

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT ANGEL'S SUNDAY

Today is the final Sunday of Advent. On the first Sunday, we looked at prophecies concerning Jesus' birth, life, death and second coming. On the second Sunday we talked about Jesus as our King and as our Bread of Life. Last Sunday we looked at Jesus as the Lamb of God and the Good Shepherd of God's sheep. Today is Angel Sunday, and part of our time today will focus on the role of angels throughout biblical history, and especially in relation to Jesus.

As we have repeatedly said over the past three Sundays, Advent is a celebration of all that God has done – in and through His son Jesus Christ, and how He did it. Today I want to remind you that Advent is also a time to ponder our own view of God, our allegiance to God, our adoration of God, and our humble gratitude to God. So let us bring together celebration and contemplation, rejoicing and pondering. And though you are familiar with the scriptures we will be reading and the songs we will be singing, I urge you to listen and sing with a thoughtful, open heart that will allow the Holy Spirit to refresh known truths and speak new truths that will draw you closer to God, build your faith in God, and grow your love of God.

One of the great truths about our God is that He hates sin – even to the point of pouring out His wrath upon sinners. He is the One who decided that the penalty for sin would be eternal suffering of the worst sort – which most of humanity thinks is the eternal flames of hell. But we who know God personally, know that the worst suffering is to be separated from Him and all the good that permeates His kingdom, for eternity. Yet at the same time, our God is the One who came to earth in human form as Immanuel, as the Son of God, as the son of man, as the Living Word, as the Bread of Life, as the Lamb of God, and as the Light of the World. And He came to earth in order to step into our place and pay the penalty for sin that we owe, so that we can be born anew, reconciled to God with full rights of sonship, and enjoy personal and intimate fellowship with – not just for the duration of this life, but for eternity.

In other words, our God hates sin, yet loves sinners and has made a way for us sinners to be reconciled to Him and live with Him forever. Our God condemns

sinner to eternal damnation, yet He came to earth as a man, lived a perfect life, and paid the penalty for sin that we owe by dying in our place. And He did this so that we could be freed from the penalty of sin in order to live with Him forever. What we see in this is the reality of God's impartial justice mixed with the power, the wisdom, and the mercy of His love.

HYMN

ALL I HAVE IS CHRIST

PRAYER:

Light Prophecy Candle

Isaiah 53:1-6 (#1) [in two parts]

Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? [2] For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. [3] He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face, He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. [4] Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. [5] But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. [6] All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him.

Light Bethlehem Candle

John 6:27-33 (#1) [in two parts]

"Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval." [28] Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" [29] Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." [30] So they asked him, "What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? [31] Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" [32] Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. [33] For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

Light Shepherd's Candle

Revelation 5:12 (#1),

Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!

Light Angel's Candle

Luke 2:8-14 (#1)

In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. [9] And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. [10] But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; [11] for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. [12] This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." [13] And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, [14] "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased."

HYMN #168

COME THOU LONG EXPECTED JESUS

In **John 17:1-3 (#2)**, John records one of Jesus' prayers in which He said: "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. [And] this is eternal life, that they may **know** You, the only true God, and [**know**] Jesus Christ whom You have sent."

Paul, in contrasting his life before salvation to his life after salvation said in **Philippians 3:7-8a (#2)**, "But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. **More than that**, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of **knowing** Christ Jesus my Lord."

Without question, Paul counted his salvation through faith in Jesus Christ a marvelous treasure. And yet, he counted knowing Jesus Christ – that is, walking with and engaging in personal, intimate fellowship with Jesus Christ a greater treasure.

Many years before Paul, God, speaking through the prophet **Jeremiah** said (**#2**), "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises

lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,” declares the LORD (**Jeremiah 9:23-24**).

The more we trust God, the more we are motivated to pursue godliness in all areas of life in hopes of becoming holy like He is holy. The more we pursue godliness in all areas of life, the more we experience God’s lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness. The more we experience God’s lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness, the more we become convinced that God is perfectly good. The more we become convinced that God is perfectly good, the more we believe that we are perfectly safe in His hands. And the more we believe that we are perfectly safe in His hands, the more we rest in Him, pursue intimate fellowship with Him, gain an inward peace that remains steadfast in spite of the circumstances, and discover a never before known, or equaled, joy. This is the abundant life Jesus came to give us.

Therefore, God came to earth as Immanuel, as the Son of God, as the Lamb of God, as the Savior of the world, as the Living Word, as the Bread of Life, and as the Way, the Truth, and the Life, in order to save us from our sin, forgive us for our rebellion against Himself, reconcile us to Himself, and teach us to live godly lives – WHY? – so we can draw near to Him, and in drawing near enter in to a personal, loving, and intimate relationship with Him for eternity.

HYMN

I AM HIS AND HE IS MINE

JOHN 1:1-14 (#3) [in three parts]

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light. There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

HYMN

JOY TO THE WORLD (Vs 1,2,4)

Isaiah 9:6 (#4)

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

God promised the Israelites that He would one day come to earth in human form so that we would not fear drawing near to Him and could then get to know Him in ways we humans – with all our limitations and weaknesses – can comprehend and understand and experience. This is a marvelous gift from God.

Imagine if the only way you saw God was as a cloud during the day and a pillar of fire at night, or as a cloud on a mountain top with lightning flashing, thunder pealing, and the ground shaking, or as an angel, or as the brightness of the Shekinah radiating off the gold-plated walls of the Holy of Holies?

What if the only description of God that you heard was that He is the creator of the universe and a consuming fire; or that He is a compassionate father whose wrath fills people with fear; or that He is an impartial judge who will judge everyone, including you, according to their deeds. Though such labels are accurate, they present us with a picture that makes it hard to feel safe in the presence of God or have confidence that God loves us. True, many of the Psalms describe God as compassionate, merciful, forgiving, patient, and loving, but Jesus gives us a living example of all those words in ways that speak to our humanity and invite us to climb up on His lap and snuggle into His loving arms.

Which brings us back to this portion of scripture in Isaiah where he uses four labels to describe Jesus.

- (1) Jesus is our **Wonderful Counselor** – that is, Jesus is our amazing, supernatural, all-wise counselor. And if we will seek His wisdom, listen to His advice, and live according to what He says, we will be transformed, and we will grow in Christ-likeness, and we will experience an inner peace and joy that outward circumstances cannot diminish or take away, and we will find in a tangible yet indescribable way what we have entered into a relationship with Him that is personal and intimate.
- (2) Jesus is our **Mighty God** – that is, Jesus is our all-powerful God in human form. He possesses God's strength. Therefore, if we will turn to Him for strength and rely on Him for the power to live life, overcome sin, break free from old habits, overcome our human frailties, put on Christ-

likeness, be content with what we have, and endure trials and suffering, we will experience the truth of Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”

- (3) Jesus is our **Everlasting Father** – Everyone has a father, but no father lives forever, and no father is perfectly good. Yet Jesus is an eternal father who is perfectly good, and who loves us with everlasting love. What a joy and comfort it is to lie in His arms, pillowed on His loving breast, hearing Him whisper in our ear, “You are mine and I am yours.”
- (4) Jesus is our **Prince of Peace** – and it is by His doing that we have peace with God **and** that we have the peace of God welling up inside us. To have peace with God is an unsurpassed gift in light of God’s wrath against sin and sinners. And to have the peace of God welling up within is a marvelous gift in that it enables us to remain peaceful in spite of the turmoil, conflict, and troubles surrounding us.

We read in **Micah 5:2, 3-5 (#4)**, But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah (*EF ruh thuh*), too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity. [4] And He will arise and shepherd His flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord His God. And they will remain, because at that time He will be great to the ends of the earth. [5] This One will be our peace.

This one, that is, this Jesus, is our peace! I think the words from the hymn “PEACE, PERFECT PEACE,” provide a wonderful summary of the peace we find in Jesus in the midst of everyday life.

READ: Peace, Perfect Peace

(#4) Peace, perfect peace, in this dark world of sin?
The blood of Jesus whispers peace within.

Peace, perfect peace, by thronging duties pressed?
To do the will of Jesus, this is rest.

Peace, perfect peace, with sorrow surging round?
In Jesus's presence nought but calm is found.

Peace, perfect peace, with loved ones far away?
In Jesus's keeping we are safe, and they.

Peace, perfect peace, our future all unknown?
Jesus we know, and He is on the throne.

Peace, perfect peace, death shadowing us and ours?
Jesus has vanquished death and all its powers.

It is enough: earth's struggles soon shall cease,
and Jesus call us to heaven's perfect peace.

HYMN #178

O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM

THE INVOLVEMENT OF ANGEL'S

Angels are supernatural beings created by God to do His bidding – in heaven and on earth – and that includes being His messengers to people like you and me. Other examples of angel activity include worshiping and praising God, bringing needed provisions to God's people, protecting God's people, destroying the enemies of God's people, strengthening and encouraging God's people, bringing answers to prayer, and caring for believers at their time of death.

Angels are prominent in both the Old and New Testaments, especially in relation to new beginnings and judgment. In fact, angels are referred to in **34** of the **66** books of the Bible. They are mentioned **108** times in the Old Testament and **165** times in the New Testament. (C. Fred Dickason, *Angels: Elect and Evil*, Moody, 1975, p. 13.)

When angels appear on earth, they usually have the appearance of an adult male, which is why they are sometimes described as men. In the New Testament, they are often reported to be wearing white (**Acts 1:10**; **Mark 16:15**), garments white as snow (**Matthew 28:3**), dazzling apparel (**Luke 24:4**), or shining garments (**Acts 10:30**).

Only two angels are specifically named in Scripture. The archangel Michael is mentioned four times – Jude 9, Revelation 12, and Daniel 10. Gabriel, the only other angel named in the Bible is mentioned in Daniel 8 & 9, and in Luke 1 as God's messenger to Zechariah and Mary.

Genesis 3:24 is the first recorded appearance of an angel on the earth. In that verse we read that after sending Adam and Eve out of the Garden, God placed an angel with a flaming sword at the entrance to the Garden to guard against anyone re-entering the Garden and eating from the Tree of Life.

When Hagar – the mother of Ishmael – was running away from Sarah, God sent an angel to call her back, and tell her of His promise concerning the child she was bearing. An angel of God appeared to Abraham several times – including the time he had taken Isaac to the mountain to sacrifice him to God. Two angels visited Lot to exhort him and his family to flee Sodom before they carried out the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Jacob was visited by an angel in a dream. It was an angel – who on the first night of Passover – brought death to the first born son in every home in Egypt which had no blood over the door and on the door posts. God promised Israel that He would send an angel before them for the purpose of bringing them into the Promised Land and securing it as their homeland. An angel destroyed the Assyrian army as they prepared to defeat Judah in battle. An angel stopped Balaam’s donkey on the road, and made the donkey speak to Balaam about his foolish quest. God sent an angel to rebuke Israel for their sinfulness in the days when God was appointing Judges over Israel. Gideon was called into service by an angel. Samson’s parents were visited by an angel, and his mother – who had been barren – was told she would have a son. God used an angel to punish David for counting the fighting men of Israel to see how large an army he could raise. When Daniel was thrown into the lions den, an angel delivered him from certain death by shutting the lions mouths. And I could go on, but time does not permit.

In the New Testament, an angel told Zacharias that he would be the father of John the Baptist, in spite of his old age and the fact that his wife was barren. An angel appeared to Mary concerning her becoming the mother of Jesus. An angel appeared three times to Joseph, Mary’s husband. An angel announced to the shepherds that Jesus had been born in Bethlehem. It was an angel who ministered to Jesus during his forty days of temptation in the wilderness. And again, it was an angel who ministered to Jesus during his agony in Gethsemane the night before his crucifixion. An angel rolled away the stone from the door of the tomb in which Jesus was buried, and an angel told the women who came to Jesus’ tomb on Sunday morning that Jesus was not there, for he had risen just as he said.

In the book of Acts, angels appear numerous times. In **Acts 5:17-20**, we read about the Apostles being put in prison, and it is an angel who comes during the night and frees them. **Acts 8:26-28** tells of an angel who instructs Philip to travel the road from Jerusalem to Gaza, and it is on this road that he meets the Ethiopian Eunuch and tells him about Jesus – after which the Eunuch was born again and baptized. In **Acts 10:3-7** we read about an angel appearing to Cornelius and telling him that God would send Peter to teach him what he

needed to know in order to put his faith in Jesus Christ. Herod put Peter in prison, and the night before Herod intended to put Peter to death, an angel led Peter out of prison and set him free (**Acts 12:6-11**). Soon after Peter's escape from prison, Herod's pride got the best of him and he exalted himself to god-like status. As a result, an angel came and put him to death for his public display of pride (**Acts 12:20-23**). And finally, we read in **Acts 27:21-26**, that Paul was being taken – by boat – to Rome to stand trial before Caesar. During the journey, the ship was storm-tossed for many days and everyone feared for their lives. It was during those stormy days that an angel appeared to Paul and assured him that everyone would be saved **if they stayed together**.

When Jesus comes again, angels will come with Him and help Him usher in the new kingdom age.

And finally, I want to remind you that God's angels protect God's people and little children. We read in **Psalm 34:7** that "The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and rescues them." And in **Matthew 18:10** Jesus said, "See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven."

HYMN

ANGELS WE HAVE HEARD ON HIGH (vs 1,3)

THE CHRIST STORY FROM SCRIPTURE

Luke 1:26-29 (#5)

In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, (27) to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. (28) The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." (29) Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.

Luke 1:30-33 (#5)

But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. (31) You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. (32) He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, (33) and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."

Luke 1:34-38 (#5)

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" (35) The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High

will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. (36) Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. (37) For nothing is impossible with God." (38) "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

HYMN #170

THOU DIDST LEAVE THEY THRONE (vs.1,4,5)

Matthew 1:18-21 (#6)

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. [19] And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. [20] But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. [21] "She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

Matthew 1:22-25 (#6)

Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: [23] "Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which translated means, "God with us." [24] And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife, [25] but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus.

Read: Mary, Did You Know? (Words by Mark Lowry) (#6)

Mary, did you know that your baby boy would one day walk on water?
Mary, did you know that your baby boy would save our sons and daughters?
Did you know that your baby boy has come to make you new?
This child that you've delivered, will soon deliver you.

Mary, did you know that your baby boy will give sight to a blind man?
Mary, did you know that your baby boy will calm the storm with his hand?
Did you know that your baby boy has walked where angels trod?
When you kiss your little baby, you kiss the face of God.

The blind will see, the deaf will hear, the dead will live again.
The lame will leap, the dumb will speak the praises of the lamb!

Mary, did you know that your baby boy is Lord of all creation?
Mary, did you know that your baby boy would one day rule the nations?
Did you know that your baby boy is heaven's perfect Lamb?
That sleeping child you're holding is the great I am!

HYMN #195

SILENT NIGHT, HOLY NIGHT (vs 1,3)

Luke 2:1-7 (#7)

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (2) (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius (*kwi h RIN ih uhs*) was governor of Syria.) (3) And everyone went to his own town to register. (4) So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. (5) He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. (6) While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, (7) and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Notice the providence of God – He got the right people to the right place at the right time through seemingly unrelated circumstances. This should give us confidence to submit to God's will, because He is working – and will continue to work – to accomplish His will. Have you seen God's providence at work in your life?

HYMN #185

AWAY IN A MANGER (vs 1,3)

Luke 2:8-14 (#8)

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. (9) An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. (10) But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. (11) Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. (12) This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." (13) Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, (14) "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

HYMN

HARK, THE HERALD ANGELS SING (vs 1,3)

Luke 2:15-20 (#9)

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." (16) So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. (17) When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, (18) and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. (19) But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. (20) The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

HYMN #193**O COME, ALL YE FAITHFUL (vs 1,2)****Matthew 2:1-6 (#10)**

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem (2) and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him." (3) When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. (4) When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. (5) "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: (6) " 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.'"

If we are to learn anything about religion from this portion of scripture, may we at least learn that among the religious, not much has changed. The religious Jews of Jesus' day were much like the religious Protestants and Catholics of our day. For them as for us, it is far more common for those of us who are religious to know the right answers than it is to live according to the truth we know. It is far more common for those of us who are religious to profess faith in God and His Word than to live each day, in situation after situation, as the faith we profess to have would have us live. It is far more common to see the wrong others are doing – and tell them about it, than to be honest about our own wrong-doing and correct it just as we want others to correct their wrong-doing.

These religious leaders who knew where to look in the Holy Scriptures to find where Christ would be born were the same ones who ignored what the scriptures have to say about justice, murder, and mercy, and in so doing pushed Pilate into condemning Jesus to death on a cross – though they knew He was innocent of all

charges. It is not that they didn't know better, its that they chose to make such things as self-interest, being treated as very important people, having power, and enjoying wealth as more important than living up to the truth they knew or living according to the faith they professed to have.

HYMN #206

WE THREE KINGS OF ORIENT ARE (vs 1,5)

Matthew 2:7-12 (#11)

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. (8) He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him." (9) After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. (10) When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. (11) On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. (12) And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

Matthew 2:13-18 (#11)

When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him." (14) So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, (15) where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son." (16) When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. (17) Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: (18) "A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more."

Matthew 2:19-23 (#11)

But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, and said, [20] "Get up, take the Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel; for those who sought the Child's life are dead." [21] So Joseph got up, took the Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel. [22] But when he heard that Archelaus (*ahr kuh LAY uhs*) was reigning over

Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Then after being warned by God in a dream, he left for the regions of Galilee, [23] and came and lived in a city called Nazareth. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets: "He shall be called a Nazarene."

HYMN

GOOD CHRISTIAN MEN, REJOICE (vs. 2,3)

It happened so very long ago. It happened in the dark; the sun wasn't up, for there was no sun. There was no moon, no sky, no earth, no sound – nothing of what you and I know, not even anyone to know that there was nothing – nothing at all, except for the joy of the Three who are One.

Their joy was immense, they who are the source of all joy everywhere. They lacked nothing, and nothing they wished was beyond their reach. United in a bond of closest intimacy, they continually experienced the joy of a pure love far beyond that known to mortals.

On this occasion they met to discuss their joy, for they wished it to grow. Their wish was not for more joy for themselves, for their joy was already complete. They wished rather to spread their joy, to share it.

But, as we have already said, there was no one – no one with whom their joy could be shared.

"Let us create mankind in our own image, our own likeness," said One. And they felt great joy in anticipating the joy of their creation. They foresaw a vast multitude of mankind, eternally in a bond of closest intimacy with their creator, continually experiencing the joy of that pure love. And they, who already knew such joy, who owned such joy, reveled with the delight of expectation.

And then ... there was silence.

At length One said, "If we create mankind in our own image, and in our own likeness give him the ability to choose, he will destroy himself. Mankind will choose sin, and so break his bond of love, both with us and with his fellow man. In that way he will surrender up the joy we share with him. Furthermore, sin will destroy all it touches, and so we must expel from our presence all who become tainted with sin."

And again, there was silence.

All who know joy must also know grief and loss, for they are part of the same package. At least that is our best human understanding of joy and grief. And grief was deeply felt at the apparent loss of so wonderful an ambition.

Yet the Three who are One were not yet ready to yield to the loss. And so, at the right moment, One suggested, "It is possible we could forgive."

So the spark of hope was rekindled, but the problem was not yet solved. For sin, even if forgiven, still destroys all it touches. It was necessary, not only to forgive, but beyond that, to purify--to purge the sin from the core of their being, and to confer upon the guilty ones the goodness they had once disowned.

And so One declared, "Suppose one of them were to live without sin. And suppose that one was then willing to go on our behalf. Suppose that we send that one to give his life as a sacrifice for mankind's sin. We could then impart that one's goodness to any who will receive it."

The plan was recognized as a sound one, and so the search began. They, who can foresee future events as easily as mortals, who upon observing a visitor approaching on the sidewalk can predict a knock on the door--they examined all the sidewalks of mankind's history, seeking one qualified by his own goodness to open the door.

The search was exhaustive, leaving no possibility unexamined. But the result was bleak. For, in all the thousands of years of human history, all the millions of environments in which mankind lived, all the billions of individual humans--amid all this, none was found who was able to become a sacrifice for sin, for none was found who lived without sin--not even one.

The silence was long this time.

Yet still they were not ready to yield. And so One asked: "Who will go for us? Whom shall we send?"

Then again there was silence, but not so long this time.

Finally, One spoke. "I will go," said the Son. "You can send me."

HYMN

I STAND IN AWE

HYMN

MAGNIFY THE LORD WITH ME

PRAYER: