

Rev. Seth D. Bode † Sermon 257, 12-09-2020 † Advent Wednesday

“Lord God, you have appointed me as a pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument -- but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

“Sir, we would see Jesus.”

THE NAMES OF THE MESSIAH, THE WONDER ABOVE ALL WONDERS

Text – Isaiah 9

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”



We love Christmas carols. There are many of them, a vast treasury. In fact, as soon as December hit, it was like drinking from a firehose of Christmas celebrations. People cannot wait for this time of year. Our radio goes to 105.5. Or we’ve driven to houses with lights synchronized to special Christmas music, if you only tune in inside your car.

Carols get us ready for Christmas in some way, shape, or form. That’s what the season of Advent seeks to do – get us ready for Christmas. The Savior of the world must come. But he comes not just once. He comes twice. First at Christmas, second at the end of all things, the Last Day. So we need to be prepared for more than balls of holly.

One preparation this time of year is *wonderment*. It has been rightly said:

It’s The Most Wonderful Time Of The Year

Andy Williams sang this over 50 years ago, and times have already changed. Listen ...

*It's the most wonderful time of the year / With the kids jingle bellling
And everyone telling you be of good cheer / It's the most wonderful time of the year ...*

*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 the / Christmases long, long ago.*

*It's the most wonderful time of the year / There'll be much mistletoeing and hearts will be glowing
When loved ones are near / It's the most wonderful time of the year!*

The song is a celebration and description of activities associated with the Christmas season, focusing primarily on get-togethers between friends and families. Among the activities included in the song is the telling of "scary ghost stories," a Victorian Christmas tradition that has mostly fallen into disuse. It survives in the seasonal popularity of numerous adaptations of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. Other activities mentioned include hosting parties, spontaneous visits from friends, universal social gaiety, spending time with loved ones, sledding, roasting marshmallows, sharing stories about previous Christmases, and singing Christmas carols in winter weather.

Advent takes on no great or mighty wonder if it's a social time alone, because then we are playing an un-wonderful game of ignoring our sins and how un-wonderful we have been towards our family and friends. And it only gets worse when our vacations brought us not only to new places or to good old people but to new heights of frustration and anxiety packing or hosting. We haven't always been so wonderful to our families, have we? Preparing for special occasions isn't always as slick and friendly as we would like to remember. Haven't we found ourselves to be rather possessive and greedy? Don't we tend to point the finger of blame at people for the pandemic? Don't we hurt the ones we love the most? Isn't it a wonder? How we have been wondrous sinners!

If Christmas is about a jolly good time, without reflection on our own sins, we'll never find the joy that satisfies the most. If Christmas is only a social occasion, a fuzzy and warm feeling in the cold winter frost, then we are forgetting what is really wonderful. What does God say is "Wonderful"? Isaiah 9:6 says, ***"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders."***

That doesn't sound so wonderful. We really have no indication of who this child is, what he should accomplish, or who he is. All we know is that he is a gift and he has a monumental burden on his shoulders. Will he rule? Will he simply be oppressed? If we kept reading, this first part becomes more clear:

*“And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”*

But oppression and rule with this child would not be difficult. The first name we heard is “Wonderful.” The Hebrew word is פֶּלִי *Peli*. “Wonderful,” “something miraculous,” “something supernatural.” And we have heard this name before: The word is as in Judges 13:18, פֶּלִי, *peli*, is the Angel of the Lord, who allows himself to be worshiped. (In the Bible, angels and saints refused worship. This Angel of the Lord did not. It must be Jesus Christ Himself, making an appearance in the Old Testament in the form of an angel.) Samson’s parents are told they will have a child. They asked his name. He said, *“Why do you ask my name? It is wonderful פֶּלִי (peli).”* It makes you wonder if this isn’t really the name of the Angel of the Lord, but that “Wonderful” is simply a substitute word. The true name would be unpronounceable, indescribable, too wonderful to speak aloud. This “Wonderful,” this special One to come, would be our inexpressibly wonderful Savior, Jesus! That God could send his Son, Jesus Christ, is enough for us to call Him “Wonderful” on our own. Now God tells us that is a good name for Him. “Wonderful.”

We marvel at the wonders of a holiday. But we marvel at God’s wonderful dealings with human beings. This is far more than Christmas traditions. With a firm hand, He leads the nations, as we may readily observe when we read the history of Israel. Gently He leads the sinner, as we learn when we study the life of Abraham and read the great book of Esther. God also directs your life and mine. He promises, *“I will guide you, keeping my eye on you,”* Psalm 32:8.

We marvel likewise at God’s unsearchable judgments. Saul was chosen as king of Israel, but, disobedient to God, went down into defeat and death. David fell into scarlet sins yet was lifted out of his transgression and was blanketed with God’s snowy forgiveness.

Again, the old live and the young die, the wicked prosper for a time, and the Christians suffer. Why does it all happen this way? *Now we see a poor reflection, as in a mirror.* It is all a mystery. But there is no darkness around the throne of God. Though *the ways of God are not our ways* and *His judgments are past finding out*, nevertheless God has a plan for every soul.

So we wonder and marvel when we behold God's way of saving souls. Human beings lay conquest with sword, battlefield, army, and satellite. They fight with propaganda, shouting, cults, false teachers. God's way is the foolishness of preaching, as Scripture itself declares. God saves man by grace and not by works. This is too wonderful for us, nevertheless, gloriously true.

We marvel and wonder at the incarnation, that God sends His Son into the world of a virgin. By the shedding of blood He pays the ransom price. He died for us while we were yet sinners. This seems too wonderful for us when we think of the dying thief, of the woman who was a sinner, and many others. But the blood of Jesus Christ can make the foulest clean. The blood of Jesus Christ must cleanse you and me if we are to have peace and to be filled with the hope of salvation. Through His gospel God offers to cleanse us.

Wonderful, isn't it? Isn't it what makes the music make sense? Doesn't it give reasons for our joy? Isn't it the most wonderful time of the year because we can ponder and wonder over our Savior, Jesus. He removes the flood of our sins. He exchanges our sin for his perfect life of peace. He rules as our Prince, Lord, and King.

Isn't this truly the wonderful reason for the time of year? Christ is true man in true God in one person, God in our flesh and blood, Immanuel! That is the sign of all signs, the wonder of all wonders. "Human reason, though it ponders / Cannot fathom these great wonders." We cannot replicate it. We cannot imagine God.

There's a line in our carol about the "hap-happiest season of all." I like that line. I often think it sounds like the "laugh-happiest season of all." And no one could argue with that, the joy and peace and hope and laughter that God-made-man brings to us. It's the most wonderful time of the year. No other season inspires such wonder. At Easter, it's wonderful, but we can quantify it – Jesus was dead, and is now alive again. At Ascension, it's wonderful, but we can at least understand Jesus took His heavenly throne in His heavenly home, from where He came. At Christmas, we cannot fully wrap our minds around what God has done, truly and wonderfully becoming just like us, just for us.

Wonderful?

The MOST Wonderful. Amen.