

“Are You Ready for Christmas?”

Luke 1:39-45

During this Advent Season, the Gospel lessons have been ones that remind us to “keep watch” and “be prepared.” “Get ready! Christ is coming!” For the past few weeks, the common question asked around town, and I am sure asked of you, has been, “Are you ready for Christmas?” I am sure every mom or dad has been asked that question. When I get asked that question, people have other thoughts in mind. From Saturday until Tuesday, we have five services in four days. I have been asked more than a few times, “Are you ready for Christmas?”

Two weeks ago, I was feeling a little cocky because as of December 12, I had all of my sermons written through Christmas Day – at least solidly roughed out. A week ago Thursday, I went to my computer to read through today’s sermon one more time and send it off to Gretchen, and all I had were the rough draft notes I had put together on that Monday. I know what I did wrong on the technology side, and I have learned my lesson over the years that whenever I start feeling a little puffed up, God has a way of humbling me.

I am telling you about my sermon preparation because, over the years, around Christmas (and the same is true around Easter), my congregational members, the sheep of my flock out of love and concern for their shepherd, for their pastor, you tend to look at me with pity as if

preparing sermons or services and coming to church and worshiping God five times a week is a heavy burden, is a chore, is a weight on my shoulders.

I tell you it is a joy – but it is work. It is like what Mary and Elizabeth are doing in our Gospel reading. (Just so you know, I am fully aware that I am going to be in so much trouble (and not just from Malinda) for comparing my time of sermon preparation and preaching to being pregnant and giving birth). I am fully aware that this is an analogy which will bring lumps of coal in my stocking in the days to come.

Elizabeth and Mary are both blessed to be with child through miraculous circumstances. Elizabeth was barren, had no children, and the Lord announces to her husband Zechariah that she will bear a son who will be named John. He was to come in the spirit of Elijah and prepare the way for the Lord. Even while in his mother's womb, his recognition of the presence of the Son of God causes him to leap for joy.

Elizabeth cries out, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" This is the proper response to the presence of the Son of God – even if He cannot be seen with the eyes; even if His voice cannot be heard at the moment. I tell people all the time that I have the best job in the world. Every day I get to come here and be in God's House. I have never had a bad day in God's House. Even when Christ cannot be seen here with the eyes; even when His Word is not being proclaimed at a particular moment in time, the proper response to being in the presence of God is unmitigated joy.

How much more should we be filled with joy and praise for God when Christ does speak to us in His Word and when Christ does come to us in His flesh and blood under the form of bread and wine in the mystery of the Sacrament?

Don't pity me because I have to be here a lot this week. The work which I have done in preparation for my sermons is nothing like the discomfort and labor of a woman bearing a child. And the joy I have in the privilege to being the one who gets to proclaim the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ is a boundless joy. The Son of God has come to be our Savior – and I get to tell you about it.

We have the privilege of coming together today as we anticipate the celebration of the birth of our Lord. Then on Monday night, the children have their program which allows them to tell the story of the birth of our Lord, and their message has the theme of each promise of the Messiah in the Old Testament adding more and more light to this dark fallen world until finally the Light of the World Himself, the Son of God, Jesus Christ enters and the word of the prophets is fulfilled, "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light.

Then later on Christmas Eve, we will gather in the darkness of that night and share the light of Christ symbolized in the passing of the flame from the Christ candle to each one of your candles, and greeting one another with the words, "Merry Christmas." And during that service, there is nowhere I would rather be than standing right here watching the flame of the Christ candle being passed and the seeing your faces illuminated one by one.

“What do you feel when we share the light of the Christ candle and wish one another a Merry Christmas? What do you feel as you look into the eyes of your spouse and your children as you share the joy of the Word of God and the light of salvation?” The emotion you feel as we do this each year is genuine and real, because the event we celebrate that night is genuine and real. The light of the Christ candle means so much to us because we are the children of light.

On Christmas Day, I am going to talk about how when I look back and ponder Christmas in my youth, more than anything, I remember being in God’s House. To this day, when people ask me if I am ready for Christmas, I tend to offer answers that puzzle and confuse the inquirer, because my answer will never have anything to do with the purchasing of gifts.

Leading up to today, when asked, “Are you ready for Christmas?” as we have seen throughout the Advent Season, the more appropriate question would be, “Are you ready for Christ to come?” Christmas will come and we will celebrate. And it is appropriate that we give gifts. Those small gifts remind us that our Father in heaven has given the ultimate gift.

Christ has come. The Son of God has come in the flesh. As John says, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” And He has taken the burden of your sin upon His shoulders and has carried it to the cross.

That is what we celebrate today and tomorrow, and the next day, and I pray this is true every time we gather together as the children of God. It is joyful work to proclaim the Good News of salvation here in God’s House. And we will do so until Christ comes once again. Amen.