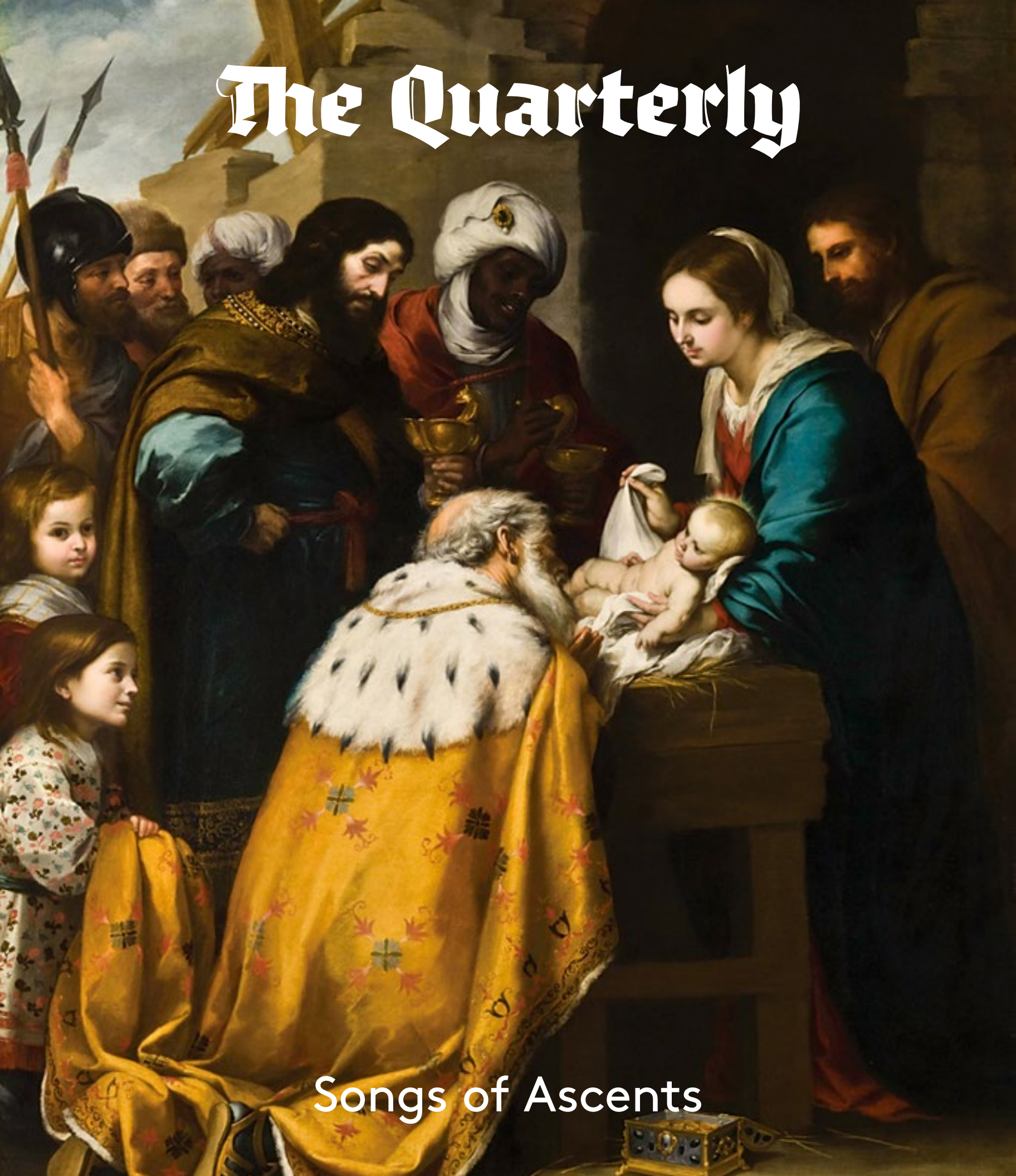


The Quarterly



Songs of Ascents



Cities Church

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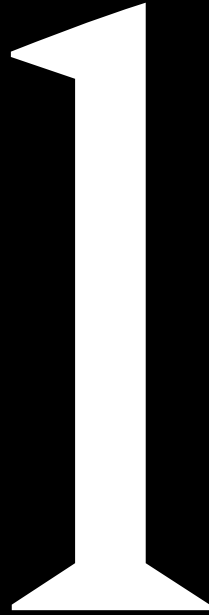
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Jonathan Parnell



The Ascent This Advent

8





Jonathhan
Parnell

How we get there matters as much as where we're going.

This is no new insight, not when it comes to the well-worn path called Christian discipleship. But it at least has felt new to me in recent days. The reason for that comes, in part, by how the truth arrested me a while back when I was praying in my study.

After we moved into our home five years ago, Melissa and I commissioned a little corner of our basement to become a quiet place where I can meet with God. It often gets called my “office,” but that’s largely as a joke. Melissa can’t call it an “office” without smiling because she knows how I cringe at the word. I like to think of my time there to be more about soul care than administration, so I insist on “study” instead of “office,” as silly as that seems (and it is silly).

But either way, one day not long ago I was there, praying in that space, asking the Father for help. I needed answers. *Will you please show me what you want? Will you please show me your heart in this?* It was one of moments when I’m being serious in prayer. This was not one of those polite petitions we sometimes do — you know what I mean. There are those times when we ask God for things because we know we should ask for them. Sometimes we just ask because it’s right to ask, and because we want things to be in their proper order, and that is a good thing to do.

But this time was not that.

This was coming from a place of deep uncertainty. *I’m not trying to be polite here, Father, and you know it. I seriously don’t know what we’re supposed to do.*

It was like I stood on the edge of some great valley, and when I peered

across to see the other side it was every bit as dark and foggy as the path right in front of me. I needed God to clear the fog, turn on the lights, and throw a bridge down over the unknown terrain. So I asked him to do that. *Can you tell me what you want here?*

And then came this simple little truth.

This. He wants this.

He wants this praying and pleading and asking and hoping stretched out on the carpet facedown— and he wants this because he knows I realize it’s the only thing that makes sense right now. He wants this kind of looking away — my looking away from self and every man-made book that cover the walls around me. He wants the “Me on the way,” not just the “Me when I get there.” That’s why *how we get there matters as much as where we’re going.*

God is not just in the destination of things, but he’s also in the path along the way. He will get his glory not just in the results, but also in the process.

That’s what the words are getting at when we read in Psalm 121:8,

The LORD will keep your
going out and your coming
in from time forth and
forevermore.

He’s into the steps. He cares about how we put one foot in front of the other, starting with where our hearts are inclined as soon as we rub the sleep out of our eyes each morning, and then what makes us either excited or anxious or both about the day ahead.

God is not just in the destination of things, but he’s also in the path along the way. He will get his glory not just in the results, but also in the process.

Now there's not a lot of people who want him to be concerned with all that. It is too invasive, they might say. A distant god is much easier to manage. But there's just no such thing, and God's love is too great for him not to be in our details.

The question for us gets at how we live differently because of it. God cares more about me trusting him than me getting all the answers. Okay. Right. Now, what does mean for Monday traffic, or that big meeting on Thursday? We need to connect the dots — and that's what the Songs of Ascents help us do.

Psalms 120–134 makes up a collection of psalms each labeled, “A Song of Ascents.” Many scholars agree that these songs must have been sung by the Israelites on their semi-regular pilgrimages to Jerusalem. This would mean that these psalms are something like a road trip album. Jerusalem rested at an elevation higher than the surrounding area, and as these Israelites *ascended* up to Jerusalem for worship, they'd repeat these tracks together. That is one explanation for how they got their name — the Songs of Ascents. I think that's right, but there's another explanation too, and it has to do with the wider context of the Book of Psalms.

There are basically two levels at work here. First, there is how these psalms were used on the ground for those earliest believers — they sang them on the way to Jerusalem — but then second, there is what these psalms are meant to say as Scripture in the context of Psalms and its greater message. And the context there is Israel's exodus from Babylonian captivity. Just like God delivered his

people from Egypt in the first exodus, he had accomplished a second exodus in leading his people out of Babylon. Israel had come up, *ascended*, out of Babylon.

But even that exodus was pointing to another one. There will still be a greater coming up, a greater ascent. And when that one comes it will mean the promised offspring of David is seated on his throne, forever.

So in that sense, you and me are in same shoes as those first singers and readers. We're still waiting. Still walking. The Son reigns, no doubt, but one day he will reign more fully, and until then we continue on the way. And how we get there matters as much as where we're going.

Day 1

Q1 Read Psalm 120. How does God react to the Psalmists call of distress? Why should we find comfort in this?

Q2 In this instance, why did the psalmist pray to God?

Q3 In verse 8 it's written that God will go to his resting place. What is this resting place?

Q4 Why does it matter that the Psalmist dwelled amongst those that hate peace? How does that impact our lives?

Q5 How can Christians take this psalmist's pleas and apply them to their own lives as exiles in a fallen world?

Day 2

Q1 Read Psalm 121. What is the theme of this psalm?

Q2 In verse 2 the psalmist writes, "My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth." Why does the description of God as a creator matter when we pray?

Q3 What comfort(s) can be derived from knowing that "he who keeps you will not slumber?"

Q4 What does it mean when the psalmist writes, "the Lord is your shade on your right hand?"

Q5 How does this psalm relate to our overall salvation in Jesus?





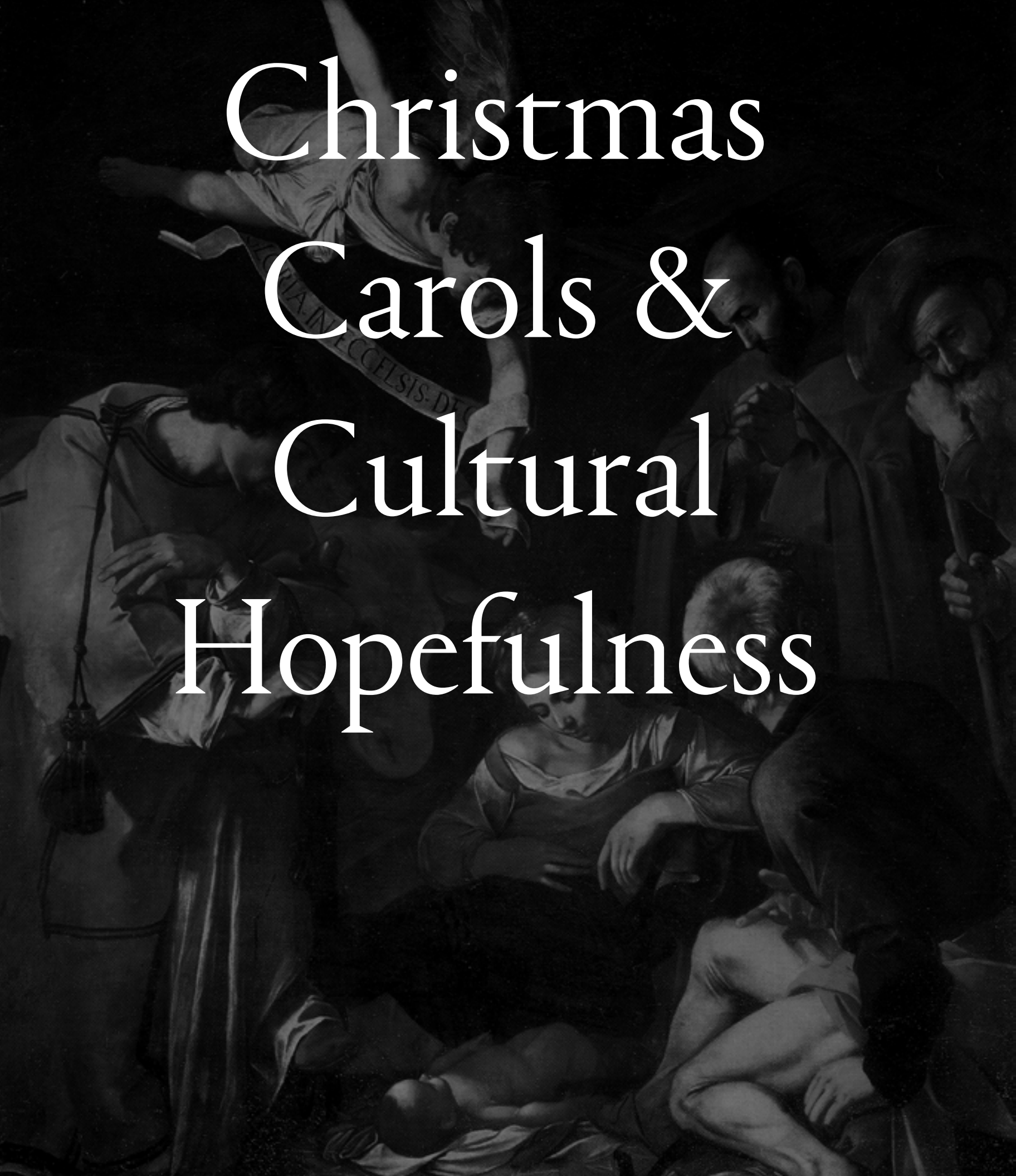
Day 3

Study 1 Peter 2:11-12.

Sermon Notes

November 27, 2016





Christmas
Carols &
Cultural
Hopefulness

Nick
Aufenkamp

21

I have a love-hate relationship with Christmas carols.

I groan the day after Thanksgiving, when every station on the radio and public place is buzzing with the all-too-familiar tunes. And, as a musician, the obnoxious number of chord changes and unusual melody lines make me dread having to re-learn and lead carols on Sunday mornings. Yet, the vast majority of Christmas carols are amazing! I marvel at the beautiful poetry and theology in classics like “O Come, O Come Emmanuel!” or, “O Holy Night.” While my fingers may be bleeding after our Advent services, my heart is always refreshed by the incredible truths Christmas carols help us to proclaim. And, though I am quickly fatigued by the repetition of Christmas carols in the public spheres, I am sincerely amazed that many of the songs—with all their boldness about Jesus and the salvation he brings—are still being played for the masses. I love that during the Christmas season Christians and non-believers alike are humming along to the glory of God.

For example, “Joy to the World” by Isaac Watts is currently one of my favorite carols. Watts wrote this in 1719 (and he did not even intending it to be a Christmas song).

It hasn’t always been my favorite carol because I used to think it was too repetitive and way too peppy. But, when you’re writing a song about the arrival of the Savior of the world—the One who solves mankind’s universal problem, crushes Satan, and forever breaks the curse of sin—I suppose some peppiness is in order. “Joy to the World” is the song my soul *needs* to sing at the end of 2016; a year that has

**Men and women,
like you and me,
ate meals with him;
talked, laughed, and
cried with him; they
saw the place he was
born, witnessed his
death, and placed
their fingers into his
pierced side. Because
Jesus has come for us,
we can be confident
that our lives are not
meaningless.**

been, on the whole, pretty dark and discouraging for most of us.

Ponder with me a few of these lines from “Joy to the World”:

*“Joy to the World, the Lord is come!”
“Joy to the World, the Savior reigns!”
“He comes to make His blessings flow
far as the curse is found.”*

These truths change *everything*.

Jesus Really Came

Joy to the World, the Lord is come! God is either real or he isn’t; he is who he says he is, or he’s an imaginary friend; he has stepped into time and human history in the most astounding way, or he is so distant from us that he is utterly irrelevant to us. There is no in-between or middle ground: Jesus, God the Son, has either come or he hasn’t. And the good news is, Jesus has come! His presence proves the existence and immanence of God, our Creator. Christmas gives us hope by reminding us that we are not alone in the universe. Emmanuel has *come!* He has *dwelt* among us! Men and women, like you and me, ate meals with him; talked, laughed, and cried with him; they saw the place he was born, witnessed his death, and placed their fingers into his pierced side. Because Jesus has come for us, we can be confident that our lives are not meaningless. In fact, Jesus’s advent proves that every one of us has eternal significance. We were made by God for the greatest purpose of all, to love and be loved by him. So, take heart, weary brother, *the Lord is come.*

Jesus Really Reigns

Joy to the world, the Savior reigns. I'm writing this in October, which means America has not elected her new president yet. Barring a miraculous outpouring of God's grace leading to national repentance, neither the Donkey nor the Elephant represent a hopeful trajectory for our nation. No matter. Jesus reigns! After ingesting countless hours of political stump speeches, debates, and commentary, I need to be reminded that Jesus is still on his throne and that he is not threatened by the world's leaders. I *know* he is good. I *know* he is wise. I *know* he does all things well. Thus, my hope is not staked in the leaders of my nation. No, my hope is *fixed* in the One who is—right now—in control over all things and is working all things for the good of those who love him (Rom. 8.28). Christmas reminds me that Jesus will return, set all things right, and those who threaten me now will join all the rest of creation in bowing before Jesus and confessing that he is Lord. Take heart, worried sister, *the Savior reigns.*

Jesus Really Won

He comes to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found. How far is the curse found? Certainly, we can turn on the nightly news and for half-an-hour witness a steady stream of conflict and violence. Even more daunting, we can look within and be horrified by the impurity of our thoughts and desires. Even the good we do is mixed with selfish motivations. Is anything in this world not tainted by the curse of sin? No. Everything is warped.

Broken. Cursed. And yet, the good news Christmas brings is that Jesus is drowning all that is cursed, not in wrathful judgment, but in his restorative blessing. He is reconciling to himself “all things, whether on earth or in heaven” having made “peace by the blood of his cross,” (Col. 1.20) and he promises that he is making all things new (Rev. 21.5). Take heart, Christian, when you see the effects of sin in your life and over the world: *he comes to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found.*

Bringing It All Together

I said my soul *needs* to sing “Joy to the World.” I need to sing it because I need to believe it. I am often tempted to think that the world is going to hell in a hand-basket, and when I do, this simple carol reorients me to the reality that, because Jesus reigns, the future is brilliantly bright. “Joy to the World” reminds me that Jesus is here, in control, and is at work, which fills my soul with hope and emboldens me in the midst of the present darkness to proclaim joy to the world in Jesus's Name.

So, this Advent season let us not merely hum along to our beloved carols. Rather, it is my prayer we would be moved to worshipping Jesus by the carols we sing and hear – while we're Black Friday shopping, preparing Christmas dinner, hanging lights on the tree, or gathered with the church. And may our hearts be filled with unfading hope as we remember this season that Jesus has come and Jesus will come again.

Day 1

Q1 Read Psalms 122 and 123. What does it mean, in 122:2, that they go to the house of the Lord?

Q2 How does the psalmist characterize Jerusalem in Psalm 122?

Q3 In 122:9, what does it mean when the psalmist writes, "For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good?"

Q4 In Psalm 123:1-2, the psalmist describes people in a specific way. What way are people described? How does this underscore our relationship with God?

Q5 Why does the psalmist, in 123:3-4, ask for mercy from God?

Day 2

Q1 Read Psalms 124 and 125. What are the things the psalmists says God protects them from in Psalm 124:1-5?

Q2 In 124:6-7, the psalmist says that they (Israel) escaped their troubles and predators. Why does the language of them escaping danger matter? What does it tell us about the things we will face in our own lives?

Q3 According to Psalm 125, how are those who trust in God like Mount Zion?

Q4 How does the psalmist compare God to a mountain range? How does that connect with how those who trust in God are like Mount Zion?

Q5 What is the plea the psalmist makes in Psalm 125:4-5? How do those things come to fruition through Jesus?



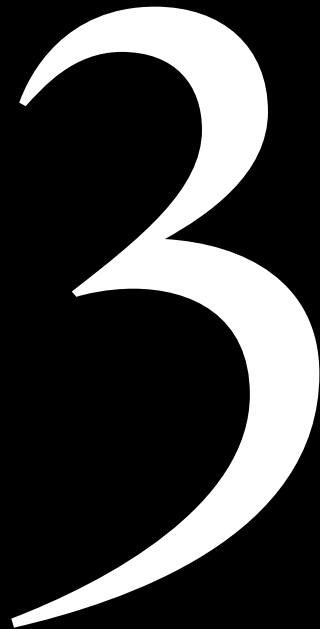


Day 3

Study Ephesians 2:19-22.

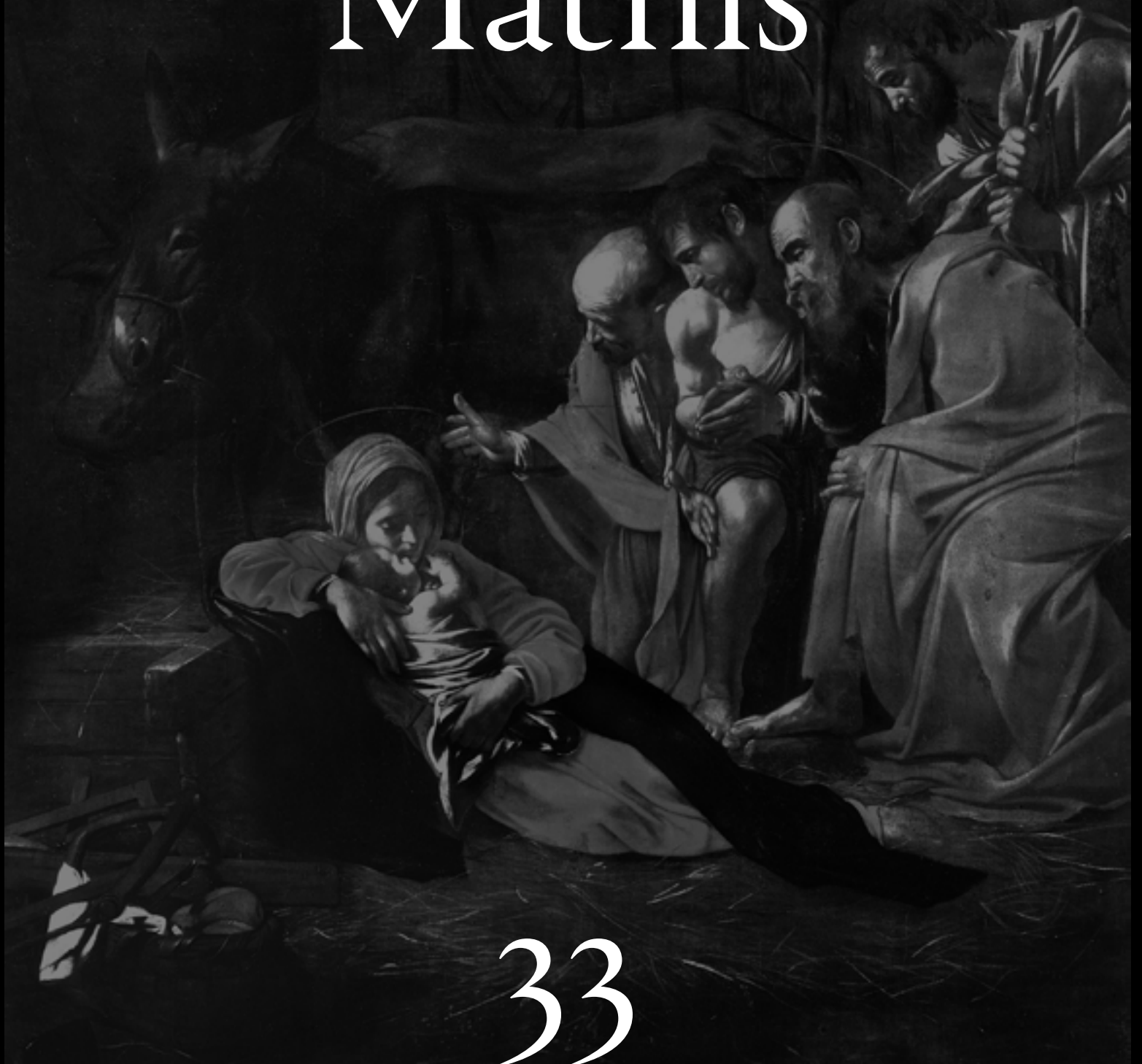
Sermon Notes

December 4, 2016



Sent into
the World:
Jesus' Mission
and Ours

David Mathis



33

A danger lurks in our endeavors to live incarnationally. Danger, yes, but not deterrent. It is a risk worth taking, though not treating lightly.

The danger is that we can subtly begin to key on ourselves, rather than Jesus, when we think of what Christian mission is and what incarnation means. Over time we start to function as if Christian mission begins with, and centers on, our intentionality and relationality. What really excites us is not the old, old story, but our new strategies for kingdom advance. Almost imperceptibly we've slowly become more keen how we can copy Jesus than the glorious ways in which we can't.

But thankfully the Advent season, and its annual buildup to Christmas Day, serves as an important periodic reminder that the most important part of the Christian mission isn't the Christian, but the Christ.

Our little efforts at incarnational living, courageous and self-sacrificial as they may be, are only faint echoes of the world-altering, one-of-a-kind Incarnation of the very Son of God. And if Christian mission doesn't flow from and toward the worship of the Incarnate One, we're really just running round the hamster wheel.

Jesus Sends Us

Make no mistake about it, Christians are sent. Jesus prays to his Father in John 17:18, "As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world." In identifying with Jesus, we are not only "not of this world," but also sent right back into it on redemptive mission.

The classic text is Jesus' commission at the end of John's Gospel: "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you" (John 20:21). Those whom Jesus calls, he also sends — a sending so significant that receiving his "sent ones" amounts to receiving him. "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me" (John 13:20).

Such a sending should be awe-inspiring, whether our particular sending includes a change in geography and culture, or simply a fresh realization and missional orientation on our lives and labors among our native people.

But what are we "sent ones" sent for? What is this sending about anyway? Merry Christmas.

Why We're Sent

This is where the Advent reminder is so essential. We are sent as representatives of the one born in Bethlehem and crucified at Calvary. We are sent to announce with all we are — with mouth and mind and heart and hands — that the Father sent the Son.

We are sent to say and show that Jesus was sent into the world to save sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). What we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus and the good news about him (2 Corinthians 4:5). We are not the message, but mere messengers.

Which means that Jesus' sent status is in a class by itself. He was not only sent as the preeminent Messenger, but sent as the Message himself. Jesus' "sentness" is primary and ultimate. Our sentness is at best secondary and derivative. Christmas

is a reminder of the primacy of Jesus as the Sent One.

His Ultimate and Utterly Unique Sending

That the Father sent his Son to share fully in our humanity is no mere model for mission. It is at the very heart of the gospel which our mission aims to spread. Christian mission exists only because the Message still needs to be told.

Jesus' mission is unrepeatable. His Incarnation is utterly unique. We are meager delegates, unworthy servants. The more attention we give to the ultimately inimitable condescension of the Son of God, the less the language of "incarnation" seems to apply to our measly missional efforts.

Whatever condescensions and sacrifices we embrace along the path of gospel advance, they simply will not hold a candle to the Light of the world and his divine stooping to take our humanity and endure the excruciating death on our behalf.

Incarnation Inimitable

Because he was in the very form of God, Jesus "did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:6-8).

Is there something here to mimic? Yes, in some distant sense. But in the main, this Incarnation is not

about what we are to do, but about what has been done for us.

So before going on too long about our mission as Christians, let's give due attention — the attention of worship — to the Jesus whose mission showed us God and accomplished our eternal salvation. The great *missio Dei* (mission of God) finds its most significant meaning in the Father sending of his own Son not only as the high point and center of the universe and all history, but also the very focus of eternal worship. Our sending, then, empowered by his Spirit, is to communicate and embody that central message, and so rally fellow worshipers.

Our Mission Echoes His

What is the place then, if any, for the talk and tactics of Christians living incarnationally? So far our plea has been that we not obscure the important distinction between Jesus' matchless Incarnation as Message, and our little incarnational attempts at being his faithful messengers in word and deed.

But are there any applications to make?

Donald Macleod is perhaps as zealous as anyone that the unparalleled condescension of Jesus in the Incarnation not be obscured. Macleod's book *The Person of Christ* (InterVarsity, 1998) is a Christological masterpiece, and his sixth chapter, simply called "The Incarnation," is about as good as it gets. And while his record of uncompromising Christological reflection speaks for itself, this same author would have us imitate Jesus' incarnational self-condescension. Macleod writes elsewhere:

[Jesus] did not, as incarnate, live a life of detachment. He lived a life of involvement.

He lived where he could see human sin, hear human swearing and blasphemy, see human diseases and observe human mortality, poverty and squalor.

His mission was fully incarnational because he taught men by coming alongside them, becoming one of them and sharing their environment and their problems.

For us, as individuals and churches in an affluent society, this is a great embarrassment. How can we effectively minister to a lost world if we are not in it? How can we reach the ignorant and the poor if we are not with them? How can our churches understanding deprived areas if the church is not incarnate in the deprived areas? How can we be salt and light in the darkened ghettos of our cities if we ourselves don't have any effective contacts and relationships with the Nazareths of [our day]?

We are profoundly unfaithful to this great principle of incarnational mission.

The great Prophet came right alongside the people and shared their experience at every level.

He became flesh and dwelt among us.

(A Faith to Live By: Understanding Christian Doctrine, 139, paragraphing added)

Macleod believes the language stretches sufficiently. There's enough elasticity to talk of our incarnational mission without obscuring Jesus'. But to do so, we need Advent's reminder again and again.

The Centrality of Worship

Christmas reminds us that our life's dominant note must not be our witness for Jesus, but our worship of Jesus.

Mission is a critical rhythm of the Christian life, an essential season of redemptive history. Our mission of extending Jesus-worship to others, local and global, should be a frequent check on the health of our own Jesus-worship. But mission for Jesus must never take the place of our worship of Jesus, lest the very mission become crudely distorted along with our own souls.

Our Eternal Theme: Worship, Not Mission

If the chief theme of our lives is not worshipping Jesus, enjoying God in him, and being freshly astounded by his grace toward us sinners, we have no good business endeavoring to bring others into an experience that we ourselves aren't enjoying. And so it is not only the most missional among us, but all of us, who need reminding again and again, that mission "is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is."

Year after year, Christmas summons us to think of ourselves as worshipers of Jesus much more than we think of ourselves as on-mission pastors, ministers, leaders, or laymen. May it be true of us this Christmas.

May Jesus, the Great Sent One, ever be central — mission included — and may the worship of the Incarnate One continually be the fuel and goal of our faint incarnational echoes.

Day 1

Q1 Read Psalms 126 and 127. Based on what we read in Psalm 126, what happens after the fortunes of Zion were restored? Why?

Q2 What ways can we learn to express joy through God's work after we read Psalm 126?

Q3 How are the ideas of self-reliance and control addressed in Psalm 127?

Q4 What joys can we find in the fact that without God none of our works will have a foundation?

Q5 What does Psalm 127:4, "Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth," mean?

Day 2

Q1 Psalms 128 and 129. In Psalm 128:1, the psalmist writes, "Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord." Why would people be blessed if they fear God?

Q2 What does it mean to eat the fruits of your labor?

Q3 Why is it important for the psalmist to note, in Psalm 129, that those who have brought harm to Israel since it's youth have not prevailed?

Q4 What does it mean that God has "cut the cords of the afflicted?"

Q5 What is the psalmist saying about the enemies of Israel in 129:5-8?



Lauda in excelsis deo.



Day 3

Study James 4:13-17.

Sermon Notes

December 11, 2016

4

Cavan Wagg

44





Story

My life has truly been outrageously blessed by God. There are so many good things in my life that had nothing to do with my choices, behavior, or knowledge. I don't deserve the life I have and I certainly don't deserve life everlasting. From the beginning of my life I have been graciously loved by the Good Shepherd. In fact, one of my earliest memories is my mom explaining the gospel to me.

Like all young children I disobeyed my parents daily and, in love, my parents disciplined me. Even though every child receives punishment, the LORD used a common experience to show me His mercy. Sometime around the age of four or five, I remember standing in

the kitchen of our house. I don't know what sparked the conversation or what followed, but I do remember being told that just as I disobey my parents and I deserve punishment for my actions, we all have disobeyed God and deserve punishment for our actions. However, Jesus has taken our punishment for us so that we can be with God when we die.

What amazes me is how I could understand some of the concepts in this simple gospel message. How did I understand who God and Jesus were, what death was, and how someone could take on my punishment? I don't know how I believed, but I did. The LORD was gracious to me.

But the fact remains that the gospel is not only this simple truth as explained by my mom, it is richer and deeper than we can possibly imagine. Throughout my life I have been shown more and more of how in Christ “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3). I have come to know and experience that the gospel is not just for the moment of conversion, but it is the very lifeblood of the Christian.

Throughout my childhood, my knowledge of the Bible and of God grew. Enrolled at a Lutheran School from K-12, I was taught Biblical history and was required to memorize Scripture verses as well as parts of Luther's

small catechism. I learned a lot of information and understood the difference between the Law of God (His Commands) and the Gospel of God (His Grace). I even lived out what would have been considered a Christian life, but I still hadn't grasped the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ.

On the contrary, I thought I had everything pretty much figured out. I thought I knew the Bible well enough—at least better than most people. I knew arguments for the authenticity of the Bible and Christianity. I knew plenty of theological concepts, including the basics of the gospel. Certainly, I could sin less than I did, but I was sure that as I got old-

er I'd become more disciplined and that would solve most of my problems. Oh, how little did I actually know!

In the summer after my freshman year of college, I read *Crazy Love* by Francis Chan. This book opened my heart to the fact that, although I knew a lot about Christ, I barely knew Christ intimately and emotionally. This really shook my life's trajectory. Following Jesus doesn't mean I can only have knowledge of Christ's sacrifice, but I needed "to know this love that surpasses knowledge." Instead of focusing most of my time and energy to academic and personal achievement, I needed to focus on Christ. This drove me to seek out Christian

community at the University of Minnesota which I thankfully found in Campus Outreach.

This community changed my life. Through the relationships I made and the truths that I heard, my understanding of the gospel has deepened. Throughout my childhood I had always understood the gospel as a courtroom scene where I stand before God the Judge for a fatal sentencing, but Jesus steps in and takes my punishment instead and I can walk free. However, I learned that another way to look at the gospel is as a hospital scene where I lie before God the Healer with a fatal disease, but Jesus steps in and gives his blood for me so I can live again. This second view showed

me that sin is not bad behavior, but it is a brokenness of the soul. I needed Jesus not just for covering my bad deeds, I needed him to change my heart and mind, my very soul.

This deeper understanding of my sin problem prompted me to look at my desires and my emotional responses to the gospel. It pushed me beyond just knowing the truth, to loving the truth. This was truly transforming who I was. I realized the gospel was not just for life after death, but for my life now. The solution to my problems was not discipline, but Jesus!

Over the past several years, I have come to understand my desperate need to daily re-

mind myself of who I am by the death and resurrection of Jesus. Knowing Jesus is not like knowing physics and world history. Knowing Jesus is believing the gospel so well that I am changed to my very core, that I am continually being changed to image Jesus because his blood flows through my veins, through my very heart. I cannot truly live without him.

Now there are also many other things that Jesus has done, is doing, and will do in my life. I can easily say with John that “Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” (John 21:25), but for now this will have to be enough.

Day 1

Q1 Read Psalm 130. Why would the psalmist plead for God to be attentive?

Q2 How does the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus answer the question asked in Psalm 130:3?

Q3 What does the psalmist mean when he writes, in verse 6, "my soul waits for the Lord, more than watchmen in the morning, more than watchmen in the morning?"

Q4 Given that the psalmist wrote this before Jesus, what redemption is he talking about in verse 7?

Q5 From what iniquities does Israel need to be redeemed?

Day 2

Q1 Read Psalm 131. How would you describe the psalmist's attitude/mood in this passage?

Q2 What does the psalmist mean when he says, "my heart is not lifted up, my eyes are not raised too high?"

Q3 In the second half of verse 1 the psalmist says, "I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me." What are the things that the psalmist is not concerning himself with?

Q4 Ultimately, what does verse 1 lead to the psalmist revealing about himself in verse 2?

Q5 What's the overall theme of this psalm?



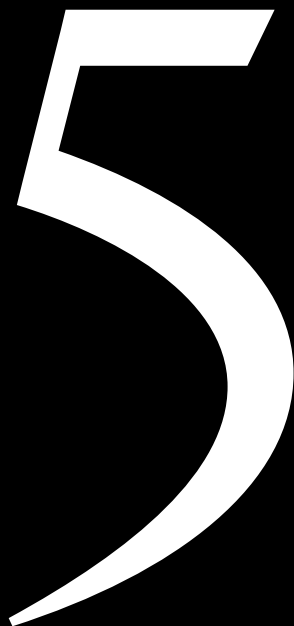


Day 3

Study Isaiah 55:7.

Sermon Notes

December 18, 2016





62

Until the Son of God Appeared

Jonathan
Parnell

Finally, the son was born. Generation after generation had anticipated his birth and the world desperately needed him. Desperately.

Each day was a gloomy cloud of night. The darkness of death's shadow filled the earth. Strife and quarrels multiplied without hindrance. The hearts of all mankind only conceived evil. In fact, "every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). It actually was so bad that the detoxification of wickedness meant the complete de-creation of the world. God would start all over, if not for this one son.

They called him Noah.

The First Remnant

Long before the sons of Adam knew there would be a captive Israel (or even an Israel at all), there was a lonely exile from Eden to mourn. They knew they needed a Savior. And the story in Genesis 5 makes it clear that the birth of Noah was full of this hope.

Beginning in Genesis 3:15, all eyes are on this coming offspring of a woman. This is the one who will crush the serpent and reverse the curse. Then Adam and Eve had two sons and the hope intensifies, until Cain murdered Abel and set off to build a metropolis of wicked progeny (Genesis 4:17-24). But Adam had another son, Seth, which inspired Eve's significant commentary: "God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him" (Genesis 4:25). Seth then also had a son and "at that time people began to call upon the name of the LORD" (Genesis 4:26).

This is a remnant, right here at start.

There is a line from Adam — created in the likeness of God and producing offspring in that likeness — all of which live within a wicked world (Genesis 5:1, 3).

This One Shall Bring Relief

If we pay careful attention to the details in Genesis, we see a pattern develop in Adam's genealogy. Sons are born, live long lives, father more sons, and then die. The rhythm is interrupted only once with the profile of Enoch — who didn't die because he "walked with God" (Genesis 5:24).

And then, ten generations from Adam, the focus is on a certain son named Noah. His birth, like Seth's, inspires significant commentary. Lamech said of him, "Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands" (Genesis 5:29).

Don't miss what's said here. A son has come to heal the curse. Stephen Dempster says it's striking, "particularly the link between the birth of a son and relief from the curse of the land (Dominion and Dynasty, 71). Make no mistake about it, Noah is the one first looked to as the Savior promised in Genesis 3:15.

Among all the wickedness, Noah grew to find favor with the LORD (Genesis 6:7-8). He was a righteous man, blameless in his generation, and like Enoch, he "walked with God" (Genesis 6:9; 7:1). Also like Enoch, he was spared from death when everything around him wasn't. The flood destroyed the entire earth, except

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Noah and those in the ark (Genesis 7:23).

The future of all mankind rested on this one, this blameless son. Finally, he had arrived. Finally, the son had come . . . until he fell, eerily similar to the first Adam, in a garden vineyard (Genesis 9:20). He was given the same commission as the first Adam, like the first creation: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Genesis 8:17; 9:1, 7). But also similar to the first Adam, and to the chosen nation after him, Noah crumbled in the face of temptation. Hopes were dashed, and the biblical storyline was just getting started.

The Truly Righteous

Years would pass, more sons would be born, and the anticipation would rise and fall from Abraham to his two sons, then one; from Isaac to his two sons, then one; from Jacob to his twelve sons, then one, who was called Judah (Genesis 49:10). And throughout the most unlikely circumstances, against the backdrop of slavery and rescue and idolatry and law and conquest and more idolatry and judgment and monarchy and more idolatry and judgment and exile, the smoldering wick of our hope was never quenched.

Another son like Noah appeared — a son of man in that same lineage, but more, he was also the Son of God. His birth inspired significant commentary as well, not merely from his parents, but from a whole multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will toward men!” (Luke 2:14).

They called him Jesus.

But unlike Noah, and the first Adam, and everyone else, this son didn’t fail. He looked the tempter himself in the face and prevailed in faithfulness. He was the truly righteous, the wholly blameless. Here, at last, was the promised offspring of Genesis 3:15 — the Dayspring from on High, the Desire of the nations — who was sent by God to conquer the curse not by escaping death, but by defeating it, which he did not by fleeing the waters of judgment in an arc, but by becoming the arc himself and plunging into the darkness.

He became the curse for us to disperse the clouds of night. He died in our place to put to flight death’s shadow. And on the third day, he was raised from the dead to give us vict’ry o’er the grave. Immanuel has come! God-with-us has come!

So Rejoice! Rejoice!

Day 1

Q1 Read Psalm 132. What does it mean that the psalmist asks God to remember “in David’s favor?”

Q2 What vow does David make according to verses 3 through 5?

Q3 In verse 8 it’s written that God will go to his resting place. What is this resting place?

Q4 What is the oath that’s recounted in this psalm?

Q5 What is the theme of this psalm? How does Jesus fit into that theme?

Day 2

Q1 Read Psalms 133 and 134. In Psalm 133, how does the psalmist describe brothers dwelling in unity?

Q2 What does it mean to “dwell in unity?”

Q3 Who is the Aaron referred to in verse 2?

Q4 Why does the psalmist specifically mention Aaron and oiling running down on his beard?

Q5 What is the call of Psalm 134? How can we do this in our daily lives?





Day 3

Study Micah 5:7.

Sermon Notes

December 25, 2016