



2025 Weekly Devotions

Week of: December 15th - 21st

Sermon: December 14th



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH
building community ◊ equipping believers ◊ serving Jesus

December 15

Luke 1:43
“The First Noel”

As the choir led us in the old hymn “The First Noel”, published in 1823, I couldn’t help but wonder how many of us were wondering what the word *Noel* even means. It is always a good idea to know what you are singing when considering it as an offering to the Lord. The word has a French etymology or beginning and simply means *Christmas*. It could also be translated or at least include the understanding of *birth* in relation to the coming of Christ. Christmas was and is a celebration of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. So, we are making statements and declarations about the very first Christmas that took place over two thousand years ago.

The message of the song is the joyous pronouncement that the King of Israel has been born. When we sing the song or wish someone a joyous noel, we are following the example of the angels, announcing the good news that Jesus Christ was born, not just for Israel, but for all mankind, so we could receive forgiveness of sins through Him. The song captures the record of the story as it is presented to us in Luke 2. The fact that angels appeared to the shepherds and declared the amazing good news of the imminent birth of our Savior was an incredible moment in history.

In the song, we sing emphatically and persistently that on this first Christmas the King of Israel, and all the world has been born. We celebrate this display of God’s amazing grace now and forever. We are summoned to join in with all other followers of Christ in a chorus of praise to our heavenly Lord. We praise Him because as the song states, “He hath made heaven and earth and with His blood mankind has bought.” Wow, this is truly an amazing theological truth that we proclaim still today.

I wanted to point out a moment before the birth of Christ that occurred between Mary, the mother of Jesus, and her relative Elizabeth. Elizabeth was six months pregnant, in her old age” (Luke 1:36) when the angel Gabriel came to Mary in Nazareth and announced that the Holy Spirit would come upon her and that she would have the privilege and responsibility of carrying the Lord Jesus in her womb even as a virgin. Mary was overwhelmed by this news, believed it, and some days later went to see Elizabeth.

When Mary approached Elizabeth’s home, who was herself pregnant with John the Baptist, John in utero, did a somersault in Elizabeth’s womb (Luke 1:41). There are of course so many amazing moments in that encounter, but I want to zero in for just a moment on verse 43. Elizabeth said, “And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” Her humility startles me and causes me to pause for some reason. It appears that throughout the Scriptures, humility is a characteristic always present in those who recognize their own sinfulness and undeserving nature. They are, like Elizabeth, overwhelmed and captured by God’s grace and His willingness to condescend to them. “The First Noel” reminds us that God came to earth to save us. A people who to date remained sinners, yet even so, He came to live as one of us, to live the life required by God that we could not, and to save us by dying in our place. The first noel is indeed good news.

December 16

Galatians 4:4-7
“Newborn King”

I hope that you never fail to realize and consider the anticipation that we feel as children, and even now for many of us, prior to opening Christmas gifts, should reflect or at least remind us of the joy and anticipation of seeing our newborn King. I want you to think for a moment of what it must have felt like on that first Christmas night as the reality that their Savior had finally come hit them. My hope for today is that you will consider the times, even now, when you must wait upon the Lord for His answers, His appearing, or His resolution to your issues.

The oppression that the Israelites were experiencing is far more challenging than what most of us have ever had to face on a continual basis. How long, Lord, must have been the cry of their hearts so many times. Much like the Hebrews enslaved in Egypt for 4 centuries. Surely there were times when they thought God had forgotten them forever. Again, I know it may feel like a childish comparison to consider the anticipation and excitement centered around Christmas morning when you finally get to open those presents, but it can remind us to hang in there and remember that the day finally comes when the wait is over and the blessings rain down on us in joyful ways.

I thought it was perfect that the children got to sing with Brad on the song about anticipation and excitement around the arrival of our newborn King. Children exemplify and remind us of what raw joy, enthusiasm, and trust looks like so beautifully. Their excitement causes them to struggle to close their eyes and sleep. Oh that you and I would long for with unabated hope the coming of the Lord Jesus, not only at the end of the age but in our day to day. As we pray, work, and wait, I hope that we will all look for the precious hand and presence of the Holy Spirit as He works to encourage, comfort, guide, strengthen, and establish our faith so that we will never grow weary in well doing nor lose the excitement based on the fact that we know the Lord is near.

The first verse of this great song was, “We’ve been waiting, our hopes hoping for a Savior, for our Lord.” I wait for Him to return but I also wait and expect that He will constantly show up as I am walking in the Spirit and abiding in Christ. I love those moments when He “shows up” and blesses my life with His mercy and grace. The children sang, “Love is here and we wait no more.” That line captures a sense of satisfaction with our newborn King. He is what and who we have been looking for and longing for in our lives, and He has come to dwell with us, to give His life for us, and to save us.

Listen to these words of declaration, “Peace on earth and death defeated. Mercy triumphs and grace abound. Through this child we find forgiveness, our salvation here and now.” Goodness, dear ones, this song is rich with solid doctrine and proclamations of faith that stir my heart to greater surrender and a desire to obey King Jesus. Thank you, children, for this wonderful reminder and your example of anticipation, excitement, and confidence in the promises of God.

December 17

Isaiah 55:1-3
“Come Adore the Humble King”

How precious it was to see and hear Brad and his son Luke singing this song of praise together. I find the title of this song intriguing because of the lyrics that make up the song. In the title itself, there is the invitation to *come*. What struck me so deeply in this song is the reminder that before He invited us to come to Him, He came to us. This is of course what we celebrate at Christmas time. The fact that Jesus Christ left the glory and wonder of heaven to come to this cursed and broken world among people whom He knew many would reject Him is a love that none can fully comprehend.

As Brad and Luke sang, we were reminded that He came to dwell with us. Dwell means to abide deeply or to settle in as if to stay. This was not a quick blow through or light touch. He lived among the people and even put on flesh to become one of them. The God who was for the most part unknown, was now walking among people, making Himself known, and even calling many His friends. It was His love, mercy, and grace that caused Him to leave His throne and come to us. Our King looked from His throne and saw the sick, the lost, the dying and was moved with compassion. So much so that He sent His only Son with an invitation to come.

Now, we are invited to come to Him. In the passage that I chose for today’s “point to ponder,” Isaiah wrote, “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to Me, and eat what is good, and delight yourself in rich food...” (Isa. 55:1-2). Oh friend, let that sink in.

We have been invited to come just the way we are. We need no money and could not make this purchase if we had more money than we knew what to do with. It is here that we can find that which does actually satisfy the longings of our souls. It is where we can come to the banqueting table of our Great God and feast from the finest foods and find all that is good. The truth is dear ones that until we accept this invitation, we will forever be laboring and longing for that which does not satisfy and never will.

I imagine you may feel like Elizabeth did as I mentioned yesterday. If you understand the fallen condition of your own soul and the holiness of the One who invites you to come, you might find yourself trembling in fear and unable to step towards the unimaginable invitation to come inside. Fear not dear family, we are told that we can come with boldness because our Savior, the One whom we celebrate now, has paid our debt, clothed us in His righteousness, and has removed all enmity between God and us. He has made us acceptable and wanted at the King’s table. Yes dear ones, come to the humble King as a broken sinner and find you are provided for by His merciful and gracious hand.

December 18

1 Peter 3:14-15

“Let the World Sing Gloria”

Oh, how I rejoiced and worshipped as the girls sang “Let the World Sing Gloria.” I joined in heart and voice as together we praised the One who came to save us and turned our darkness into light. My dear brothers and sisters, I hope that you have become completely convinced of the truth of God’s Word and the precious promises that He has given to us in Christ and made real in us by the Holy Spirit. My prayer for all of us is that we would know Him personally and intimately so that we would no longer doubt His presence, power, and purposes for the hard places in our lives.

I mention hard places because anybody can stand and appear strong when life is easy, the sun is shining, and there are no opposition or obstacles on our paths. The promises that we made as we bowed the knee and surrendered our lives to Christ are for the times when life is hard, the future is unclear, and the wind is blowing hard against us. It is then that our faith must be strong, unwavering, and beautiful.

In this beautiful song that the girls led us in, we were exhorted to live so that the world would see our faith and the majesty and value of the One who came to save. One lyric contained these words, “Hear the song rising from the hearts who long to stand in wonder of the Son who comes to save.” Beloved, this is how we are to live as children of God. I thought about the often-quoted passage from 1 Peter 3:15 where it is written, “...but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.” Why would they ask?

The reason an onlooker would ask you about your hope is because they don’t have it, they want it, and it is so precious and beautiful to one who stands in need of answers, reasons, and hope. This requires of course that you are standing strong in the storms of life. Notice in the verse preceding this one, Verse 14, it says, “But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed.” Friends, the reason they ask is because you are standing strong and faithful not on a sunny day, but on a really hard day. These are the times when the average person would crumble under the pressures and burdens, but you stand with confidence, courage, and peace as you rest in the sovereign goodness of God.

This song contained precious truth for believers. I was challenged and encouraged by the great lyrics. I hope that you will long to exemplify the image created in the words of this song, “Let the World Sing Gloria.” Can you join with the songwriter in proclaiming that you will stand “unafraid that something is about to change knowing it’s the very thing that we need the most?” They are fantastic words of knowledge, faith, and unwavering confidence in the way God directs our steps. Let the world sing gloria because you and I are leading the way as we rise and we praise Him for His incredible plan of redemption. God put on flesh and came to dwell among us. What a Savior!

December 19

Hebrews 9:27-28
“He Who is to Come”

The Christmas musical included at least one somewhat surprising song. I say it was surprising because the lyrics were not devoted, chiefly, to the first coming of Christ which we celebrate during the Christmas season. Instead, the song entitled “He who is to Come” is about the next time the world will see Jesus.

The truth is that the Christmas season does not constitute the pinnacle of God’s dealings with the world. Jesus came, and that is glorious, but His first coming was designed to make possible a future reunion. You see, our faith is not ultimately grounded in a baby in a manger, our faith is grounded in a risen, victorious King.

Jesus was born in a sleepy town to common parents for the purpose of doing something extraordinary. He came to live and die... for us! The great hope of the Christian faith is not that Jesus was born of a virgin, the great hope is that He is coming back again to ultimately save His own.

Now, we often talk about the Second Coming in terms of judgment and, to be clear, judgment is a part of Christ’s coming. Revelation 1 speaks of the wailing that takes place when those who have rejected Christ see Him again. There will be great gnashing of teeth and an awful sense of dread upon those who have chosen to reject the truth and salvation that God alone offers.

However, Hebrews 9 speaks about another component of the second coming of Christ stating that on that day there will be a group of people who rejoice when Christ comes again as they are those who are eagerly awaiting His return. The sight of Christ descending upon this place will be such a welcome relief and source of great joy for those who believe.

My question to you today is simple... which camp are you in? Have you put off the issue of coming to Christ? If so, know that you are in the position of wailing. However, those of us who have cherished not only His coming but His dying and rising again have every reason to sing for joy at the prospect of “He Who is to Come”. Oh, church family, I long for the day that He arrives. I look forward to the joy of seeing Him and knowing that all our struggles and problems and quarrels are drawing to a close. He is coming again dear friends; may we be ready to shout for joy when He appears.

December 20

Matthew 1:23

“O Come O Come Emmanuel”

One of the most glorious truths about the Christmas season is that God came to be with us! The familiar song “O come O come Emmanuel” expresses this truth so very well. If you are like me, this song has become a staple in our Christmas music library, but I don’t want the familiarity of the song and the truth of the song to become commonplace or stale to believers.

It is, in fact, quite remarkable that God would come to dwell amongst us. Consider for a moment the sacrifice of simply leaving the glory and ease of heaven to live in this place. Ponder afresh Christ’s decision to take on flesh and living amongst sinful people, knowing full well that they would rebel and nail Him to a tree. Think about the love and commitment of the One who would come knowing that He would take our place, absorbing the wrath of God due our sin!

The idea of God being “with us” is a testament of His grace and love but it is also a reminder that He is a God that understands. Let me explain. Years ago, I had a part time job at Habitat for Humanity in Columbus, GA. My job required that I organize and help run our “Restore” (think of a thrift store for building supplies). Our “store” was a warehouse that had no air-conditioning and the job required that we were constantly working to move and reorganize the store, even in the dead of summer in Georgia!

I thought often about quitting that job (the pay was less than stellar!) but I didn’t, in part, because I had a fantastic boss who went above and beyond to work alongside of me. He was “with me” when we were breaking our backs moving tile in the 100-degree heat of a warehouse. He was “with me” when we were picking up hundreds of donated windows that were donated by Fort Benning in the heat. He worked alongside me, and I esteemed that highly.

One of the results of his working along with me was that I trusted his guidance and heeded his instructions. I knew that he was telling me what to do but I also knew that he understood the implications of his instructions! He wasn’t giving me commands from an air-conditioned office, totally oblivious to the hardship of working in difficult conditions. He was speaking as one with authority but also as one with great understanding and empathy to all my struggles.

In the same way, our Lord speaks today. He knows what it’s like to suffer physically, He understands temptation and heartache and pain, and He knows these things because He is God “with us”. He came to live in the same fallen world that you inhabit. He came to suffer in your place, and He rose to a position of authority as One who is understanding and aware of all that you endure. Know then, brother and sister, that our Great Emmanuel, is a God who “gets it” and let this be further reason to love, praise, and honor Him.

December 21

Luke 2:8-20

“When We Behold”

One of my favorite songs from this musical was entitled “When we behold”. The song’s lyrics are simple enough as they recount for us the wonder and adoration that followed the appearing of the sign of the Messiah to both the shepherds and the wise men (magi). I have cherished hearing this song because it reminds me of the glory of the moment of coming to Christ.

Consider for a moment the story of the shepherds in Luke 2. These men were simply minding their own business, watching the sheep on a typical evening. There was no hint of anything supernatural or even out of the ordinary on this night until the glory of God appeared in His messenger announcing the arrival of the Messiah that had been long anticipated.

Things went from typical, and mundane, to extraordinary and exuberant in the matter of mere minutes. I think there is a great parallel in that story between the shepherds and many of us. If you’re like me, you have much in common with this aspect of the story of the shepherds. I, like them, was not anticipating anything all that unusual on the night of my salvation. I had no designs to know Christ, I certainly wasn’t seeking Him but, in God’s mercy, the declaration of the coming of the Messiah opened my eyes and changed my life for all eternity.

The ramifications of the knowledge of the truth that Christ has appeared in order to take away my sins are still mind-blowing to me. For two decades now, I have considered and pondered and cherished all of the blessings that flow from the appearing of Christ and His subsequent death. He changed my life from typical and dreary to miraculous and hopeful and I pray that He has done the same for you.

When we gather to sing about this risen Savior, we are singing about One that deserves all the praise He can receive. He has shown up, in time and space, in order to redeem us and this arrival is worthy of all the pomp and circumstance that it was given in that field during the first Christmas season.

May we never lose sight of the glory of His announced coming and may we always cherish the moment that we were told of His appearance. I imagine that the shepherds rehashed their encounter with Christ daily for the rest of their lives. I am sure that the sight of the Lamb of God in that manger drastically altered their lives and I pray that our coming to see Him in His glory has done the same!