

Title: Promise Made – Promise Kept (pt.1)

Text: Matthew 1.22-23

Theme:

Series: Advent 2007 #1

Prop Stmt.

Christmas is a season as well as an event. Because the event is so dominating, the anticipation of the event is what is known as the season. Sometimes the anticipation is actually better than the event. In our anticipation, we imagine what Christmas will be like, and we usually do not imagine the entire family getting the flu, or food poisoning, or some other wretched scenario.

For almost 2,000 years, traditions in the historic Christian church have tried to capture this anticipation in what has become known as the Sundays of advent. There are some church traditions which ought to be dead and buried because they are biblically and theologically wrong or confusing. But, observing the four Sundays of Advent is a tradition that I think can be extremely beneficial, because, properly understood and observed it can help capture the true message of the incarnation. But they must be properly understood. Let me define some terms:

Advent – (Lat.) “to come” So, when we speak of the Advent of Christ, we are referring to the coming of Christ, which usually refers to His 1<sup>st</sup> coming. But, advent is a term that can refer to his 2<sup>nd</sup> coming, or return. Advent is actually a word that is related to the word adventure. An adventure is a happening, an event, or an unusual experience of sorts. The advent of Christ is sometimes called the “Christ event”. We could actually call his birth, life, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension the “Christ adventure.”

Sundays of Advent - The four Sundays of Advent, are the four Sundays that precede Christmas Day. The advent of Christ was not completely out of the blue. It was a surprise, but it should have been an anticipated surprise. It was promised. It was prophesied. It was spoken about and it was spoken about to a number of different people in different situations. These different groups of people who either received the news or who delivered the news about the coming of Christ, have historically been organized into four different groups; Prophets, Angels, Shepherds, and Magi. The Word of the Lord first came to and through the prophets. The Word of the Lord then came to and through the angels who spoke to Mary, Joseph, the Shepherds and an angel was even involved with the Magi. The Word of the Lord came to the Shepherds and came to the Magi. Each of these four groups are highlighted on their particular Sunday.

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent: The Prophets’ Sunday

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent: The Angels’ Sunday

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent: The Shepherds’ Sunday

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent: The Magi’s Sunday

Advent Candles – God uses the concept of light as a means to describe the affect of His Word. Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path (Ps. 119.105). Send forth

your light and your truth (Ps 43.3). The unfolding of your word gives light (Ps. 119.130). So, when the Word of the Lord came to the prophets, they were given light. The more revelation there is the more light there is too. The lighting of the candles symbolizes the fact that God has given us light by giving us His Word. On the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent, we only light the prophets candle and we rejoice that the Word of the Lord came to the prophets. On the second Sunday of Advent, we light the Angel's candle. On the second Sunday, we have two candles lit, which give us more light. We follow this pattern for the four Sundays which symbolizes the fact that if we did not have God's revelation, we would be in complete spiritual darkness. Of course, the reason that God's Word brings light is because God's Word is the revelation of Himself. He is ultimate light. The four Sundays of Advent all point to the actual Advent of Christ. So, in our Christmas Eve Service, we finally light the Christ candle and we usually sing, Joy to the World because the Lord has come.

During the Sundays of Advent, I generally preach a mini-series to prepare us for Christmas. I am doing that again this year, and then in January, we will return to finish up for 1 Corinthians. The series for Advent this year is called Promises Made, Promises Kept because I am preaching on the five prophecies that Matthew records in his first two chapters that were fulfilled in the events surrounding the birth of Christ.

Read Text: Matthew 1.18-25

Pray

## **1. Introduction**

Our focus this morning is on verses 22-23. In these two verses we read that somewhere in history, God made a promise, and Matthew is showing that God keeps His Word. One of the things that we love about Christmas is children. Children have hope. They show an innate desire to believe. Tell them something and they want to believe it. They want to believe in their dreams. That one concept has made the Disney Company billions of dollars because it is such a powerful concept. But, we know better don't we because we used to be the children who believed. Children are little people who have not had their hearts crushed by people who lie and don't keep their promises. For most children, it is a realization that grows on them. If you always trust, you will be crushed. What is worse is when that same child begins to realize that he or she does the same thing to others. Beloved, I am so thrilled that I can do more than simply share in the pain of those experiences. Just like you, I have grievously sinned against others by promising something and then not delivering on that promise. I believe that is the exception and not the rule, but for that to happen even once, is deeply troubling. I too have been sinned against by people who promise me, they will do something and then I have to hound them and hound them to do it and it is so frustrating and I can easily form calluses upon my heart and become caustic and harsh in my spirit. Yes, I know those shoes, but I am so glad that we are not on our own Saviors, because we would be a miserable lot if that were the case. And that is why I am so excited to preach this series that demonstrates over and over that God keeps His Word.

The world is the stage that God built in order that He might have an arena on which to display His glory. God's acts and God's attributes are His glory. God is righteous and true. Therefore, God's words and actions are true. When God makes a promise, He keeps it. The world and all of its events are the stage upon God performs His Word. We do not usually see it like that. In our lives we are like the scientist who is examining the cellular structure of a piece of wood fiber, forgetting that these cells are part of tree that is part of a forest that is part of state that is part of a country that is part of continent that is part of a world that is part of solar system that is part of a universe. We only see the very tiny part of history that our lives touch and we often fail to see how big the rest of life and history really is. And part of that is because life in our little Petri dish can be pretty intense, at least as it appears to us. It sure seemed intense to Ahaz, king of Judah (Israel's southern kingdom) in 735 BC.

**2. Explanation**

**3. Application**

- A. Everything about your life matters to God.**
- B. He's got the whole world in his hands (and his finger prints are everywhere!)**
- C. God delivers on what He promises.**
- D. God finishes what He starts.**
- E. Embrace and follow God.**

**4. Question – What are you going to do about this?**

What are some of the promises of God that God has banked for you, upon which you need to start writing some checks?