

## The Promised Savior

### November 29<sup>th</sup>

Scripture Reading – Genesis 3:1-15

Christmas is a season of anticipated promises. As a kid, you probably asked (or are asking) for a lavish gift. Unsure of whether your parents would (or will) come through, you make them promise. In your mind, if you get them to promise to get you what you want, you will have nothing to worry about. However, even when they promise, you tend to wonder if they really mean it.

In Genesis 3, we see the heartbreaking story of when sin entered the world through the disobedience of Adam and Eve. We see how their sin breaks the first couple's relationship with God, each other, and creation. No longer do they have the opportunity to walk with God. No longer do they feel safe around each other. No longer will creation submit to their authority. From Genesis 3 on, we see story after story of man hiding from good and fighting for evil.

In the midst of the heartbreak, the Lord gives a promise. In Gen 3:15, the Lord tells the serpent, "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." Adam and Eve hear the Lord tell the serpent these words. Although they also experience the discipline of God, the discipline comes with hope. They hope that one day God would send someone to crush the serpent.

Eventually the offspring of Eve comes but not without moments where God's people are unsure if God will actually fulfill his promise. Like a kid in between the moments where he asks for a gift and open it on Christmas morning, Israel wonders if the day will come when God fulfills his people. Until God reveals the gift of Jesus in Bethlehem, the Jews have to trust that God will send the Promised Savior.

Unfortunately, because God does not work within the timeline of people, the Jews grow impatient until they lose faith. They remove their faith in the future Messiah and place it in themselves. They trust in their own obedience. They trust in their own understanding. Because they lose sight of God, they lose sight of the Messiah's purpose—to crush the head of the serpent. This Christmas, as you anticipate the gifts you may receive, use this anticipation as a reminder that God fulfilled his promise of Jesus Christ.

Reflection Questions:

1. What is one gift you begged your parents for as a kid?
2. How would you respond if you heard God make the promise that your offspring would crush the head of the serpent, but you never saw the day? Would you still trust God to do exactly what he promised?

## The Chosen King

### December 6<sup>th</sup>

#### Scripture Reading – Psalm 2

One of the best aspects of Christmas is the music. From silly songs about reindeer and snowmen to songs that exalt the Lord, Christmas music fills homes and churches across the world. People love Christmas music because of the emotion music creates. In fact, the reason we love music in general is because of what we tend to feel as we sing.

The Books of Psalms is a mixture of prayers and songs to the Lord. While the authors write them from their perspective of life within their context, the Lord reveals himself and his truth through the psalms. Psalm 2 is considered a royal psalm that exalts God's chosen king. While the psalmist directly sings about the earthly king of Israel, the Lord speaks these same words to tell us about his own love for the king he has chosen—Jesus Christ.

Unfortunately, our worship tends to depend on the opinions of others. Ashamed of what others may say about who we worship, we can tend to stay quiet about our joy for our king. During Christmas, the world may mock a Christian's worship of the infant king. The world may deride a Christian's belief in the infinite God residing in the infant. The world may question why a king would trade in his throne for manger outside an inn. No matter the response of the world, we must continue to worship.

As you gather with the church each Sunday morning or turn your radio on to hear Christmas cheers, may you allow the words to stir your heart for worship towards the king. May you avoid getting caught up in the season of Christmas; may you turn your attention to the king the music exalts.

God has chosen his king. Now we have a choice. Will we walk in wisdom exalting the king in fear and trembling? Will we recognize that we do not deserve to sing about a babe in a manger? Will we recognize that the silence prior to Jesus's birth has led to nations around the globe to collectively and joyfully exalt Jesus as the chosen king?

#### Reflection Questions:

1. What is your favorite Christmas song?
2. How can we make our worship less about the seasonal experience and more about the Lord?

## God With Us December 13<sup>th</sup>

Scripture Reading – Isaiah 7:14

Sometimes it just does not feel like Christmas. When we think of Christmas, we think of Christmas carols, snow, hot chocolate, family, trees, and lights. Living in Oklahoma, we can easily have sixty-degree Christmas morning. Sometimes, neighborhoods do not have as many lights set up. Sometimes, we celebrate differently causing some members of the family not to be present. Sometimes, Christmas just does not feel like Christmas. Rather than being full of Christmas cheer, we feel more like scrooges and grinch.

In our passage, King Ahaz, king of Judah, faces oppression from Syria. At this point, the nation of Judah has separated from Israel. Both Syria and Israel hope to take advantage of King Ahaz and lead them from the Lord. Ahaz fears Syria will defeat Judah. In order to instill hope and confidence in the people, the Lord encourages Ahaz to ask for a sign. When Ahaz will not, the Lord offers one for him. The sign is that a virgin will conceive and bear a Son. They will call him Immanuel, which means God with us.

Eventually, Babylon takes Judah captive. Judah is left asking, “God, where is this child? Are you no longer with us?” Judah’s experience of exile makes them feel that God has abandoned them. Just as Christmas does not feel like Christmas, Christianity does not always feel like Christianity. In our journey with the Lord, we experience flat tires, construction, incompetent drivers. When we take the journey into our own hands in order to make it to Christmas dinner on time, we are visited by a police officer who wants to do more than spread Christmas cheer. Sometimes, we do not arrive at our location the way we thought we would arrive.

But, we arrive. King Ahaz probably did not think that the sign would come hundreds of years later, but Judah learns that God’s timing is better than our timing. God has not abandoned us, but he works all things to a final purpose.

For us, we have the advantage to know that Immanuel has come. While Christmas may not feel like Christmas this year or the next, the calendar tells us that December 25<sup>th</sup> is Christmas Day. While Christianity may not feel like Christianity, the coming of Jesus tells us that he is the sign. He is Immanuel. He is God with us.

Reflection Questions:

1. When does Christmas not feel like Christmas for you?
2. What does it mean in our day-to-day activities that God is with us?

# The Suffering Servant

## December 20<sup>th</sup>

Scripture Reading – Isaiah 53:2-12

Have you ever opened a Christmas present unsure of what you just opened? You had to have your parents explain to you the purpose of the gift. Even after they explain the purpose, you still do not understand why you need it. Hoping to unwrap a new scooter, you unwrapped a scarf instead. You do not know why anyone would offer such a gift on Christmas Day.

In our passage, Jesus is like a gift we do not fully understand. He is gift that does not seem relevant to how we live. The Jews looked forward to a Messiah who would rescue them from their oppression. Isaiah writes at time when the Israelites lived in exile in Babylon. The Israelites looked forward to God's servant rescuing them. However, they did not expect the Messiah to endure oppression in order to save the oppressed. When the Jews anticipated a king to slaughter his enemies, God would send a king who would be slaughtered by his enemies.

Isaiah paints a grim picture of what Jesus suffered for his people. Jesus did not come with a celebrity status. While Jesus tended to have a paparazzi early in his ministry, they eventually rejected him for a murderer. He became accustomed with the grief and sorrows of men. In order for God to be just and the justifier, he poured out his wrath upon his servant. Not once did the servant question the plan. He took everything with joy for he knew what was to come.

Unlike the Jews of the Old Testament, we do not look forward to the Messiah to come. Instead, we look back for why the Messiah had to come. One way we look back is through the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is meant to stir within us emotions similar to what Jesus experienced on our behalf in addition to joy knowing that we will not have to suffer for our transgressions.

The Lord's Supper also fulfills another purpose. The Lord's Supper is meant to be taken in community with other believers. Every time we take part in the Lord's Supper, we are reminded that God has not only saved us to himself, he has saved us to one another. Collectively, we have the responsibility to helping others understand the weight of our sin that the Father has placed upon his Servant. While a gift that often goes unnoticed, God still offers us what we really need.

Reflection Questions:

1. Have you placed your faith in Jesus Christ to save you from your sin?