

## Advent and God's Family

### Advance Announcement

Join us on the first Friday in December to hear Susan Morehouse introduce the Christmas season with her harp and Dr. Bill Morehouse speak on "Advent and God's Family."

Are you looking forward to celebrating the nativity of our Lord during Advent this year? The birth, life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus are amazing realities that are always wonderful to contemplate anew. Join us as Dr. Morehouse and his wife Susan take us on a personal, historical, and Biblical tour of what Advent can mean to us, not only now but for the rest of our lives and even beyond.

God reminds us through the apostle John in Revelation 21.3, "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.'"

Dr. Bill will give testimony about how God entered, transformed, and continues to illuminate his heart from the inside out and how each of us can draw even more encouragement from our shared faith in Christ and His finished work. Emmanuel has come; He is with us; and He is coming again! Hallelujah!

### Dr. Bill's Message

Thank you for inviting Susan and me to join and celebrate with you on this first day of Advent. We've been looking forward to coming and are glad to be here! I'm going to share a brief message with you today about Advent, and Susan will be inviting God to join us with a special piece on her harp.

As we all know, **Advent** means "coming" and carries with it a sense of hopeful, patient anticipation. This applies to our coming, your coming, babies coming, events coming, and our own mortality coming. We set aside the **season of Advent** in the Christian calendar to commemorate and anticipate the "coming of Christ" from three perspectives:

1. His physical **nativity** in Bethlehem (He became incarnate and came to us as a baby, then grew into full manhood in our midst as God with Us),
  2. His coming into our lives by faith (His revelation of Himself to us, inviting our personal **reception** of Him into our hearts by faith. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock"), and
  3. His **Second Coming** (The promised time when He will come again to gather His saints and establish His perfect Kingdom on this earth).
- **Let's go further** into each of these:
1. **Nativity** is the occasion of a person's birth. We all can freely confess that we were born – that's how we got here! The very process and event of being born implies the coming together of a father and mother who will hopefully stay together to raise their newborn infant into maturity. Our human mothers and fathers were, as we are, imperfect, limited, and mortal. All of us have stories to remember and tell, and so do our families! My parents married and I was conceived in 1942 when they were both 21 years old. My, how old and grown up they were! Shortly

afterwards, nearly 6 months before I was born, my Dad was drafted into the horrors of WWII and was, by God's grace, returned to us 3 years later. Along with everyone else we are born as children of Adam and Eve into fascinating but fallen human cultures with differing customs, histories, languages, politics, and religious beliefs. Let's all take a moment to give thanks for the joys and sorrows of being part of very human families.

Jesus was born, just like we were, as a human being into a human family but probably in somewhat more unusual circumstances than ours. His culture was Jewish and his divided country was under foreign occupation. His mother Mary was an unmarried teenager at the time of her divine conception. Her fiancé Joseph had serious misgivings about continuing the relationship until God reassured him. Afterwards Joseph was amazingly faithful. We all know the story about how, when Mary's pregnancy was advanced, they were compelled to walk 90 miles overland from Nazareth to Bethlehem with Mary riding on a donkey. Something big was going on in Bethlehem and all the accommodations were full, so they stayed in a stable. Since almost everyone involved was Jewish, what could that "something big" have been?

Let's take a moment to look into this more closely. Although "Christmas" (the Catholic Mass that celebrates the birth of Christ) has been customarily celebrated on December 25<sup>th</sup> since at least the 4<sup>th</sup> Century under Constantine, extensive Biblical research indicates that His birth probably occurred in the fall on Tishri 15 in the Jewish calendar, the first day of The Feast of Tabernacles (*Sukkot*), with the stable serving as a suitable temporary "booth" or tabernacle for them to stay in. Jesus was then circumcised on *Shemini Atzeret* (Hebrew for "Eighth Day of the Solemn Assembly"), AKA *Simchat Torah* (Hebrew for "Rejoicing of the Torah"). Two months ago on October 7<sup>th</sup> this holy day celebration in Israel was interrupted by a horribly deadly surprise attack on Israeli civilians by the terrorist group Hamas. Was their timing a coincidence on the calendar or was it by design? Who chose that date, and why?

Back at the time of Jesus' nativity, although the Israelites – the followers of Yahweh – had been anticipating the coming of their Messiah for centuries, Jesus wasn't the kind of Messiah most of them were expecting. They were waiting, and still are, for a conquering hero to liberate them from their captors and enemies. Instead, Jesus' incarnation, birth, life, ministry, death, and resurrection ushered in His Kingdom with demonstrations of the Father's love that lead to conviction, repentance, and salvation both now and in the age to come. He became our Passover Lamb, sacrificed that we might receive Him and His gifts of abundant life here and eternal life after we die. Why do we still hold back?

- **Let's meditate together** on God's gift to us as Susan plays "*What Child is This?*" on her harp.

**1 What Child is this**, who, laid to rest,  
On Mary's lap is sleeping?  
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,  
While shepherds watch are keeping?

**Chorus:**

This, this is Christ, the King,  
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing:  
Haste, haste to bring Him laud,  
The Babe, the Son of Mary!

**2** Why lies He in such mean estate,  
Where ox and ass are feeding?  
Good Christian, fear: for sinners here  
The silent Word is pleading.

**[Chorus]**

**3** So bring Him incense, gold, and myrrh,  
Come, peasant, king to own Him.  
The King of kings salvation brings;  
Let loving hearts enthrone Him.

**[Chorus]**

2. Our **Reception** of Jesus as our Lord and Savior is the second Advent we're going to talk about. This is what our hearts are yearning for – an unmistakable spiritual event that goes beyond cultural knowledge into a personal revelation of our eternal, loving, and merciful God being with us and for us. He calls us out of the corruptions of this world into His Kingdom with His Father's offer to adopt us as His children – born again from above by water and the Spirit, transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of Light, raised and transformed from self-willed fallen human beings into His yielded children. It is then that we truly become part of God's Family. Before that it's something we've heard about in church, but after our inner conversion we can really take on our true identity in Him as children of God.

I was brought up in a number of churches, mostly Episcopal, Methodist, and Presbyterian. Dedicated and sprinkled as an infant, confirmed as a youth, proud of my abilities and leadership, and still sinful to the core. As my sins accumulated through college, training, and out into medical practice I became more and more troubled and ended up crying out to God, "If You're there, I need to know it!" Guess what? He answered! Within one week 6 different people spontaneously shared Christ with me – not Allah or Buddha or Krishna, but Jesus. I was invited to a prayer group, experienced Christ personally, and gave my life to Him. Some gifted and wise leaders then asked if I wanted to experience the fullness of God's Holy Spirit, and by His grace I said "yes" and received from the Father His gracious presence and power through the laying on of hands. It was and continues to be a life-changing and undeniable experience of God's grace, forgiveness, love, and empowerment. This is what Jesus was talking about when He told Nicodemus that he needed to be "born again" (or "born from above"). And this is the infilling power of the Holy Spirit that Jesus, after His resurrection, encouraged His disciples to wait for during the celebration of *Shavuot* (the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost). We need to redo our experience of being fathered all over again, this time by our perfect Heavenly Father, to be forgiven, cleansed, and made into new creatures in Him by the power of His Holy Spirit. His process of redemption is open to all who knock, seek, and ask. What about you? Have traded your old mortal life in for Him to replace with His new eternal life?

3. **Second Coming.** If you've done much New Testament Bible study, you've probably come across the teaching that Jesus is coming back to earth again. You may even have heard it during the celebration of the Lord's Supper when many Christians recite the "Memorial Acclamation" together that goes like this, "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again." One place in the Bible to look for confirmation is in the first chapter of Acts. Once you see the promise, you'll begin to see it over and over again throughout the Scriptures, especially in the prophetic writings of the OT and those of almost every writer in the NT. Yes, Jesus is coming back again! *Hallelujah! Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus! We and our world are a mess and we need you; we love you. Come quickly, Lord Jesus!*

Are you getting eager – getting ready? Well, when is He coming? There are two answers: He will come for each one of us at the moment of our death, which actually could be anytime, even soon. [Tell about recent sudden passing of Ken Soderlund.]

And He will come for all who are still alive at the end of the age, which might not be as far off as one might think. How can we bypass avoidance and prepare with an increasing sense of hope and expectation? We can read His Word, especially what Jesus Himself and His apostles and prophets said. We can pray for insight. And we can gather together to study and encourage one another "so much more as we see the Day of His return drawing near."

- **Let's ask the Lord** to fill us with His joy and strength as Susan plays an ancient hymn of the incarnation *"Of the Father's Love Begotten"* written by Aurelius Clemens Prudentius in 400 AD.

**1 Of the Father's love begotten,**  
ere the worlds began to be,  
He is Alpha and Omega,  
He the Source, the Ending He,  
of the things that are, that have been,  
and that future years shall see  
evermore and evermore!

**2** By his word was all created;  
he commanded and 'twas done;  
earth and sky and boundless ocean,  
universe of three in one,  
all that sees the moon's soft radiance,  
all that breathes beneath the sun,  
evermore and evermore.

**3** He assumed this mortal body,  
frail and feeble, doomed to die,  
that the race from dust created  
might not perish utterly,  
which the dreadful Law had sentenced  
in the depths of hell to lie,  
evermore and evermore.

**4** O that birth forever blessed,  
when a virgin, full of grace,  
by the Holy Ghost conceiving,  
bore the Savior of our race;  
and the Babe, the world's Redeemer,  
first revealed His sacred face,  
evermore and evermore!

**5** This is He whom heav'n-taught singers  
sang of old with one accord,  
whom the Scriptures of the prophets  
promised in their faithful word;  
now He shines, the long-expected;  
let creation praise its Lord,  
evermore and evermore!

**6** O ye heights of heav'n, adore Him;  
angel hosts, His praises sing:  
pow'rs, dominions, bow before Him  
and extol our God and King;  
let no tongue on earth be silent,  
every voice in concert ring,  
evermore and evermore!

- **Let's pray together** I'll offer a prayer on our behalf, and then you can all join in with me in the familiar words that Jesus taught us in His Lord's Prayer . . .

*"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your Name. Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one, for Yours is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen!"*

- **We've brought** several copies of Susan's harp CDs and some small books that I've written on the back table for any who are interested, either for themselves or for others as gifts. You might be most drawn to Susan's Christmas album and to my guide to the Biblical Holidays as well as any of her other albums or the Celebrate Salvation group studies I've published on foundational discipleship and growing into maturity in Christ. God bless you all!