

Message #1076
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"EXPECT BIRTH PAINS"
{ "What to Expect When You're Expecting" --I }
{ Hebrews 12: 1-35 }
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INTRODUCTION

Today is the first Sunday in Advent. This is the season that both ends and begins the Christian calendar.

...frequently our focus is on the first Advent
...Jesus coming as a baby born in Bethlehem
...this year during Advent our focus will be upon the second Advent--the promised return of our Lord

One word is the theme for Advent this year: "EXPECTING."
"What to Expect When You're Expecting" is the title of a popular handbook written by Arlene Eisenberg for parents expecting the birth of a child.
...I've borrowed the title for the Advent messages
...we will draw parallels between a couple awaiting the birth of their child between the first and second advent of Christ.

ANTICIPATION OF THE SEASON

The Advent-Christmas Season is an exciting time for all the family.
...children especially anxiously await the day when they can open their gifts
...but, I confess, the kid inside me enjoys doing it too
...our grandchildren examine every package under the tree that bears their name
...sometimes they'll pick one up and grin as if they know what's inside
...they have even been known to shake a box or two
Advent is the Season of anticipation. Just like parents expecting the birth of a child go through nine months of eager anticipation...and sometimes nine months of mixed emotions...

...what can they expect?
...will it be a boy or girl?
...will the pregnancy go well?
...will the mother feel sick?
...will there be complications?
...will the baby be healthy?

The Jews Lived in Anticipation of a Coming Messiah

Hundreds of years before Jesus' birth prophets foretold of a coming Savior. Isaiah wrote--

"The Lord Himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and will call Him Immanuel." {7:14}

"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. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over His kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this." {9:6-7}

"A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him--the Spirit of wisdom and of

understanding, the Spirit of counsel and power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord--and he will delight in the fear of the Lord...with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth...righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist...in that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious. In that day the Lord will reach out His hand a second time to reclaim the remnant that is left of His people...He will raise a banner for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel; He will assemble the scattered people of Judah from the four quarters of the earth..." {From Isaiah 11}

Little wonder that when the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary with the news that she was blessed by God and that she would give birth to a son whose name would be "Jesus" that she responded so positively. Her only concern was that she was yet a "virgin"...yet the angel assured her that "...nothing is impossible with God...!" Her response was quite simply: "I am the Lord's servant...may it be to me as you have said...!"

...she lived in expectation of the coming Messiah

...as had her parents

...and many generations before her

...they were familiar with the words of the prophets promising this coming Messiah

The Prophet Isaiah was quoted in Matthew 1 when the angel appeared to Joseph and assured him that the child Mary was bearing was indeed the One whom God had promised hundreds of years before...the one who would "save His people from their sins...Immanuel!"

They watched for a sign with great anticipation--

...God gave one through Mary, the virgin

...God gave one to Joseph

...the angels gave one to the Shepherds

Christ came--the "logos" {word} became flesh...

"...being in very nature God...made Himself nothing...taking the very nature of a servant...made in human likeness...found in appearance as a man..He became obedient to death--even death on a cross...and God exalted Him...!" {Philippians 2}

That was Jesus' first advent...

...God chose to participate in our dilemma by becoming concrete in Jesus, the Christ!

...He reconciled us to Himself through the cross

...and...by the redemption of the cross we are brought into the experience of God's grace

And now...

WE LIVE IN EXPECTATION OF JESUS' SECOND ADVENT

When discussing Jesus' second coming we must exercise caution.

...Jesus made it clear that He didn't know the day or the hour of His return

...that brings into judgment all date-setters.

Today we are deluged with people who want to "sell tickets to the Battle of Armageddon" rather than doing our best to be doing His work... and sharing the good news of God's grace...until Jesus returns!

"I must work the works of Him who sent me while it is yet day, for the night cometh when no man can work!"

Beware of those who get rich on prophetic date-setting...and just be sure you're prepared and ready for His return. Three key words for believers as we await Christ's return...

...preparedness

...watchfulness

...faithfulness.

I'm also aware of the hermeneutical problems in studying the second advent of Jesus because of various eschatological views that affect our reading: premillennial, amillennial, postmillennial, transmillennial, etc.

But, bearing this in mind--in the words of the Apostle Paul... "We hope for what we do not yet have...and...we wait for it patiently!" {Romans 8:25}

Therefore, we expect a literal fulfillment some day of the promises of Jesus' ultimate return...His second advent...just as those Jews of the first century...being prepared while watching faithfully.

"WHAT WILL BE THE SIGN...?"

Jesus had pronounced judgment of religious leaders...

...He grieved over Jerusalem

...He foretold His triumphal entry

But then He departed Jerusalem with His disciples leaving behind the splendor of the great temple.

"Jesus left the temple and was walking away when His disciples came up to Him to call His attention to its buildings. 'Do you see all these things?' He asked. 'I tell you the truth not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down!'"

This ancient temple was one of the outstanding sights in the ancient world.

...built of white marble and plated with gold

...it shone in the sunlight so that a person could hardly look at it

...some of the supporting stones were 40 feet in length and weighed one hundred tons {the cutting and

moving of these colossal stones remain a mystery of ancient engineering}

These disciples--several of whom were fishermen from Galilee were duly amazed and impressed by the majesty of the temple...and then Jesus predicts that it will be completely destroyed.

Their natural response was: "When?" In fact, they asked several questions...

"Tell us when will this happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?"

And Jesus' response was: "Expect birth pains!"

Just as a woman experiences pain in childbirth, so too we can expect painful times before Jesus' promised return.

Jesus warned His disciples to be careful lest they be deceived...He did not want the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 to be confused with His ultimate personal return.

He wanted the disciples not to mistake cataclysmic events such as wars, earthquakes, and famines as indications that the end of the age was upon them.

Such happenings are but "the beginning of birth pains!"

Many things will follow...

...catastrophes will come...but they will do not necessarily announce the end of history

...the church will undergo great persecution

...pressures will be so great for brother to betray brother

...there will be defection from the church

...hearts of the faithful will grow cold.

But, the sign they sought is summed up in just one phrase...

"This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and THEN THE END WILL COME!"

That's why He gave them...and us...the Great Commission...to "Go and make disciples of ALL nations...!"

CONCLUSION

Be prepared...be watchful...be faithful.

- ...there will be disasters
- ...false prophets and messiahs
- ...wars and rumors of war
- ...famine
- ...natural disasters
- ...persecution
- ...people turning away from the faith
- ...the love of many growing cold

But, mind you, these are merely the "beginning of birth pains..." There MUST be a period of labor before the actual event.

A woman who feels birth pains is keenly aware that soon the baby will arrive.

So, too, as we see these "birth pains" around us we should be assured that Christ WILL indeed come again.

As believers we are called to persevere in the midst of what happens around us...to remain...

- ...faithful
- ...watchful
- ...prepared

My dad's favorite song was: "Some Golden Daybreak, Jesus will come!"

- ...we don't know when
- ...we cannot predict when
- ...we can merely be prepared