

“Finally, Some Good News!”

Steve Ramer, Pastor

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Scripture:

Mark 1:1-8

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight," " John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Sermon:

I know most of you have heard me say this, but, I hate Christmas!
The mad rush to buy things, the focus on consumerism,
Santa Claus, and sweet little manger scenes of fat, white babies.

But I do love Advent.

The barren landscape and cold of December
along with its long, dark, and starry nights.

The necessary longing for light and the desperate search
for hope in the midst of a dark and despairing world.

The anticipation of the of new life,
the sure expectation that God is coming to be with us,
reminding us again that we are not alone.

But this year I feel the need to do something different,
I need to make a radical and unexpected change!

It has been a tough year.
A year ago at this time many of us were still grieving
the results of last years election.

And now after a year in this new political climate
we are tired and discouraged, in need of some real hope
and the promise of a renewed joy.

We also lost our dear Eliza!
So quickly did she depart that we barely had time to say goodbye.

I guess what I am saying is, that I sort of feel like we've had Advent already!
I feel like I have been spending most of the past year
already stumbling in the darkness, trying to hold on,
waiting patiently for the light that prepares us for the joy,
hope, peace and love that is born in us again!

And so this year, Mary and I decided that we would do just that.
That we would just go ahead and skip advent
and jump on ahead to Christmas!

Let us find the baby, wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger
and let us respond with our songs of joy,
for unto us a child is born this day who is the Prince of Peace!
This is good news of a great joy that can turn our despair into hope,
sadness into joy and all the worlds hatred into love!

Why is Christmas such good news?
Well, Mark in his Gospel tells us so!
Yes, Mark, the only synoptic Gospel
that does not include an annunciation, or a magnificat,
or a manger scene, or anything, for that matter, from Jesus' childhood.

Mark begins his account with a few simple words,
boldly pronouncing that what he is about to tell us is the "good news."
In a burst of unprecedented creativity,

Mark introduced the ancient world to an entirely new form
of literature that he called "Gospel".
"Gospel," is translated as "good news",
and this news is so good and so totally unexpectedly fresh
that a whole new form of literature was needed to convey it.
It is needed and necessary and it is really new "news,"
and certainly good enough for any season or time of year!

During Mark's time, there were plenty of other genres
he could have chosen, such as; poetry, comedy, letters,
philosophical teaching, history, etc.

But none of them, I guess, worked for Mark
and for what he wanted to communicate.
So unexpectedly, from out of the proverbial “blue”
the Gospel was born in order for Mark to tell us about Jesus.

Not only has God come to be with us in a radically new way
but that arrival also had to be communicated in a radically new way.
Unconventional content necessitated a new form
in order to communicate the greatest news of all!

God has come in human form to be with us!
God has come to be with us in our darkest moments of despair.
All the hopes and fears of the past are fulfilled!

The pounding waterfall that is the source of all hope,
joy, peace and love has been released!!

This is “good news!”
This news is the ultimate gift of the season
and, ultimately, it is the reason for the season.

So let us sing for joy!

Let us indulge ourselves in the hope the season brings!
Come let us be filled once more with the promise of new birth!
Let us find new courage in the fact
that when God wanted to change the world,
God sent a defenseless child!

And even though Mark fails to include any of the Christmasy stuff,
go ahead and get lost in all of what Matthew and Luke have to say
and boy do they fill it with lots of really awesome stuff!

A virgin birth, teenage pregnancy,
undocumented aliens on the move,
angels on high, astrologers, evil kings
and, I have to admit, some really stupid shepherds who insisted on
herding their flocks out into barren pastures in the middle of Winter?

Maybe the baby wasn't all that chubby and he certainly wasn't white,
and the manger likely smelled more of manure than myrrh.

But a baby is something to celebrate,
especially when he is the cure to all that ails us.

This is “good news” folks, really good news!

But it is still okay if you want to observe Advent.
Taking a season to reflect upon great truths are necessary.

Advent acts as an “in-between season,” bordered on the one hand
by our collective memory of how God has come to us in the past
and on the other, by the anticipation of God’s presence to come.

“Come, oh come, Emanuel”

is a prayer that looks both backward to a child born
in an unexpected place in an unexpected time,
and forward with longing and a firm belief that God is also immanent.
No one likely expected that first birthing of God into our world.
Similarly, all future births will be just as unexpected!

This Advent I invite you to hope for,
and to also experience simultaneously, God’s arrival!

But be on the lookout, because it will likely happen
in a place and time, that up until that moment,
you never would have thought it possible!

And it may happen when you least expect it to?
Maybe while you are at work, or maybe at home.
Rebirth can even happen while shopping
or standing in a check out line at the mall?
Maybe a new birth could even happen in church?
Or maybe even as you gaze upon a kitschy manger scene?

“Awesome” is the love
that our God seeks to lavish upon you and me.
“Out of this world” are the deeds
that the Divine wants to perform for, and in us!
“Unexpected,” and undeserved,
God’s gifts flow in abundance!

Playfully, dancing and fearless
out of the dark
and into the everlasting light!

So be ready, then,
to hear the Good News!

You certainly don't want to miss it,
cause its quite the story!
It is finally some Good News for all to hear
and a story that is worth telling!

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