

I. Christmas Eve in Biblical Perspective
“Comings and Goings”
Acts 1:4-11
Dr. Harry L. Reeder III
December 24, 2021 • Christmas Eve 5pm Sermon

This may seem like a non Christmas passage but this is God’s Word. It’s inspired, inerrant and infallible. Hear the Word of the Lord. Acts 1:4-11 says [4] *And while staying with them He (Jesus) ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, He said, “you heard from Me; [5] for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”*

[6] So when they had come together, they asked Him, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” [7] He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by His own authority. [8] But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” [9] And when He had said these things, as they were looking on, He was lifted up, and a cloud took Him out of their sight. [10] And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, [11] and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw Him go into heaven.”

The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of our God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

This is a very special time in my life as a pastor because it opens up so many avenues in terms of the exposition of the majesty of Christ as Lord and Savior when you’re considering the glory of the Incarnation – Immanuel, God with us – and the glorious fact that the One who came is coming again, God coming for us, all of His people.

This is also a special time for me personally because in 1969 during the Christmas season I came to saving faith in Christ and it was a life changing moment for me and it’s never been the same ever since. I rejoice to see that repeated in the lives of others during this Christmas season, but having said that one of the great challenges is this service and how I can share some things with you in a short homily that can maybe bring a focus to you about some of the majesty of Christ, why He came into this world and what it means for you in that direction.

As I was working through the various Advent readings, my sermon preparation and the carols we sing a thought came to me. I love these great classic carols for not only the musical excellence they convey but they have theological gravitas to them with this glorious theology built into them. The best way for me to open up that thought to you is to simply to name it – it’s Aunt Ethel. I realize you have no idea who Aunt Ethel is but I with you did. It was my grandfather’s sister. I was not her favorite nephew but she did tolerate me.

My sister Vicki and I were talking one day about who our Aunt Ethel reminds us of. Do you know who Almira Gulch is? She is a character from a famous old movie *The Wizard of Oz*. She is the woman on the bicycle who turns it in after a tornado for a broom. She becomes the wicked witch of the East. I believe Aunt Ethel was saved but she sure reminded me of either Miss Gulch or the wicked witch of the East. My aunt was a very plain spoken, very smart, direct woman.

When we would come down for holidays to Augusta, Georgia to visit the Reeder side of the family we would always ask my Aunt Ethel about updates on relatives and friends because

we didn't live there like she did. She would always answer this way; 'Well, you know them, for they are always coming and going.' I knew she was going to say that because that's what she would always say. I have no idea what she meant when she said 'coming and going' but, as I read the Christmas narratives, the individual accounts and went through the hymns, there is a lot of coming and going.

As I looked at Matthew and Luke, which are the predominate Gospels that deal with the Advent and look at the individual moments you will see there is Christ – You shall call His Name Jesus for He has **come** to save His people from their sins and Paul says in I Timothy 1:15, *[15] The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus **came** into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.* But then you get a lot of coming and going. Matthew records the wise men who come and worship Him. Then as the wise men are led by the Spirit of God the Scripture says this glorious, penetrating, pervasive statement; 'when they leave they depart or go another way' and that's what happens to anyone who comes to Christ and puts their trust in Him – you go another way for it's a changed life and forgiven life. In Luke, there are shepherds who hear the glorious Good News and they **come** to Bethlehem to see. Then they **go**, praising God and proclaiming the Good News. They come and they go.

Not only do you have those individual moments in Matthew and Luke of coming and going but we also sing it at this time of the year – Joy to the World, the Lord has come, O come O come Immanuel and rescue Israel. Then there is the glorious hymn, O Come all ye faithful or come let us adore Him. Perhaps one of my favorites is a great spiritual that says go tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ has been born – come and go.

One of the great challenges as a pastor for I feel this constantly, is that one of the things Jesus warns about in Scripture is how people misuse the Word of God. They use the Word of God to teach and preach but they don't use it rightly. Paul warns the church at Ephesus, particularly the elders in Acts 20 about this after his departure. Acts 20:28-30 says *[28] Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which He obtained with His own blood. [29] I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; [30] and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.*

In my preaching now for over four decades I have this constant burden that whenever I expound or preach on a text, I take the time to put it in its context lest it get twisted. One of my teachers once told me, 'If you don't set the context your text will become a pretext.' I don't want that when I deal with God's Word so I deal with the context. This last week as I was thinking about this, it reversed for me. The content which I just went through some with you on the come and go, come and go, but then I just backed up and looked at the Gospel of Luke that records some of these narratives.

How does Luke start? Luke 1 and 2 starts with come to Bethlehem and see. Then Luke 24 says to us from Jesus 'I'll be with you, go and preach repentance unto sins in the name of Christ to all the nations.' These are the bookends – come, go. Not only Luke does this, but Matthew does this as well. Matthew 1 and 2 starts off with come, come with the wise men, come with others and see. Then we see how Matthew ends from Matthew 28:18-20 says *[18] And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. [19] **Go therefore** and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

Then after the Gospels have been written the first book after that covers the history and dynamics of the opening of the 33 years of the life of the church. It's interesting to note that the Gospels cover the 33 years of the life and ministry of Christ in His Incarnate body and then the book of Acts covers 33 years Christ's continuing ministry in His church – the body of Christ. Acts doesn't start off with come but it starts off with go and then He tells us at the end that He is coming back for us. That is what we are supposed to be doing.

If you have come to Christ, we're supposed to be united, not as spectators or critics but united in Gospel faithful churches – going with the Gospel to the world so that others can come to Him and then He's coming back for all of us when all of His people from all of the nations have been brought to Him – coming and going. As we are going, we anticipate the day when He comes.

I want to give you these two thoughts about this matter of coming and going. Joy to the World, the Lord is come. Have you noticed how Isaac Watts writes that hymn? The Lord *is* come, because not only has He come in the Incarnation but He has also come at Pentecost by the Holy Spirit to indwell the body of Christ and He is with us until the end of the age. Then He will come again in that glorified body but He won't come by way of a virgin womb but He'll come back with the shekinah glory just as they saw Him ascend from the Mount of Olives.

Jesus says until then that He will give us power – the power of the Holy Spirit – and He wants us to go with evangelism and discipleship, making disciples of all the nations. Start in Jerusalem then move the circle out – Judea – then move the circle out – Samaria – then move the circle out to the utter most parts of the world and that becomes the outline of the book of Acts. This is the spreading of the Gospel through His church by the power of the Spirit in Jerusalem which you find in Acts 1 through 8. The Gospel through His church by the power of the Spirit to Judea and Samaria you find in Acts 9 through 12 and then the Gospel goes to the world starting in Acts 13 through 28 and it's still moving and will until He comes again.

The first thought is the coming of Christ into this world brings a blessed Divine invitation to come to Christ from that world. It is a trustworthy statement that He has appeared to save sinners in this world (I Timothy 1:15). He came to save you and you weren't looking for Him. You didn't want Him. You didn't care about Him yet He cared for Him. You needed Him but you didn't want Him. He wanted you and He didn't need you. So why did He come? John 3:16 says [16] *For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.* Romans 5:6 says [6] *For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.* At the right time Christ went to the cross to save us from our sins and He invites us to Himself as our Lord and Savior. Come to Him.

Here is the second thought. Coming to Christ brings to us an urgent and lifelong occupation of going to the world for Christ. When you come to Him, who has come into the world to save you from sin, the world and the flesh, now He sends you into the world. Go get you up on a mountain and proclaim the Good News. This Christ has given us a lifelong occupation. As you receive Him for salvation He then sends you into the world for the rest of your life to bring Christ to others that they might be saved.

There is nothing more important – I'm not saying there are not important things – but you coming to Christ is the most important thing you will do with your life for eternity hangs in the balance based on the decision you have made about Christ. Hebrews 9:27 says [27] *And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.* God has so loved you that He sent His Son to take that judgment that you might have life if you come to Him. I want you

to know there are many joys in this world living for Christ but there is no greater joy than to bring Christ to others in this world.

I'm sure many of you think a lot about what you are giving as gifts to your family and friends and that in many ways is fine, but my question to you is, have you brought Christ to them? Have you brought the indescribable gift of Jesus to your family, friends, neighbors, team mates, class mates, co-workers, etc.? That is the most astonishing, joyful and most gratifying thing one can experience in this world.

You come to Christ for salvation and then you keep coming. I know I do for I come to Him everyday in prayer, I come to Him for wisdom. I come to Him for strength because I know I can't do anything without Him and I certainly can't do what I'm called to do without Him. I come to Him in my weakness. We come to Him every Lord's Day in worship for there is nothing more precious than gathered worship to the praise of the Father in the name of the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit. We not only come to Him in salvation, but to worship Him, pray to Him, for wisdom and strength and when we go, we love to go intentionally.

Jesus tells us to go seek and save the lost intentionally for He came to do that and that is what we are to do (Luke 19:10). Go to the highways, byways, cities, and hedges. Go to wherever people are. Think of that way where the Lord would open up an opportunity for a Divine appointment to give away a Divine gift that can't ever wear out and will never ever be retired to a shelf for it is the gift of everlasting life in Jesus Christ.

Matthew and Luke start with coming and end with going. Acts starts with going and then tells us that Jesus Christ is coming. Come to Bethlehem, Christ born of the virgin in Bethlehem, come and see, Christ who taught in Galilee the truth, come, listen, Christ on the cross at Calvary, come to be saved, Christ coming again – come quickly Lord Jesus. When He comes, O Savior I ask You, may He find us coming to Him and going to others for Him. Praise His name forever, let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, as we enter into these moments of consecration, we thank You for the light of the Gospel that has come in Christ that the darkness of sin might be dispelled. We thank You O God that You allow that light to do its work in us and through us so that we can take it into the kingdom of darkness and bring the Gospel of the Kingdom of light to the world. Lord, boldly I ask You with all the inadequacies of the one who just gave this message, would you speak to the hearts reading this today so that after they read this they will come to Christ for salvation and then Father, I pray for all who know Christ, will give up the fascination of the things of this world that in an of themselves are not evil but when we put them in place of You and our lifelong occupation to bring You to others – O God fill us in our hearts and our souls that from our mouths, thoughtfully, intentionally and to the praise of Your Name, we might proclaim Good News. God, we live and see the chaos, darkness, divisions and the line of the chaos, darkness and divisions is not running through regents, geography, economics or politics, but it's running through the hearts of men. O God, take the Gospel from our hearts to the hearts of others and may the light of Christ be seen for I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.