventually goes on a crazy crusade to kill one man. That one man is **David**, a simple shepherd boy whose zeal for the Lord was used by God to defeat the entire philistine army! David, although a nobody in terms on any of the world’s criteria for leadership, is a ‘**man after God’s own heart**’, and is the one God chooses to become the model king in Israel. Not that he is perfect, far from it. At one point he ends up committing **adultery and murder!** But he is one that seeks God and his honor, and who when confronted with his sin repents and returns to God. So **God promises** to make his kingdom an everlasting kingdom, which is eventually fulfilled in the Messiah reigning on David’s throne.

David, and his son **Solomon**, go on to build Israel into a great **kingdom**. God blesses them with great riches and land. He blesses David with a great musical talent and ability to communicate his **inner-most feelings in poetry**. So we get many psalms that have been used mightily in the worship of God, as well as to minister to those in all kinds of distress and persecution. To **Solomon** is given great **wisdom**, from which come many of the proverbs of the Bible, along with the observations of life in Ecclesiastes and the great love Song of Solomon. Solomon also builds the **Temple**, God’s address on earth, the place where the people can pray in their sins and where God has promised to see and hear, to forgive and to restore.

In addition to these more visible works of the kingdom, God is working out his master plan in many **small, unseen ways**. Raising up a prostitute named **Rahab** in to aid in Joshua's day, and placing her in the genealogy of the Messiah. Sending **Boaz** as the arch-typical kinsman-redeemer to marry a poor Moabite woman named **Ruth**. Testing **Job** to show Satan how faithful God's people can be. Redeeming sinners and setting events in motion that will effect all mankind.

Yet the cycle of **sin still remains**. In the midst of this great and growing kingdom, **Solomon**, the wisest man to ever live, disobeys God and takes **foreign wives** for himself. They bring in **foreign gods**, and before they know what has hit them Israel is trying to mix the worship of God with ungodly practices. And so **the kingdom is divided in two**, and kings come and go who grow further and further from God. In fact, as God gives his verdict on each king it becomes clear that the **northern kingdom of Israel will never have a good king**. And the **southern kingdom of Judah will only have a handful**. That handful, like **David** and **Josiah**, will work hard to turn the people back to God and to destroy objects of false worship. But in the end each good king gets replaced by a bad and things continue to degenerate.

In the midst of the sin and rebellion of the people and their leaders God sends the **prophets**. They are sent to speak on God's behalf, to **remind the people of God's law** and the punishment promised for transgression. They are to **call the people to repent** before it is too late, recording for all time their lack of response as well as God's righteous judgment. Some, like **Elijah**, are sent to the people to demonstrate the power of God by miraculous. Others, like **Elisha** and many of the **Minor Prophets**, speak not just to the people but to the leaders as well. Others, like **Jeremiah** and **Ezekiel**, speak in pictures and parables or with powerful oratories. Still others, like **Hosea** and **Jonah**, are called to be living representations of the love of God. Some, like **Isaiah** and **Joel**, primarily point beyond the current day to **the Messiah to come**. Through all these means God works to **wake up his people to their sin**. He also uses the prophets to **comfort his remnant** that still follow him, giving them confidence in God's plan for **future redemption**.

In the end the people **harden their hearts** against God. And so they are **defeated and sent into exile**. First Israel falls to the Assyrians, and is absorbed into their nation. Later Judah, who did not even learn from their brother's calamity, is conquered by Babylon. **God withdraws** and allows even his own temple to be utterly destroyed and plundered. Finally, in **exile**, Judah does begin to wake up and return to God. We see examples of particularly faithful men, like **Daniel**, who reach high office while remaining faithful in spite of persecution. We also see godly servants like **Nehemiah and Esther** who are willing to step up to kings and plead on behalf of God's people. Through it all God is at work, **preserving his remnant**. And eventually **some do return and do rebuild the temple and the walls of Jerusalem**. And yet, even here there is both sin and disappointment. The temple is **not nearly as glorious** as it used to be, the city is not all that was expected. Somehow, somewhere there must be more. **God promised a glorious kingdom that is blessing all nations**. While what they now have is certainly better than exile, it is also much less than all that was promised. **What is God up to? And why, for 400 years after the return, does God not raise up any prophets to speak directly to his people?**

The longing grows. The rulers of Jerusalem change, but one thing remains the same, the Jews do not have their own land, they remain scattered and to varying degrees oppressed. The religious leaders set up the **synagogues** to teach people the Word of God and reinstitute the temple sacrifices, all the time **waiting and hoping for a Messiah to one day reestablish the Nation of Israel.** They try to take the lessons of the Kings seriously, seeking to put in place laws to assure the people walk in righteousness and that they themselves are wholly true to God so that when the messiah comes they will be found worthy to be part of his kingdom. And so they work and serve and wait. **In 400 years of silence they wait.**

Stephen and **Anna** and **Zechariah** go to the temple and watch and pray, awaiting the long expected Jesus. When will he come, when will God answer, when will this longing be over, when will all they have hoped for and dreamed of, all God has promised, become a reality?

**** Song switches to Narration before 1st verse of Come, O Come, Emmanuel ***

**** Everyone sing with above, then Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus *** (songs 4:30)*

ACT 4: God Becomes Flesh – the Light shines in the darkness (<5 minutes - This section)

**** white candle flame loop ***

In the **fullness of time**, after centuries of foreshadowing and preparation, God finally reveals the heart of his eternal plan for man. **A plan so surprising no one on earth understands it** or fully sees it coming. A plan so amazing the **angels stand in awe.** **God himself actually steps into the world as a man.** In the person of **Jesus**, the second person of the trinity, God humbles himself and becomes as one of us! He is born of a virgin, laid in a lowly manger, having no stately form or visible majesty. Yet even on his birth we get a glimpse into his life, **as the angels in heaven break forth in song, as lowly local shepherds and exalted wise men from afar both bow at his manger, and as the king issues a decree that he is to be killed!**

Mark writes first, proclaiming the **“beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God”.**

Mathew picks up the theme by **stating with Abraham and tracing Jesus line** all the way through David Joseph and Mary, declaring him to be **the promised one foretold.**

Luke takes it further **back to Adam and to God himself**, and giving many of the details of his birth as **son of God and man.**

John then begins with **“the Word was with God and was God”**, tracing Christ back to all eternity and showing his part in the Godhead, yet declaring that in Christ **“the Word has become flesh and dwelt / tabernacle among us”** No more flaming mountains or arks or holy places ... God now walks and talks and lives among us as one of us. He has humbled himself, taken on human nature and death itself, death on a cross.

Jesus, the Christ, grows like any other **child**, being raised in the house of a carpenter. Yet even as a child he amazes the people as he debates the religious **leaders in the temple**. At around the **age of 30 he begins his more public ministry**. He is **baptized by John**, the forerunner who has been calling people to repentance and faith for years. At his baptism the **Trinity is manifest** as the Spirit comes on Jesus with the Father speaking to acknowledge his so.

After which Jesus is immediately driven onto the **wilderness for 40 days to be tested by Satan**. But unlike Israel in the dessert, he does not grumble against God, or fall for Satan's deceitful offers of food or power. Instead, he **obeys perfectly** where we have all failed, and in so doing defeats Satan. As he leaves the dessert he **announces that the kingdom of God is at hand and calls for people to repent and believe**. He then goes about cleaning Satan's house by kicking out demons and healing people everywhere. Yet in the midst of the great miracle tour, Jesus focuses not on the miracles but on the people. **Calling 12 to be with him and sent out by him**. Teaching and showing compassion on the crowds, shepherding them and calling them to give up all else and follow him. **Promising them the bread of life, a river of living water within, rest for their weary souls and eternal life with the Father. He is the true light, the light of all men.**

... We will pick up the story of Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection more over the next few weeks ...

(8 minutes this section)

Let us return to the present ...

There is much **talk today of "Hope"** – Barack **Obama** ran for the presidency on a platform of restoring hope. While many referred to him, sometimes in jest and others no so much, as the "Savior", I think he has tapped into something that lies **deep in the heart** of each of us. We need to have hope, hope of survival, hope for a better life, hope that our life actually means something. All through the OT people were looking for hope – some turned to God and his promises of things yet to come, others turned to power, wealth, wisdom, sex ... whatever other gods they thought would give meaning, success, hope to life.

Where do you look for hope today? Have you bought into the "**American Dream**" – are you looking for a husband to wife to live you, a good paying job to provide an enjoyable standard of living, a powerful position where you can influence others, and a family of children to carry on your name? Are you looking to health care reforms, environmental initiatives, or the stock market and the fruits of capitalism to provide security?

Is your hope for the future rooted in the success, or failure of the president and those who might replace him? Is it rooted in the system, or in the free market, in change or in stability around you? Is it rooted in others, or rooted in your own abilities?

Even if we could **give everyone an enjoyable, well paying job, complete and free health care, a loving family and friends, everything we could dream of ...** every one of us in this room **will still die!** True hope, hope that will last, hope that can transform our lives needs to be **rooted in something beyond this life**, something beyond the hopes and fears of what man can do

In one of the most famous verses in Scripture John 3:16 says: “For God so loved the World that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him shall have eternal life” John roots his hope in eternity, and in the God who has sent his son to secure and guarantee that eternity for us.

Hebrews 11 puts it this way:

¹**Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.** ²This is what the ancients were commended for.

³**By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command**, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible. ⁴**By faith Abel** offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. **And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.**

⁵**By faith Enoch** was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one **who pleased God.** ⁶And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must **believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.**

⁷**By faith Noah**, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his **faith he condemned the world** and became **heir of the righteousness** that comes by faith.

⁸**By faith Abraham**, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. ⁹By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰**For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.**

¹¹**By faith Abraham**, even though he was past age—and Sarah herself was barren—was enabled to become a father because he ^[a]considered him faithful who had made the promise.

¹²And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.

¹³**All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth.** ¹⁴**People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own.** ¹⁵**If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return.** ¹⁶**Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.**

¹⁷By faith ... *the rest of the chapter lists men and women of faith, concluding with:*

³⁹These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised.

⁴⁰God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

Our hope, like theirs, needs to be rooted outside ourselves and our time. It needs to be rooted in **God alone**, who is true and faithful to all He has promised. And it needs to be rooted not in what is seen, but in the unseen realities of eternity.

We really can **live and work for something far greater** than anything we will receive in this life, we really can be agents of God's kingdom, bringing eternity one step closer. Where is your hope? Is it in you, or others, or systems, or luck, or fate, or ... Or is it in God alone? Is it rooted in what you can see, do, even envision of the future ... Or is it rooted in the eternal promises of God. Does your hope end in this life, or are you longing for a life to come? Is this world your home, or are you simply a stranger here longing for a better place?

This advent take time to examine your heart, and to begin **longing anew for God** and for eternity. This week **read Hebrews 11** and think about the people of the past who longed for God and His promises. Join us **Thursday** as we read together **the book of Revelation**, longing for eternity.

Invite your friends to join us in the weeks to come as we grow in our longing for the King. This week we mostly looked back, in the **next 3 weeks** we will be looking within ourselves today as we talk about our own longings for Love, Joy and Peace, then Christmas weekend we will look at Christ's fulfillment of our longings, and we will begin the new year thinking about how our longing for heaven can affect our life here on earth.

***** end in Prayer *****

Advent Candle 1: The Prophets / Shepherds Candle: (5 min)

- ❖ Advent Wreath – 4 candles on outside, light 1 more each Sunday of advent – remind of longing, of growing light – Also time to remember different aspects of the Christmas story
- ❖ Each week someone in the group will light the next candle, sharing a part of the story of Christmas with us, leading us into worship of God for His wondrous story
- ❖ This week is the Prophets / Shepherds candle, here to help us think about that is ...