

Sunday 12/01/24 – Panama Methodist Church

Sermon Title: “The Journey to Bethlehem: Sermon Series: (Part 1 of 5)

(Slides 1-15 will be listed in order throughout this sermon 😊!)

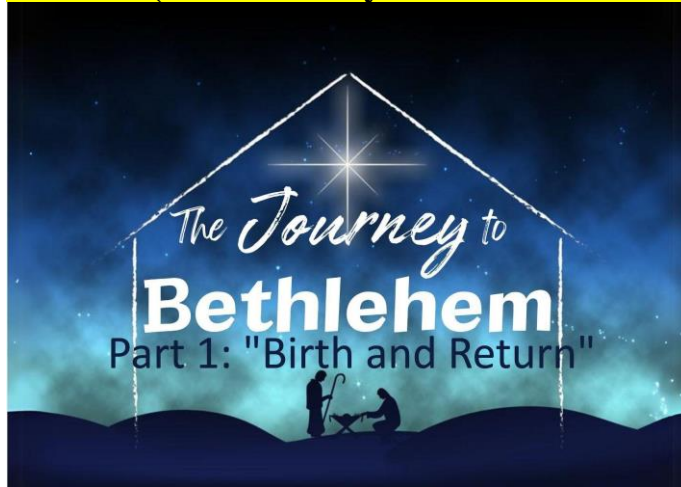
Welcome again, brothers and sisters, on this the first Sunday of this 40-day season of Advent. During these four weeks of Advent leading up to Christmas, and through Christmas Eve, we will be walking together through a new sermon series called “The Journey to Bethlehem.” On this “Journey” through the season of Advent and into Christmas, we are going to be talking about what this season is about, and why the season of “Advent” and Christmas matter. Here is our cover slide for this “The Journey to Bethlehem” sermon series:

Slide 1 – (“The Journey to Bethlehem” Sermon Series – Cover Picture)



The first part of this “The Journey to Bethlehem” sermon series is called, “Birth and Return.” Here is our slide to open this week’s message.

Slide 2 – (“The Journey to Bethlehem” Sermon Series – Part 1)



Normally, in our Sunday morning worship services we have a “Call to Worship,” where we stand after the prayer and the morning announcements. It is usually responsive, as someone speaks, and the congregation responds. Since this is the season of “Advent” though, leading into Christmas, scripture is read, we pray, we light “Advent Candles,” and on Christmas Eve/Day the “Christ Candle.” Some churches have an “Advent Wreath,” and some churches do not celebrate the season of “Advent” at all. The real question then, is what is this 40-day season of “Advent?” Further, why is this season 40-days? Is the season of “Advent” even in the Bible? The season of “Advent” is not in the Bible, and it was created through the worshiping tradition of the Christian Church over 1,500 years ago. The reason the season of “Advent” is 40-days, is because there are many numbers 40’s in the Bible. Jesus was in the wilderness for 40-days, Moses was on the mountain for 40-days, Noah was in the ark for 40-days, the Israelites were in the wilderness for 40-

years, etc. The Christian Church, therefore, created the 40-day season of “Advent” leading up to Christmas, and the 40-day season of “Lent” leading up to Easter in the spring.

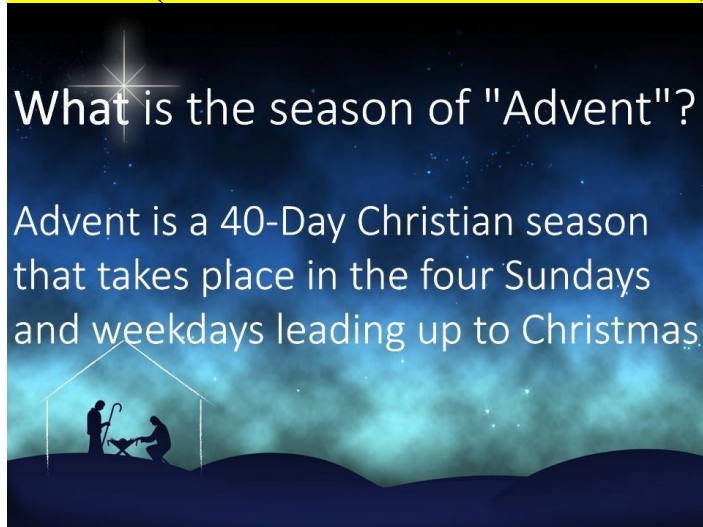
Why would the church create the 40-day season of “Advent” and the 40-day season of “Lent” though, if the Bible does not specifically tell us to create the 40-day seasons of “Advent,” and “Lent?” The Christian Church developed these seasons of “Advent” and “Lent,” not because biblically we have to celebrate them, but because of the significance of the number 40 in the Bible, and of the time leading up to Christ’s birth, his second coming one day, and the importance of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As we talked about in a sermon some weeks ago, what is the significance of the number 40, once again, in the Bible? Here is one good explanation:

In the Bible, the number 40 is often used to signify a period of testing, preparation, or transformation, representing a significant time of waiting or transition between one major event and another, often associated with a new beginning or new life (Google Search).

Since the number 40 in the Bible is associated with a period of testing, preparation, or transformation, and is often associated with a new beginning or new life, the worshiping tradition of Christian Church developed the seasons of “Advent,” and “Lent.” This is why some Christian Churches light “Advent Candles,” and have “Advent Wreaths.” It is not required by scripture, but in many ways, it is

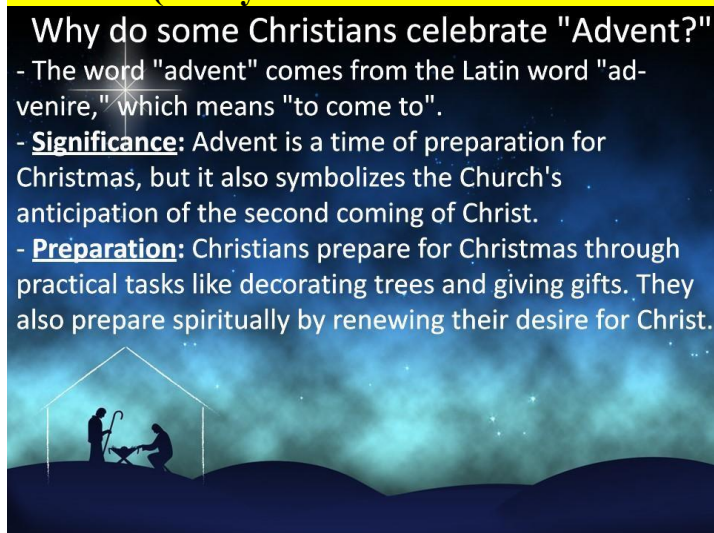
“scriptural” around the number 40, and around seasons of testing, preparation, or transformation. All this said, here is a brief definition of the season of “Advent?”

Slide 3 – (“What is the season of “Advent?””)



In repeating and mirroring what I just said a few moments ago, here is a slide called, “Why do some Christians celebrate “Advent?””

Slide 4 – (“Why do some Christians celebrate “Advent?””)



So, some of this that I just read is where I was confused when I started serving churches as a pastor in 2012. I thought that the season of “Advent” was only about

preparing for the birth of Christ on Christmas, but the season of “Advent” is also about awaiting the return or second coming of Jesus Christ. This season of “Advent” that we are in right now is about Jesus’ awaited birth, but also his awaited return to earth one day.

I still remember getting ready to preach on my first Sunday of Advent in 2012. I used the lectionary scriptures, which were picked out by the church ahead of time. The gospel lesson for the first Sunday of Advent, really took me by surprise. It was Luke 21:25-36, I think, as it was a long time ago. Why did this passage of scripture take me by surprise? Let us open our Bibles or our Bible Apps and read together through Luke 21:25-36. This is what God’s word says:

Slide 5 – (“Luke 21:25-36, New Revised Standard Version”)



Starting in Luke 21:21 God’s word says:

Slide 6 – (“Luke 21:25-26, New Revised Standard Version”)

The Coming of the Son of Man

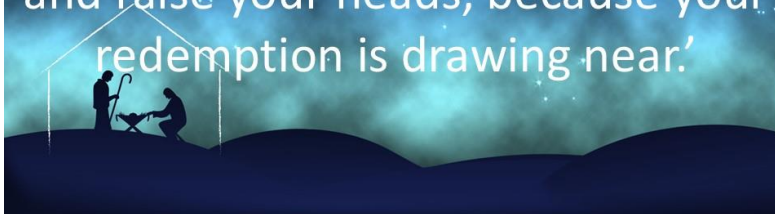
²⁵ ‘There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. ²⁶ People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.



Slide 7 – (“Luke 21:27-28, New Revised Standard Version”)

The Coming of the Son of Man

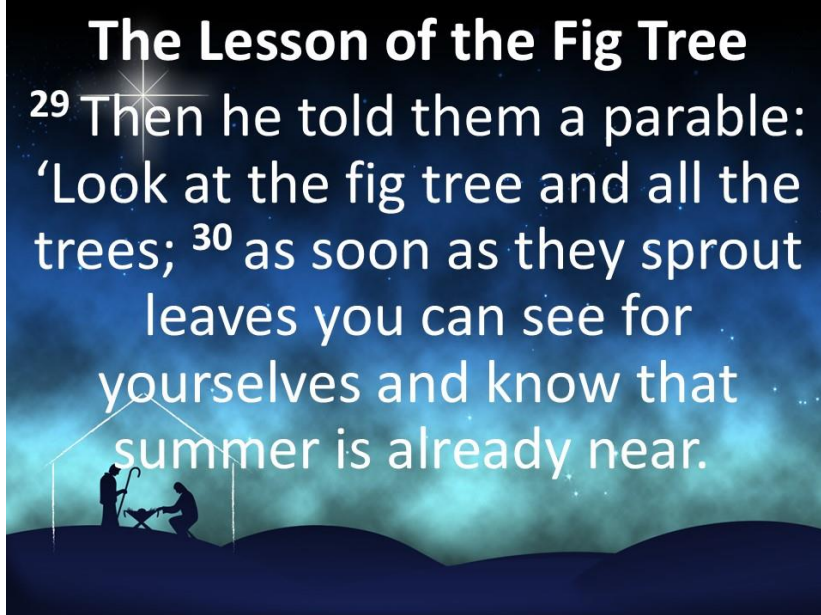
²⁷ Then they will see “the Son of Man coming in a cloud” with power and great glory. ²⁸ Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.’



Slide 8 – (“Luke 21:29-30, New Revised Standard Version”)

The Lesson of the Fig Tree

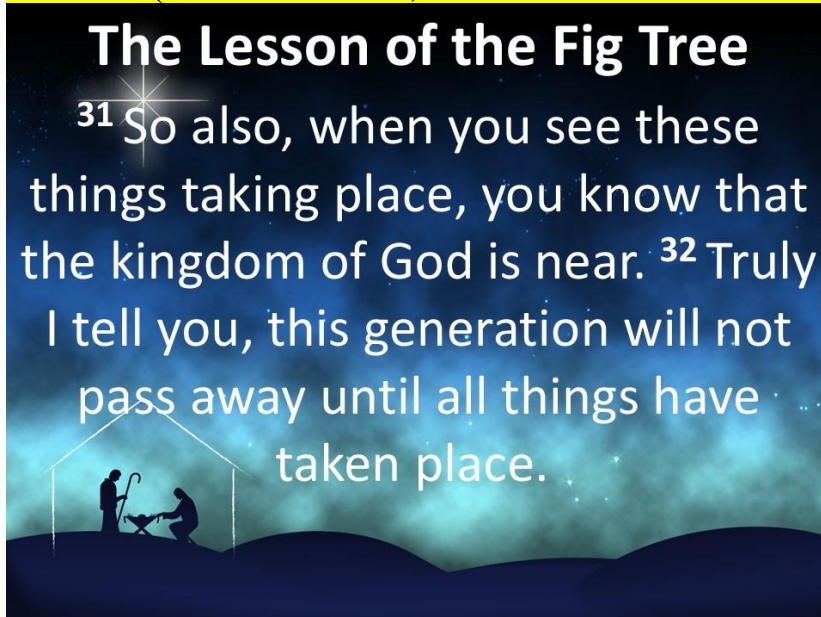
²⁹ Then he told them a parable:
'Look at the fig tree and all the
trees; ³⁰ as soon as they sprout
leaves you can see for
yourselves and know that
summer is already near.



Slide 9 – (“Luke 21:31-32, New Revised Standard Version”)

The Lesson of the Fig Tree

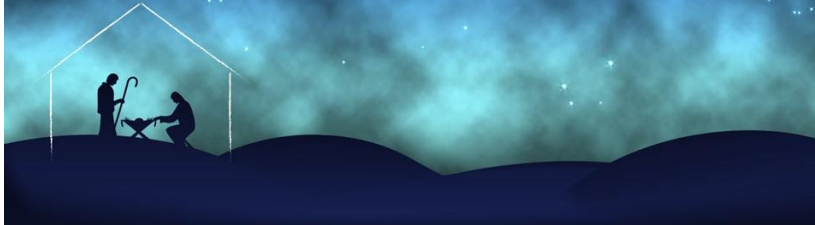
³¹ So also, when you see these
things taking place, you know that
the kingdom of God is near. ³² Truly
I tell you, this generation will not
pass away until all things have
taken place.



Slide 10 – (“Luke 21:33, New Revised Standard Version”)

The Lesson of the Fig Tree

³³ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.



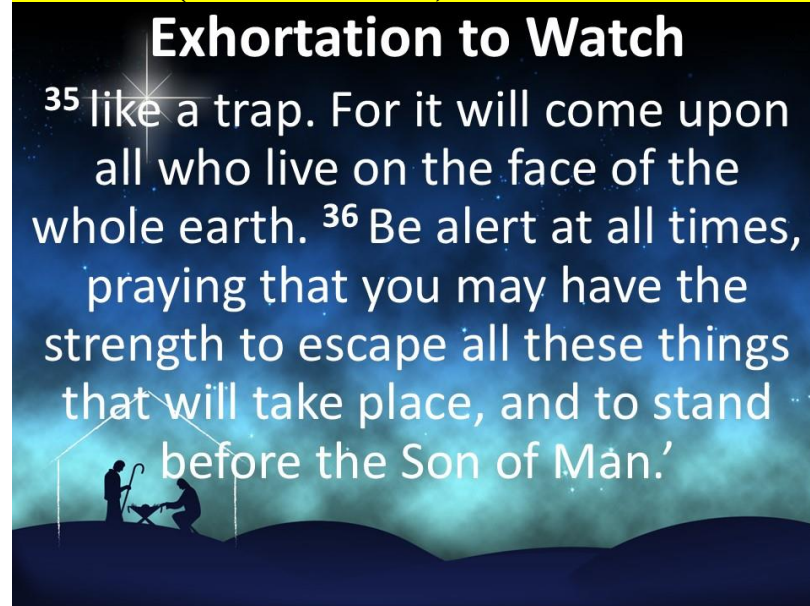
Slide 11 – (“Luke 21:34, New Revised Standard Version”)

Exhortation to Watch

³⁴ Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly,



Slide 12 – (“Luke 21:35-36, New Revised Standard Version”)



As I said, I remember my first Christmas as a pastor, looking at, I think, Luke 21:25-36, and thinking what does this have to do with the coming birth of Jesus Christ? In doing some research though, I realized that Luke 21:25-36 is a perfectly acceptable “Advent” season gospel reading. Why? It is acceptable, because it is about second coming of Christ, as the season of “Advent” is about Christ’s coming birth and return to earth.

In taking a deep dive into Luke 21:25-36, the first part of the scripture in my Bible version, Luke 21:25-28, it is called “The Coming of the Son of Man”. Jesus is telling us specifically what it will be like when he returns to earth one day. Again, as I said, my first “Advent” season as a pastor this took me off guard, as up until that point, as I just thought “Advent” was about preparing for Jesus’ birth

only. So, what does Jesus tell us about what it will look like one day when he returns to earth. He says once again, in Luke 21:25-26

²⁵ ‘There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. ²⁶ People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken (Lk. 21:25-26, NRSV).

What Jesus is telling us here, is that before returns to earth that everything Jesus said and predicted will be fulfilled. So, this would be towards the end of the Book of Revelation. Jesus is giving us a little bit of how the world will be before he comes back.

When all of these things have been fulfilled, Jesus then tells us in Luke 21:27-28, once again:

²⁷ Then they will see “the Son of Man coming in a cloud” with power and great glory. ²⁸ Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near’ (Lk. 21:27-28, NRSV).

After everything is done and Jesus’ words are fulfilled, then he will return to earth for his thousand-year reign and be King and Lord of all. The season of “Advent” is about Jesus’ awaited birth and his second coming.

To explain his second coming even further, Jesus gives us “The Lesson of the Fig Tree” in Luke 21:29-33. Let me read to you once again, “The Lesson of the Fig Tree” in Luke 21:29-33. It says once again:

²⁹ Then he told them a parable: ‘Look at the fig tree and all the trees; ³⁰ as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. ³¹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that

the kingdom of God is near. ³² Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. ³³ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

Like a fig tree sprout leaves in the spring, it is a sign that figs will return and grow on the fig tree. Jesus say this about all trees. When you see a fig tree and other leaves sprout leaves, then you know the growth will be coming soon in the summer. Jesus is saying in the parable or story of “The Lesson of the Fig Tree,” that we will see signs indication that he is coming back soon. Like fig trees sprout leaves in the spring, we will see predictions of the Book of Revelation begin to occur. When we see these signs then, like a fig tree sprouting leaves, the fruit will not be far behind. Likewise, when we see the signs of the second coming of Christ, his return will not be far behind either. Jesus often used basic things like fig tree to explain what he wanted us to understand. Here is a depiction of the parable or story of “The Lesson of the fig tree.”

Slide 13 – (“Luke 21:35-36 – “The Lesson of the Fig Tree” - Picture)



Once again, at the end of the parable or story of “Lesson of the Fig Tree”

Jesus says, once again, in Luke 21:32-33.

³² Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. ³³ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away (Lk. 21:32-33, NRSV).

Some people have incorrectly interpreted this scripture to mean that Jesus is talking about his own generation, from when he was alive on this earth. If this were true, then yes it would be a problem. Jesus, however, is talking about the final generation of people that will be on earth before he comes back. Jesus then says that “Heaven and earth will pass away,” but his words are eternal.

The last part of Luke 21:25-36, in my Bible translation is subtitled “Exhortation to Watch.” In Luke 21:34-36, Jesus is giving us final instructions and warning about his second coming. Here is what Luke 21:34-36 has to say, once again:

³⁴ ‘Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, ³⁵ like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man’ (Lk. 21:34-36, NRSV).

Jesus is telling to protect our hearts, not to become distracted, not to let the worries of life or drunkenness drag us down. Jesus tells us that his second coming will just happen once day, so we need to stay vigilant and be prepared. Jesus’ return will come for all who live on the face of the whole earth he tells us. As I

said, he says be alert, or be vigilant, be clear headed, and be prepared to avoid and escape un-Godly things. For if we are alive on this earth when Jesus comes, may we be ready to stand before him in judgement.

The season of “Advent” my friends, once again, is not just a 40-day period leading us to the season of Christmas, it is also the waiting and anticipation of the return of Jesus Christ our Lord. On this first Sunday of “Advent,” how does this all apply to our lives. Let us take a look together:

Slide 14 – (“Application to our Lives”)



Application To Our Lives:

- Advent is a 40-Day Christian season that takes place in the four Sundays and weekdays leading up to Christmas.
- Advent symbolizes the Church's anticipation of the second coming of the Messiah, while also celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ.
- How are we preparing to celebrate Jesus' birth/Christmas?
- How are we preparing for the second coming of Jesus?
- What are we grateful to God for in this season of Advent?

The slide features a dark blue background with a starburst in the top left corner. At the bottom, there is a silhouette of a manger scene with a woman and a child, set against a backdrop of rolling hills and a starry night sky.

As call the praise team/choir forward, in this season of Advent, and soon to be Christmas, may we prepare spiritually and in general, for the memory of Jesus' birth on Christmas, as we all await his glorious second coming to earth. This is a season about Jesus, for Jesus, and a season that calls to be more like Jesus. I have a closing slide for this sermon series. Here it is:

Slide 15 – (“God Bless: Have a wonderful week” - Slide)



Brother and sisters, happy “Advent!” Amen.