



FLAMES *for the* FAITHFUL

A SERMON SERIES FOR ADVENT



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WEEK 1: THE PROPHECY CANDLE

MONOLOG SERMON

- The **Monolog Sermon** is delivered by the worship leader:

🔊 Listen! If the message of Advent could be expressed in only one word, that word might well be “listen.” Especially if the message of the first candle on the Advent wreath had to be expressed in one word, that word would say it very well: “Listen!” Even as the first candle flickers to light, the Advent wreath seeks to get our attention. Listen!

The first candle on the wreath is sometimes called the Prophecy Candle. I know that when we hear the word “prophecy,” most often we think about foretelling the future, and that is part of what today’s message is all about—but only part of it. While God’s prophets in ancient times did foretell the future now and then, that was not their primary task. Their primary task was to preach—to speak the Word of God for the people of God.

And if the prophets’ job was to speak—it follows that the people’s job was to listen. We’re back to that word again, for in the sense of preaching, prophecy continues to take place—right here, in this very church, week after week: God’s Word is proclaimed for God’s people. The task

of prophecy continues even in our day. The job of a prophet is to speak God's Word for God's people.

And the job of God's people is to listen. The first candle on the Advent wreath calls us to that task, and the rest of the candles will continue to echo that call all through the season.

For example, the second candle on the wreath is called the Bethlehem Candle, for when the Word became flesh ("the Word," please notice—what God has to say)—when the Word became flesh, it happened first at Bethlehem. The first time Jesus' human voice was heard, it rang out there at Bethlehem, a newborn voice, an infant cry, a baby's first try to communicate. And that's worth listening to. For what the prophets long proclaimed, what ages and ages of faithful folk had waited for—for the Word of God to break the silence of the centuries and fill the world with hope—was happening in Bethlehem.

Was Bethlehem prepared? Are we? The light of prophecy is about to flicker there anew, in those dark streets, to fill the world with hope. One wants to call out, "Listen, Bethlehem!"

The third candle on the Advent wreath, the pink one, is the Shepherds' Candle, and it too urges us to listen. For when the Word made flesh was first proclaimed ("the Word," please notice—what God had to say)—it was shepherds who were chosen to hear good tidings of great joy, shepherds working the very hillsides where David had once tended his flock—the most famous shepherd of them all—and written his psalms, the Word of God in poetry: "My soul takes refuge in you, O Lord, until the destroying storms pass by. I cry to God Most High; he will send from heaven and save me. My heart is steadfast, O God. I will sing and make melody. For your steadfast love is as high as the heavens; your faithfulness extends to the clouds."

That was a psalm of David, the shepherd. And now a new song is about to be sung, a new message proclaimed in heavenly choruses: the end of fear, beginning of joy; the prophets' promises fulfilled—in shepherds' terms: the Son of David coming in the name of the Lord, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, the Good Shepherd laying down his life for the sheep. And by that message the third candle seeks to turn our fear into joy. It is a message well worth hearing. Listen!

The fourth candle on the Advent wreath is the Angels' Candle. For when the Word became flesh ("the Word," please notice—what God has to say), it was angels who were sent to say it ... to shepherds ... at Bethlehem—the Word of God proclaimed, fulfilled: "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord."

Listen! That is the message as the first candle begins to glow, lighting the way to all the rest. Listen! For here in God's Word is a light that shines beyond the bounds of Bethlehem, beyond the hillsides of the shepherds. He is the Word of God proclaimed for all the world to hear—a message of HOPE.

If you want another word to summarize the message of Advent, especially the first candle, that word could well be HOPE. The Bible very consciously connects HOPE with the Word of God: “The Scriptures were written,” the Bible says, “to teach and encourage us by giving us HOPE.” The biblical concept of HOPE means to have something to look forward to: “The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all. So we are filled with HOPE, as we wait for the glorious return of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.” The biblical concept of HOPE means to have something to look forward to: “O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord this is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem. Hope in the Lord!” The biblical concept of HOPE means to have something to look forward to: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living HOPE through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” “May the God of HOPE fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in HOPE.”

Something to look forward to. A future! And what a future it is! That’s what prophecy is all about, to help us be ready for the future—God’s future! This is only the first candle; there is more to come of the grace of God, of the message of Advent, of the HOPE with which God brightens the way before us ... into the future, a future that just promises to get brighter and brighter ... brighter than an Advent wreath, brighter than the Christmas star, as bright as heaven itself, where Advent wreaths will not be needed anymore, where “there is no need for sun or moon, for the glory of the Lord is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb of God.”

Listen! For that is the voice of prophecy, the Word of God for the people of God, the Advent message of HOPE.

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WEEK 1: THE PROPHECY CANDLE

DRAMATIC SERMON

- In place of the Monolog Sermon above, the **Dramatic Sermon** can be performed at this time by four readers:

In broad general terms, each of the four voices in the dramatic sermons represents one of the candles on the Advent wreath. Therefore, it is strongly suggested that the same four readers participate in all the services, always in the same roles.

1 represents the voice of Prophecy, featured in the first sermon and then frequently serving that same function (recalling the Old Testament Word of God) in the others.

2 speaks for Bethlehem in the second service, and often deals with the theme of preparedness and “right here, where we live” in other services.

3 speaks for the Shepherds in the third service, and is quick to emphasize references to shepherding and shepherds (especially David, the most famous shepherd of all) on other weeks.

4 speaks for the Angels (and so sometimes serves also as the voice of God), not only in the fourth service but throughout the series.

Suggestions for presentation:

- They might gather around the Advent wreath, or beneath it if it's hanging high, thus serving as a kind of "living Advent wreath" in their presentations.*
- If it's possible to have the wreath on or near the chancel steps, the readers might arrange themselves: one in front of the wreath (perhaps the "star" speaker for the day), two on either side on the steps, and the fourth behind the wreath.*
- The chief speaker for the day is in the chancel and/or near the wreath, while the other three are in the other parts of the nave: one midway in each side aisle and one at the back of the center aisle could give the impression that the whole nave is a kind of "living wreath."*
- A variation of those arrangements: At the first service, only speaker 1 is at the wreath; the other three speak from the balcony or from other locations in the church. At the second service, speakers 1 and 2 are in the chancel (just as two flames are glowing on the wreath now); the other two are still in the balcony. On the third week, only speaker 4 remains "on high"; the other three are in the chancel. And if a fourth service is conducted, all four speakers are up front and visible.*

The readers should dress in purple (or blue) turtlenecks (or choir robes) and one in pink, if possible. You also might consider having those who represent "lit" candles wear orange or yellow caps, while others remain bareheaded.

1 Listen!

2 I am listening.

1 Listen!

3 I'm listening too.

1 Listen!

2 Why do you keep saying that?

1 Because it's important.

3 Obviously.

1 Because it's the message of the first Advent candle.

2 "Listen"?

1 Yes, listen. The first candle on the Advent wreath is frequently called the Prophecy Candle.

3 Prophecy, like in foretelling the future?

1 Yes, and we will get to that before this message is done. Foretelling the future was part of what God's ancient prophets did, a very important part, but that was not their primary task.

2 Well, what was their "primary task"?

1 To preach.

2 To preach.

1 To speak the Word of God for the people of God. The prophet's job was to preach.

2 And the people's job?

[I opens his/her mouth to say it, but is interrupted:]

3 I know. To listen! The people's job was to listen!

1 It still is.

2 You mean prophecy is still taking place?

1 In the sense of preaching—yes, certainly, I mean, even in the light of one candle look around you: Right here, in this very church, week after week, God's Word is proclaimed for God's people. That is the job of the prophet, to speak God's Word for God's people.

2 And our job is?

3 To listen!

1 Listen! That is the message of the first Advent candle, a call that will echo through the messages of all the other Advent candles.

2 The second candle on the Advent wreath is called the Bethlehem Candle.

1 Listen.

2 When "the Word became flesh," it happened first at Bethlehem. The first time Jesus' human voice was heard, it rang out here at Bethlehem, a newborn voice, an infant cry, a baby's first try to communicate.

1 Listen, Bethlehem! What the prophets long proclaimed, what ages and ages of faithful fold had waited for—for the Word of God to break the silence of the centuries and fill the world with hope ...

2 Is Bethlehem prepared?

1 Listen, Bethlehem!

2 The light of prophecy is about to flicker here, in these dark streets, and fill the world with hope.

3 The third candle on the Advent wreath is the Shepherds' Candle.

1 Listen!

3 When the Word made flesh was first proclaimed, it was shepherds who were chosen to hear good tidings of great joy, shepherds working the hillsides where David had once tended flocks ... and written his psalms, the Word of God in poetry:

2 "My soul takes refuge in you, O God, until the destroying storms pass by. I cry to God Most High; he will send from heaven and save me. My heart is steadfast, O Lord; my heart is steadfast. I will sing and make melody. For your steadfast love is as high as the heavens; your faithfulness extends to the clouds."

1 Listen, shepherds! A new song is about to be sung, a new message proclaimed in heavenly choruses, the end of fear, the beginning of joy, the prophets' promises fulfilled.

3 The Son of David coming in the name of the Lord, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, the Good Shepherd laying down his life for the sheep.

1 Listen, shepherds!

4 The fourth candle on the Advent wreath is the Angels' Candle.

1 Listen!

4 When the Word became flesh, it was angels who proclaimed the news.

3 To shepherds.

2 At Bethlehem.

1 The Word of God proclaimed ... fulfilled.

4 "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. For

unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.”

1 Listen! That is the message as the first candle begins to glow. Listen!

2 For here in God’s Word is a light that shines beyond the bounds of Bethlehem,

3 Beyond the hillsides of the shepherds,

4 Here is the Word of God proclaimed for all the world to hear.

1 A message of HOPE.

2 Hope?

1 Yes, HOPE. The message of Advent, symbolized already in the very first candle, speaks of hope.

3 But this is the Prophecy Candle. Do hope and prophecy go together?

4 “The Scriptures were written to teach and encourage us by giving us hope,” the Bible says.

1 The biblical concept of HOPE means to have something to look forward to.

4 “The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all. So we are filled with HOPE, as we wait for the glorious return of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.”

1 The biblical concept of HOPE means to have something to look forward to.

2 “O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem. Hope in the Lord!”

1 The biblical concept of HOPE means to have something to look forward to.

4 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living HOPE through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

1 The biblical concept of HOPE means to have something to look forward to.

2 “May the God of HOPE fill you with all joy and peace in believing,

4 “so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in HOPE.”

1 Something to look forward to.

3 A future!

4 And what a future it is!

1 That's what prophecy is all about, to help us be ready for the future.

4 God's future!

1 This is only the first candle. There is more to come of the grace of God,

2 of the message of Advent,

3 of the HOPE with which God brightens the way before us

4 into the future, God's future, a future that just promises to get brighter and brighter,

2 brighter than an Advent wreath,

3 brighter than a Christmas star,

1 as bright as heaven itself,

4 where "there is no need for sun or moon, for the glory of the Lord is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb of God."

1 Listen! For that is the voice of prophecy, the Advent message of HOPE!

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WEEK 1: THE PROPHECY CANDLE

CHILDREN'S SERMON

- The **Children's Sermon** is delivered by the worship leader:

This sermon may be delivered by a "prophet" or "prophetess." Sandals, a shawl, an alb and a rough-hewn walking stick are probably all that would be needed to complete a costume.

- ℒ Are you ready to listen to the Advent wreath?

Or does that sound strange—to listen to a wreath? Wreaths aren't for listening to, you might think. Wreaths are for looking at. And, in the case of this Advent wreath, wreaths are for adding a little light to the room. There are candles on this wreath. And already one is flickering. That one candle is already driving the darkness away.

Did you know that it has a name? In fact, that candle is named after ME. I am one of God's ancient prophets. Prophets like me shouted, "LISTEN!" to God's people long, long ago. We had been given God's word to share. And so we shouted, "LISTEN!" And sometimes people did listen. And sometimes they didn't listen. (I think most of the time people didn't listen ... but

that hardly mattered—we had a job to do and we did it, regardless of the result!) Sometimes the word we had to share was a call to come back to God—to stop sinful ways and to start acting like God’s children. Sometimes the word we had to share was a word of promise and hope—promise that God was staying connected to his people (even if times seemed hard), and hope that God had a special future in store. “LISTEN!” we shouted. “Hear God’s word!”

The first candle on the Advent wreath is called “The Prophecy Candle.” It’s supposed to remind you of me. It’s supposed to shout “LISTEN!” every time it catches your eye.

There is a lot to listen to this time of year. Oh, there are all the “sounds of the season” ... carols and bells and “ho-ho-hos.” TVs and holiday movies make their noise, too. But this candle is asking you to listen to the word of the Lord. God has something to say. In fact, what God has to say is so important that what God has to say actually became a human being. God sent his Word to us! God sent his Son—a Savior, Christ, the Lord.

Sounds important, doesn’t it? So, LISTEN! Just like the candle tells you to!