

Rev. Janet Doyle
First Sunday in Advent
Sunday, November 28, 2021
Scripture: Isaiah 61:1-3; Galatians 4:4-7

Sermon: It's The Most Wonderful Time of the Year: Gift of Hope

One of my favorite songs at Christmas time, sung by, Andy Williams is, "It's The Most Wonderful Time of the Year." Does anyone like this one?

Lyrics

It's the most wonderful time of the year
With the kids jingle belling
And everyone telling you be of good cheer
It's the most wonderful time of the year

It's the hap-happiest season of all
With those holiday greetings and gay happy meetings
When friends come to call
It's the hap-happiest season of all

There'll be parties for hosting
Marshmallows for toasting
And caroling out in the snow
There'll be scary ghost stories
And tales of the glories of
Christmases long, long ago

It's the most wonderful time of the year
There'll be much mistltoeing
And hearts will be glowing
When loved ones are near
It's the most wonderful time of the year

It's the most wonderful time
Yes, the most wonderful time
Oh the most wonderful time
Of the year!

It is a wonderful time of the year, especially as we begin to celebrate Advent today. I love the Advent Season as we light our Advent candles each Sunday leading up to Christmas Eve. We have “The Christmas Story” Cantata coming up on Sunday, December 19 as we hear the music of Christmas and the story of Jesus’ birth. We have gift giving and gift receiving, and we have our homes and our church decorated with the lights of Christmas to remind us that Jesus is the Light of the World. What is Advent anyway?

The word “**Advent**” comes from the Latin word *adventus*, which means “coming.” Advent in the 4th and 5th centuries was a time of preparation for the baptism of new Christians. Christians would spend 40 days in prayer and fasting to prepare for the celebration that accompanied the baptism of new believers.

Over time, advent was connected to the coming of Christ, his first coming and his second coming. Advent season is an invitation to set your mind off the stresses of the year and is a chance to focus our thoughts on the gift God has given us in his son Jesus who stepped down from Heaven and took the form of a man so that we might believe.

Traditionally, the first Sunday in Advent includes lighting the candle of HOPE. His candle of HOPE symbolizes promises delivered through the prophets from God as well as the hope we have in Christ.

God crafted a great rescue plan that God lays out in scripture. This plan foretells in advance the arrival of Christ. The Bible also gives us a glimpse of the future and promises that God will come down to create a new heaven and Earth in the Second Coming of Jesus.

This first Sunday of Advent we read, pray, and reflect on the hope God’s plan gives us, foretold by the prophets and fulfilled by the life and death of Christ, and we meditate on the promise of Christ’s coming return.

Christmas has become very commercialized over the years and has lost its true meaning. Every year the gap between Christmas and Thanksgiving seems to grow smaller. It is common to hear our favorite Christmas carols played in stores in early November and stores full of Christmas items to purchase even sometimes before Halloween.

When do we have time to sit and reflect and pray during Advent? We spend time frantically looking for the perfect gifts and sending out our Christmas cards. Have we forgotten the true meaning and message of Christmas in the midst of the busyness of the season? In the midst of our list of

things to do we must not forget the Gift of Hope in the Christ Child born to give us eternal life.

It's the most wonderful time of the year because of the Hope we have in Jesus, but many in our world do not live with that hope; they live in brokenness, and they live in despair. For many, this isn't the most wonderful time of the year, but it can be, when we show others there is HOPE in this world when you know the one who is HOPE.

Advent is a time to introduce others to the saving grace of Jesus. Our world is in darkness, people are in darkness and need a light to illumine their way. So many people are lost and walking on the wrong path. If you live your life always in darkness, you don't know what light looks like. We can see from our news reports every day that people turn to the ways of the world, the ways of evil, to find answers to their problems, but that only creates more problems in their life. Jesus is the only answer to hopelessness.

Why did Jesus have to come to earth as a baby, born in a humble stable? Because of love. Because of the world needing HOPE. Because the world had brokenness and needed Good News.

Isaiah 61 foretold a Savior that would come into the world: "The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoner, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion, to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor."

This is the good news that Jesus, years later, came to proclaim. Isaiah 61:1-3 is about proclaiming God's favor and love for the world in turmoil. The verse speaks about the Messiah who has been anointed by God and that is Jesus.

The broken hearted, the poor, the captives, the prisoners, for you and for me, these are the people for whom Jesus was sent. He was sent to everyone who is hurting during this Christmas season to give them healing and HOPE.

That is what the Good News does. It heals, it liberates, it frees, it comforts, it provides, it gives beauty, it shares, it glorifies God.

Jesus came to give ordinary people like us HOPE. The appearance to the shepherds is the perfect example of ordinary and being born in a humble stable and laid in a manger for animals symbolized his own poverty and need. He left the palaces of heaven to enter a world of pain and brokenness. He who had been rich became poor that we through His poverty might become rich.

Jesus brought the good news at His first coming, and because it is good news, it is the most wonderful time of the year. Jesus brings the Good News to all. We have only to accept it and then we share this Good News with others living in darkness.

In Isaiah 61:3 it describes, we are the soil, and God plants the righteousness into our hearts. As God plants the righteousness in our hearts, we share this good news with others and the miracles of Christmas happen. From the tiny acorn comes the mighty oak tree and like the tiny size of a mustard seed grows a large bush, and so it is with our faith in the beginning. Like a tiny baby born in a stable and lying in a manger, he shows us that we too are in need of love and comfort. We too are hungry and needing more than the commercialization of Christmas to make it the most wonderful time of the year.

Just like the Grinch in the book, ***How the Grinch Stole Christmas!***, we need to discover and maybe rediscover for the first time, that Advent and Christmas are more than just packages, ribbons and bows.

Jesus wants to take your bad news and turn it into his Good News.

Jesus wants to take the spirit of despair and clothe us with a garment of praise.

Jesus wants to give us a crown of beauty instead of ashes.

Jesus wants to give us oil of gladness instead of mourning.

Jesus wants to give our brokenness healing.

Jesus wants to free you from the past so that you can live in God's favor and in God's blessings in the present and in your future. The Good News is for all of us for it brings us life and HOPE.

It's the most wonderful time of the year— when you know Jesus and receive Jesus as your Savior because he came into the dark world of brokenness to bring the Gift of HOPE.