

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, Wash.
December 25, 2010**

“Experience Hope this Christmas.”

1. Precious

Hymns: 55 – 378 (vv. 1-4) – 58 – 42 – 54 - 57

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

Christmas Message Part I

“Experience Hope this Christmas.” That was the invitation that we as a church extended to our members and to the people of our community this year. Experience hope.

It was only two years ago that the message of hope was seen wherever you seemed to look. Hope was the message that the advocates for then-Senator Barack Obama leaned on as they campaigned for him to be the next President of the USA. In the midst of a huge economic downturn and the loss of millions of jobs, many people had been blindsided by what had hit them. That downswing sent many people looking for something that could give them hope. Wisely, Obama and his campaign advisors capitalized on this desire that people had for something that could change what was wrong. Many were filled with hope that President Obama might be the answer.

Though they probably are not hoping for economic recovery or political change, hope is what also fills almost every child, both young and old, when Christmas approaches each year. It is seen in the Christmas wish lists, the sleepless nights of anticipation as the big day approaches and the hurried rush to the foot of the tree on Christmas morning. Each year, there is hope that Santa might bring the answer in the decorated gifts under the tree.

People use the word hope with optimism. No one ever hopes that things will get worse. Hope looks to the future with a positive outlook. Things are going to get better. That is the message of hope.

Let’s not forget that hope also brings with it the acknowledgment that something is missing. To look to the future with optimism means that something is not how it should be right now. For a person to have hope means that he has to acknowledge that he does not have everything.

For Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden, there was no hope. That sounds like a terribly depressing statement, but really it is not. Adam and Eve had no hope because they did not lack anything. There was no desire for change. There were no Christmas wish lists. There were no dreams about how life could be. And that is just how God wanted it for the crown of his creation. He wanted them to lack nothing. He wanted them to be able to live in a perfect world full of joy and contentment.

But that world of perfection was soon lost and Adam and Eve found out when they went against God that they were now missing something. They would quickly find out that a world with sin was not how they would like it to be. There was shame and guilt. There was pain and jealousy. There was sadness and anger. Most of all, there was this terrible reality that their relationship with their Creator was not the same as it had been. It was wrecked and one day soon, death would actually come and separate them from God and all his goodness forever.

At the moment that they lost perfection and all of those terrible things came into the world, hope as the world knows it, entered the world. Adam and Eve could now only hope that things would get better. They could only hope that this shame they felt would disappear. They could only hope that an answer would come.

That feeling is one that Adam and Eve passed down to every person that ultimately descended from them. Born into a world of sin and sadness and pain and death, all people have hope that things might get better. They hope that the pain will go away. They hope that an answer will come.

And just as Adam and Eve hid from God and covered themselves with leaves, hoping that it would be the answer, all people spend their lives searching, hoping to find what is missing. They search in places that seem logical to man. They

hope that success and wealth will give them the happiness that all too often seems to be missing from their lives. They hope that doing a whole bunch of good will make everything better. They hope and hope and hope, but ultimately, man's hopes never bring exactly what they were looking for.

Adam and Eve's hope that the leaves would cover their guilt quickly faded away. The child who hopes that a checked off Christmas list will bring euphoria soon as his eyes are on his list for next year. Man's hope that he can make up for everything with a good life is dulled by the realization that he keeps on failing and the problems keep coming. Hopes are continually dashed. Optimism replaced by the reality of humanity.

But it is Christmas, and the message of Christmas tells us to look for hope in a very different place. Long ago in the Garden, God encouraged Adam and Eve to turn away from any answers they could come up with and place their hope in the plan that God himself was going to carry out. It was a solution that was made by God. It was a solution that would be accomplished by God. It is a solution that we are privileged to hear and witness this joyful Christmas morning through a series of readings. We get to follow real hope as it started in the Garden, was promised through the pages of the OT and was realized in the manger. We get to follow real hope that has its foundation in the angel's proclamation to Mary, "Nothing is impossible with God." Our sure and confident hope is found in a Precious Child.

Christmas Message Part II

The night had been anticipated for centuries. Its importance had been passed down from generation to generation. The details had been prophesied hundreds of years in advance. When it arrived, angels filled the sky to announce the good news. Shepherds raced into town to see the wonderful sight. Wise men journeyed from afar to catch a glimpse. And yet, with all of that, the most incredible part of this Christmas birth was the one thing that made it like every other birth. A baby was born. A woman produced a child.

We sing, "Joy to the World" because we look into that manger and we see a familiar sight. We see a baby that looks just like every other baby that comes into this world.

And yet, when we look in that manger, we see something completely different. John just expressed exactly what we see, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." As we look into the manger, we see God. We see God who did not leave his people on their own after they went away from him. We see God who did not leave his people to rely on their own versions of hope. As we look at the manger, we see God who loves us and cares for us and who chose to be like us because that was the only hope for mankind. God came down from his throne in heaven, he gave up the glory that is his and he came to live among us. He came to live like us, under the law. He came to live like we could not, perfectly obedient to every commandment of God. And he did not just come down into that manger to live, he also came to die. He came to die in order that the eternal death that ends hope for all mankind would not have to be suffered by anyone.

The blessed message of the manger is that our God provides the answers for us. He lays out the truth very clearly. Sin creates a huge need, it sends people to their own solutions, it sends them to despair, ultimately, it sends them to death. But, in his mercy, God provided his people with an answer. He would do for us what we could not do by ourselves. He would live perfectly and die. In order for that to happen, God had to come to earth as man.

The fact that we see that wonderful sight in the manger fills us with hope each Christmas. It fills us with confident hope because we have a God who keeps his promises. It reminds us that the God who promised to send a solution carried out that promise. It proclaims to us that the God who promises us eternal life will give us eternal life. As we close our readings, listen as the Apostle Paul explains just how important this birth of a baby was for all people. Our hope for eternal life is made sure by the life that we see beginning in the manger of Bethlehem.