

Christmas 1C 2009

Gen 3:15, Luke 2:25 & Galatians 4:4

Imagine you're 9 years old, there are only a few days left before Christmas, and there under the Christmas tree is a box that sits higher than the lowest branches, it is wrapped in brilliant red paper with a silver bow, but best of all it has your name written on it. What could it be? You're dying to know. So you give it a nudge, and then a squeeze, and then you rattle it just a bit to see if it makes any noise. You don't know what's inside but you are so curious. Then you notice that there's a little gap in the paper on the back of the box. You peer inside pulling the paper to get the optimal view. And then the paper tears, just enough to inform you that you are not going to find out what's in that box until you have permission. And only then will you be able to pull back the paper completely revealing the gift. All in the proper time. So for now, you wait.

Waiting. We all want to know what is coming. But all we get are hints, clues, glimpses. Nothing more than a suggestion. That's what it's like waiting for prophecy to be fulfilled. After Adam and Eve sinned, they were afraid and ashamed, but there was hope. That's when Eve over heard the first hint. God made a promise to the serpent, "the offspring of the woman will crush your head". God had made a promise earlier on when he said "on the day that you eat of this tree you will surely die." and Eve ignored it and it cost her dearly, but now the snake who tricked her was given a new promise. A human being, who was to come from Eve, was going to destroy Satan. Eve was longing for this promise to be fulfilled. This was the first hint that Christmas was coming and that the gift would be a child.

Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant. And for 9 months she watched and waited. And now here it was, a baby in her arms, could it be? Was this the one who was to reverse the curse and fix all that has gone wrong? In her joy Eve blurted out, "With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man." We know now that the time had not yet come. But more promises did come. Even though she had misunderstood God's promise, and even though that child, Cain was not the messiah, she was nonetheless holding the promises. She was right to trust God, for WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED. But still there was more waiting.

There were more clues and more hints, God was letting his people have a peek at what his ultimate plan would be. Later on he made this promise to Abraham, "I8 through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed." Even though Abraham was old, God continued the promise through his elderly wife Sara. So Eve's offspring was to destroy Satan and now Abraham's offspring was going to bless all people. With each clue, the gift not only became clearer, but it was even better than they could have guessed. Abraham pulled back just a bit of the paper and saw that this promise was not only for his descendants, but also for the whole world. But there was still more Watching and waiting to come. Abraham strained to see the day when this promise would be made complete.

After more waiting and longing, God's spoke again. The prophet Isaiah wrote these words, "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." Imagine the amazement of the Israelites, as Isaiah began to pull back the wrapping paper, The seed of eve, the offspring of Abraham, the child who is born, the son who is given, will be God himself. This surely blew their minds.

Each time God speaks he reveals more of his Gift. His promises become clearer and clearer. The image is slowly coming into focus. Like a puzzle all of the pieces are coming together creating a picture of God's plan. But still we watch and wait.

All these clues were revealed under the old covenant. But God didn't just tell a handful of people a few random details sprinkled here and there. No, the entire old covenant itself points to the new covenant. The priests, the temple, the sacrifices, the prophecies, the rituals the feasts and festival days, The entire Old Testament functions as Advent. Each person, all the stories, and every last detail point to one thing: the coming of Christmas.

It's as unmistakable as our Advent. Even unbelievers know what season it is. The cards and carols, the decorations, the wreaths, the candles, the manger scenes, the sales the shopping, the children's programs—they all point to one thing. The babe born in Bethlehem, the new covenant in Christ.

But then, we get an even sharper image of how the promise to Eve would be fulfilled, of how this new covenant would be put into effect. "He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed." All of the destruction that the serpent caused would be dealt with by God's gift of this child, his own Son, being killed. Surely when this part of the wrapping was pulled back it gave everyone pause. What at first sight appears to be anticlimactic, ends up being the greatest news of all.

He who knew no sin became sin for us. The innocent servant was to take the place of the criminals. God said that the outcome of this transaction would be that the guilty would be set free.

Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah . . . for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

But after all those clues....God was silent. The Israelites waited and waited and waited. Hundreds And Hundreds of years went by without any word.

And then the waiting came to an end. Galatians4:4 In the fullness of the time, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He would redeem those who were under the Law, that we would receive the adoption as sons.

The promised child was born of a woman, and she and her husband took him to the temple. And at the same time there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; Just as all of the Israelites had been waiting for century after century, Simeon was also looking for the consolation of Israel. ²⁶And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, Simeon took the baby into his arms, and blessed God, and said, ²⁹"Lord, Let your servant depart in peace, According to Your word; ³⁰For my eyes have seen Your salvation. The first and greatest Christmas gift.

33 years later, As roman guards, pounded spikes through feet of an ordinary looking political criminal, the serpent plunged its fangs through the foot of the son of Mary bruising his heel, nailing him to a tree. At the moment of Christ's death, all of human history was forever changed. For in the child of Mary, all of God's promises have been fulfilled. The seed of Eve, finally appeared, the son of Abraham blessed all nations, the new covenant was signed in blood. The punishment that was put upon him brought us peace.

No more hints, no more clues, no more waiting. The gift of Gift of God is no longer a mystery He has revealed it the package has been unwrapped for all the see. Behold your king has come to you. Jesus is your salvation. He is the offspring of Eve who has defeated the devil. He is the seed of Abraham who has blessed all people.

Eve was the mother of the seed who saved the world, Abraham was the father whose son blessed all nations, Isaiah was the voice that pointed us to the child who forgives us, Mary was the one through whom the word became flesh, and Simeon was the one who invites us to rejoice with him that it is safe to die in the savior's hands.

So, Where do we fit into all of this? What now? Who are we? We are the church and we have a job to do. We have been sent to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins.

We have the honor of delivering the gift of God. Far better than brown paper packages tied up with strings, or even ornately wrapped boxes, you and I have the joy of delivering something that actually brings peace. We deliver this gift to our friends, family neighbors and co-workers. The people who receive this Gift, don't have to guess what it is, squeezing and shaking the box, tugging at the paper squinting and peering through the holes. There is no guess work. You and I simply declare "the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, has taken away your sins." Death is not a problem for you. Jesus is your savior.

Eve wasn't entirely wrong. With the help of the LORD she has brought forth a man. And he has come to us. Through this man all nations have been blessed. By his wounds we have been healed. He will forgive our iniquity, and our sin he will remember no more." Let each one of us say "Lord Let your servant depart in peace."