

ADVENT CANDLE LIGHTING RITUAL #4

12/19/21

PASTOR: WHAT IF ... ADVENT ... IS BIGGER THAN WE DARE EVEN IMAGINE?

THE STORY OF GOD'S SON ENTERING OUR WORLD IS THE POINT OF OUR WORSHIP AND OUR CELEBRATION EACH ADVENT SEASON.

BECAUSE OF HIS GREAT LOVE, GOD MOVED INTO THE NEIGHBORHOOD AND WE NOW HAVE HOPE!

BUT OF COURSE, THE INCARNATION IS NOT SOMETHING TO BE CELEBRATED ONLY ONCE A YEAR.

THE STORY IS BIGGER THAN THAT ... AND AMAZINGLY, IT'S STILL BEING WRITTEN!

THE CLEAR TEACHING OF SCRIPTURE SHOWS THAT WE ARE BEING SENT INTO THIS BROKEN WORLD TO BOTH TELL THE GREAT STORY OF GOD'S LOVE ... AND ... TO LIVE IT!

WE ARE CHALLENGED TO PRESENT OUR LIVES AS A PICTURE OF OUR SAVIOR ... TO OTHERS!

AS THE APOSTLE PAUL REMINDS US ... WE ARE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE LIBERATING KING!

CONSEQUENTLY, BY TRUSTING IN GOD'S SPIRIT WHO LIVES IN US, WE CAN BE GOD'S PRESENCE AND GOD'S BEAUTY AND GOD'S POWER AND GOD'S GLORY TO A HURTING WORLD ... BEING ALL THAT IN BIGGER WAYS THAN WE EVER THOUGHT POSSIBLE!

PERHAPS YOU HAVE TROUBLE SEEING AND BELIEVING IT IN THIS DAY AND AGE, BUT GOD IS STILL MOVING INTO THE NEIGHBORHOOD!

MOST CERTAINLY, THE INCARNATION IS NOT ONLY ABOUT JUST ONE GLORIOUS MOMENT IN HISTORY WHEN JESUS WALKED THIS EARTH ... NO ... IT'S ALSO ABOUT A GOD WHO STILL WANTS TO MAKE AN APPEARANCE IN THIS WORLD THROUGH HIS COMMITTED FOLLOWERS!

CAN WE EVEN BEGIN TO IMAGINE WHAT WOULD HAPPEN THEN, IF THE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS AROUND THE WORLD STARTED TO LIVE OUT THE TRUTH THAT GOD IS STILL MOVING INTO THE NEIGHBORHOOD!

THE ADVENT OF CHRIST IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO DECLARE TO THE WORLD THAT GOD HAS GIVEN US THE GREATEST GIFT!

SO LET US CONTINUE TO PROCLAIM THE PROPHECY ... THE FULFILLMENT ... AND THE PROMISE OF THAT AMAZING GIFT!

CANDLE LIGHTER #1: PROPHECY!

CANDLE LIGHTER #2: BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER, AND HE WILL PREPARE THE WAY BEFORE ME.

AND THE LORD WHOM YOU SEEK, WILL SUDDENLY COME TO HIS TEMPLE, EVEN THE MESSENGER OF THE COVENANT, IN WHOM YOU DELIGHT.

BEHOLD, HE IS COMING, SAYS THE LORD OF HOSTS.

BUT WHO CAN ENDURE THE DAY OF HIS COMING?

AND WHO CAN STAND WHEN HE APPEARS?

FOR HE IS LIKE A REFINER'S FIRE AND LIKE LAUNDERER'S SOAP.

HE WILL SIT AS A REFINER AND PURIFIER OF SILVER; HE WILL PURIFY THE SONS OF LEVI, AND PURGE THEM AS GOLD AND SILVER, THAT THEY MAY OFFER TO THE LORD AN OFFERING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS.

– MALACHI 3:1-3

PASTOR: IN THIS AGE OF TELEVISION, RADIO, THE INTERNET, SOCIAL MEDIA, AND TEXTING, HUMAN MESSENGERS ARE RARELY REQUIRED TO SHARE ANY BREAKING OR IMPORTANT NEWS. BUT OLD TESTAMENT EVENTS OCCURRED LONG BEFORE THESE TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY WONDERS, AND MALACHI, WHOSE NAME MEANS "MY MESSENGER", DELIVERED GOD'S PLEA TO HIS PEOPLE ... TURN BACK TO ME!

THE DRAMATIC WORDING ... BEHOLD, HE IS COMING ... IMPLIED THAT THE ARRIVAL WOULD BE IMMEDIATE, BUT HIS COMING WOULD NOT ACTUALLY TAKE PLACE FOR ANOTHER FOUR HUNDRED YEARS!

SPEAKING ON BEHALF OF GOD THE FATHER, MALACHI PROPHESED ABOUT THE COMING OF THE LORD JESUS. THE HUMAN MESSENGER WHOM MALACHI MENTIONED IS ... JOHN THE BAPTIST ... AND IN THIS PROPHECY ... "THE LORD" ... AND ... "THE MESSENGER OF THE COVENANT" ... REFER TO JESUS.

SO ... TO WHOM WILL YOU, LIKE MALACHI, BE A MESSENGER THIS HOLY SEASON, AND TO WHOM WILL YOU SHARE THE NEWS THAT ... JESUS CHRIST IS BORN!

CANDLE LIGHTER #2: FULFILLMENT!

CANDLE LIGHTER #1: WHEN THE MESSENGERS OF JOHN HAD DEPARTED, JESUS BEGAN TO SPEAK TO THE MULTITUDES CONCERNING JOHN ...

WHAT DID YOU GO OUT INTO THE WILDERNESS TO SEE? ... A REED SHAKEN BY THE WIND?
BUT WHAT DID YOU GO OUT TO SEE? ... A MAN CLOTHED IN SOFT GARMENTS?

INDEED, THOSE WHO ARE GORGEOUSLY APPARELED AND LIVE IN LUXURY ARE IN KINGS' COURTS.

BUT WHAT DID YOU GO OUT TO SEE? A PROPHET?

YES, I SAY TO YOU, AND MORE THAN A PROPHET.

THIS IS HE OF WHOM IT IS WRITTEN ...

BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER BEFORE YOUR FACE ... WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU?

FOR I SAY TO YOU, AMONG THOSE BORN OF WOMEN, THERE IS NOT A GREATER PROPHET THAN JOHN THE BAPTIST ... BUT HE WHO IS LEAST IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS GREATER THAN HE.
– LUKE 7:24-28

PASTOR: IN JESUS' DAY, A KING'S ENVOYS WOULD GO BEFORE HIM, MAKING THE WAY SAFE AND ANNOUNCING HIS COMING.

BEFORE JESUS BEGAN HIS PUBLIC MINISTRY, JOHN THE BAPTIST WENT BEFORE HIM, ANNOUNCING HIS COMING WITH A CALL TO REPENTANCE AND BAPTISM.

AFTER FOUR HUNDRED YEARS OF GOD'S SILENCE ... OF NO PROPHETIC VOICE SPEAKING ON THE LORD'S BEHALF ... THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL WERE EAGER TO HEAR GOD'S MESSAGE SPOKEN BY JOHN, THE SELF-PROCLAIMED FULFILLMENT OF MALACHI'S PROPHECY.

LIKE JOHN, YOU AND I CAN TESTIFY TO THE COMING OF JESUS ... HIS FIRST COMING TO DEFEAT SIN AND DEATH, AND HIS SECOND COMING TO ESTABLISH HIS ETERNAL KINGDOM.

YOU AND I CAN BE MESSENGERS OF THIS TRUTH ... OF THIS GOOD NEWS ... OR GOSPEL.

AS SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI SAID TO BELIEVERS ... PREACH THE GOSPEL AT ALL TIMES. IF NECESSARY, USE WORDS.

CANDLE LIGHTER #1: PROMISE!

CANDLE LIGHTER #2: THERE ARE DIVERSITIES OF GIFTS, BUT THE SAME SPIRIT.

THERE ARE DIFFERENCES OF MINISTRIES, BUT THE SAME LORD.

AND THERE ARE DIVERSITIES OF ACTIVITIES, BUT IT IS THE SAME GOD WHO WORKS ALL IN ALL.

BUT THE MANIFESTATION OF THE SPIRIT IS GIVEN TO EACH ONE FOR THE PROFIT OF ALL – FOR TO ONE IS GIVEN THE WORD OF WISDOM THROUGH THE SPIRIT ... TO ANOTHER THE WORD OF KNOWLEDGE THROUGH THE SAME SPIRIT ... TO ANOTHER FAITH BY THE SAME SPIRIT ... TO ANOTHER GIFTS OF HEALINGS BY THE SAME SPIRIT ... TO ANOTHER THE WORKING OF MIRACLES ... TO ANOTHER PROPHECY ... TO ANOTHER DISCERNING OF SPIRITS ... TO ANOTHER DIFFERENT KINDS OF TONGUES ... TO ANOTHER THE INTERPRETATION OF TONGUES.

BUT ONE AND THE SAME SPIRIT WORKS ALL THESE THINGS, DISTRIBUTING TO EACH ONE INDIVIDUALLY AS HE WILLS. – 1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-11

PASTOR: JOHN THE BAPTIST OBEYED GOD’S CALLING TO BE THE MESSENGER WHO LED PEOPLE TO REPENT AND BE BAPTIZED!

OBEDIENT TO THIS CALLING, JOHN WAS FAITHFUL TO THE POINT OF LOSING HIS LIFE RATHER THAN BACKING DOWN.

TO GOD BE THE GLORY!

GOD IS STILL GLORIFIED WHEN, LIKE JOHN THE BAPTIST, HIS PEOPLE USE THEIR SPIRITUAL GIFTS “FOR THE PROFIT OF ALL”.

GOD WORKS IN EACH INDIVIDUAL TO BENEFIT THE ENTIRE BODY.

AND ALTHOUGH DIFFERENT TASKS WITHIN THE BODY CALL FOR DIFFERENT GIFTS, ALL TASKS AND GIFTS HAVE THE SAME GOAL.

AT THE TIME WHEN EACH OF US COMES TO FAITH IN CHRIST, WE RECEIVE AT LEAST ONE GIFT – NOT MERELY TO BUILD UP OUR OWN LIFE OF FAITH, BUT ALSO TO STRENGTHEN UNITY IN THE CHURCH.

SO LET’S EACH ONE OF US ASK GOD TODAY TO SHOW US THE GIFTS AND TALENTS GIVEN TO US BY HIS SPIRIT.

AND THEN ... LET US USE THOSE GIFTS IN THE BODY OF CHRIST AS GOD DIRECTS!