

Scripture Reading:

John 1:1 “1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. 4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. 11 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: 13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. 14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

Revelation 21:1 “1 Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. 2 Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. 4 And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." 5 Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful." 6 And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. 7 He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God & he shall be My son."

"Jesus: The First & the Last!"

In recent weeks we have studied why we strongly believe that as gathered Saints we are blessed and empowered each week as we lift up our hearts & voices together in worship! We believe that we are convicted, instructed, strengthened and encouraged as we hear the Scriptures expounded in preaching and gather around the Lord's Table:

- Blessings that are commonly called Word & Sacrament.

We focus on expositional preaching which means that we do as I have done recently with Genesis taking the Scriptures verse by verse.

- There are also times and seasons where we preach on particular subjects or seasons and this morning will again be such a sermon!

We are celebrating the first Sunday of advent for this year and I want us to consider the important role that advent plays in our remembrance of the Church calendar & how it reminds us of the importance of Jesus being at the center of all history! Sermons can also have many different types of emphasis: Some are convicting, others challenging, still others primarily instructive.

- This morning I hope to bring a very encouraging message where we simply review and rejoice in what we should all know very well.

I read two portions of Scripture as our text this morning, and I would certainly hope that both of these texts would be very familiar to all of us!

- Jesus proclaims Himself to be the Alpha and the Omega: The beginning and the end: The first and the Last! -- Jesus created all there is including mankind in His own image.

- Jesus redeemed His people and all of creation at the cross.

-- Jesus reigns forever as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

- Theses truths fallen man and the world have rejected but these are what we must affirm and believe!
- Here at Church of the King we try to have a proper focus on the church calendar without having a slavish devotion to it.

You can find resources that have prayers and colors and robes and readings for just about every Sunday of the year... But sadly in many of the Churches where you would find such things in abundance, they have left Jesus & His work in history far behind. This was the case with the Pharisees and Sadducees whom Jesus encountered in His earthly ministry:

- They knew all the details and procedures of the Scriptures and yet failed to recognize the very deliverer that God sent into their midst!
- We certainly do not want to follow that sad tradition!

However, just because something can be abused is no reason for us to ignore or avoid a practice that can build our faith and the faith of our children. Last week we were reminded again that with the close of ordinary time Advent would now be both the beginning and the end of our Church calendar.

- This is true because the purpose of the church calendar is to remember the work and ministry of Jesus!
- All of history revolves around Jesus and a proper use of the Church calendar reminds of us this.

Jesus is the beginning and the end of history: He is the Alpha and Omega as He declared in Revelation!

The Bible presents Jesus as the creator of the heavens and the earth! The Bible reveals that Jesus comes at the center of history to redeem His people and to bring forth the New Creation. AND the Bible teaches that Jesus will return at the end of the age to judge the living and the dead. So it is proper in the season of Advent to remember that Jesus came with His incarnation as the Savior of the world AND that Jesus will return as the final judge of all the world at the end of time.

- Thus in the season of Advent where we look for the long expected Jesus we see both the beginning and the end of the Church calendar every year.

Our annual journey begins with the birth of Christ:

- Remembering as John does in his Gospel that it is the very Word of God who created all there is who now comes in the flesh.

From Epiphany Sunday until Psalm Sunday we remember the earthly ministry of Jesus: Epiphany means manifestation and just as the Magi came to see the new born King, we long to learn more and more about the life of Jesus year after year!

With Palm Sunday we enter what is called Holy Week:

- Remembering that Jesus entered Jerusalem as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Jesus was foreordained to be rejected by the religious leaders of Israel and executed by a Roman governor, demonstrating the truth that Paul rightly declares in Romans chapter 3:

- That BOTH the Jews & Gentiles stand guilty before our Holy God.

However, on Good Friday and Easter Sunday we learn that what Satan and the world meant for evil, God intended from eternity past for good where the penalty for sin is paid and the wrath of God satisfied at the cross!

- God then demonstrated the power of this redemption by raising Jesus from the dead: The first-fruit of the Godly harvest to come.

Jesus spends another forty days with His disciples on earth instructing them and giving them the Great Commission. On Ascension Sunday we remember that Jesus has now ascended to the Father's right hand in heaven where He rules until all the nations of the earth are subdued and the knowledge of the Lord fills the earth. With Pentecost Sunday we remember how this great task is to be accomplished:

The Spirit of God, the Comforter Jesus promised, descends upon the Church giving them the power & courage they need to carry out the Great Commission. Some year ago we focused on the Book of Acts as the story of how the Spirit of God will bring glory to the Son by filling the earth with His Kingdom.

- The final portion of the Church calendar is what is called ordinary or normal time which we begin with Trinity Sunday, the first Sunday after Pentecost.

Here we focus on the Triune nature of our great God and remember that each person of the Trinity is intimately involved in our salvation. The weeks of ordinary time are counted from Pentecost Sunday until the first Sunday of Advent:

- During ordinary time we remember each year that Jesus told us to observe and obey all that He had taught!

To be honest when I first began to consider the importance of the Church calendar, I thought this amounted to a big hole in the whole process!

- I thought, what, did they just run out of things to focus on after Pentecost?

As I have studied and practiced these things over the years I have come to realize that ordinary time is a vital part of our remembrance: It is in these weeks, just as it is with the days, weeks and years of our lives, that we learn to obey the commands of Jesus:

- As we learned last week, the Spirit of God will fill the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus one faithful obedience at a time... One obedience after another until that task is completed!
- We must remember the admonition of Jesus: IF you love Me, keep my commandments!
- Thus, when we come again to Advent we should see how it is both the beginning and the end.

Coming at the end of our ordinary time, we remember that Jesus will come at the end of time as the just judge of the living and the dead. As we learn from the parable of the wheat and tares, the weeds will be gathered up and burned:

- The wicked will be judged and removed.

And we as His Saints will also face a purifying judgment that Paul alludes to in I Corinthians chapter three:

“7 So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase...

10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. 11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. [discuss ‘revealed by fire’] 14 If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.”

- Thus, having moved from the beginning to the end, we prepare to begin at the beginning again as we celebrate of the season of Advent in anticipation of the joy of Christmas!

We move through this year after year to help us remember that Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega:

- The first and the last, the beginning and the end!

- We must remember that this is true for all of history and should be true in all of our lives.

It should be true for ALL of us who have been baptized and called upon to live as those who bear the name of Jesus! I want to take just a moment to consider what that means... Consider the familiar words that begin the Bible: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

The Apostle Paul in writing to the Saints at Colossi reminds us of the importance of this for our lives: "13 [The Father] has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, 14 in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. 15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. 17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. 18 And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence."

Jesus is the creator of time and space and we are reminded of this in the opening verses of John's Gospel which I read as our morning text:

- Jesus as God existed before the beginning of time...
- And thus only He can rightly claim to be the First and Last!

So Jesus is present at the beginning of history and Jesus comes at what many consider the center of history:

- As John puts it, "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us!"
- Because of the penalty and gravity of sin, God must become man to save man!

Jesus comes to offer Himself as the perfect obedient man and as the very Son of God with the power to take upon Himself the wrath due for all of our sins.

- Jesus comes to earth to save His people from their sins and to bring forth the New Creation.

As we saw last week, it is always good to remember the big picture of history:

- We have creation and fall and the decline of mankind from the garden to the cross.
- We have New Creation and redemption and advance of the Kingdom from the resurrection to the White Throne judgment.

This view of history stands in stark contrast with the view presented by the rebellious men of today...

They replace the glorious creation of Jesus with some sort of 'big bang' followed by time and chance evolution and of course they also deny the fall of man into sin.

- Rather than decline, they see mankind moving from the primitive to the more advanced. [*mention empires*]

They deny that Jesus was a real man and that men were in need of a Savior. Rather they believe that the advance of man will come through his own wisdom and knowledge:

- The great lie of the garden and of the enlightenment.

They deny the Light of the World and turn to their own dim wits. As John proclaimed: "10 He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. 11 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him."

As we obey the Great Commission we must confront such unbelief with the power of the Gospel both in word and deed:

- We must proclaim the truth and we must live the truth!

We should do so with great confidence because John understood that God from eternity past had chosen those who would hear and respond! John goes on to proclaim:

12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: 13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

- May we always remember that Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega the First and the Last!

So, we see the great contrast between the truth of the Scriptures and the myths of mankind as they suppress the truth in unrighteousness. This is a battle that began in the Garden and will continue until Satan is loosed one final time at the end of history. We should again ask, what is our role in this battle.

- As we studied last week, our role is to trust and obey, to be doing one faithful act after another as God advances His Kingdom.

The Great Commission calls upon us to preach the Gospel as those beautiful feet that bring glad tidings, AND we are to live the Gospel as we do those good works that we were created in Christ Jesus to walk in!

- I think this is especially important as we go through the Advent and Christmas seasons.

These can be seasons of great joy and great opportunity! Again, as we discussed last week, it is we who the world should see enjoying life, and what more joyous season could we have? It is we who should have "Merry Christmas" often on our lips even in the places where it might not be politically correct! Our time of gift giving should be a time where the world sees how we remember the greatest gift that was given...

- For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son!

Our celebrations and decorations should be rich and beautiful, no matter how simple or expensive they may be. We should NOT be doing all of that to show off or out of some sort of holiday obligation...

- But rather because we truly do think that Jesus coming as that little baby was the center of history and that His coming changed ALL of history!

As those who have been blessed with many covenant children we have a special obligation to insure that the true meaning of Christmas does not get lost in all of those very same celebrations.

And finally we do know that this season can often be very difficult for those who are facing trials or have lost a loved one...

- However, we should see this as an opportunity as well because we can remind them that this season is about the One Who truly can bring peace and comfort in such times.

We must remind them to not look around and think about the joy they are missing which they see in others...

- But rather remind them to look to the One Who is being celebrated, the One Who truly can wipe away their tears!

Or as the hymn writer put it so well in our hymn of response this morning:

Come thou long expected Jesus, born to set thy people free; from our fears and sins release us: let us find our rest in thee. Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth thou art, dear Desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.

- May that joy be so rich in our lives that we simply cannot avoid sharing it in this Advent season.

Communion Meditation: Psalm 108: "4 For Your mercy is great above the heavens, And Your truth reaches to the clouds. 5 Be exalted, O God, above the heavens, And Your glory above all the earth; 6 That Your beloved may be delivered, Save with Your right hand, and hear me... 12 Give us help from trouble, For the help of man is useless. 13 Through God we will do valiantly, For it is He who shall tread down our enemies."