

Prayer of the Day:

Stir up your power, O Lord, and come. Take away the burden of our sins and make us ready for the celebration of your birth, that we may receive you in joy and serve you always; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Verse of the Day:

Alleluia. The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel. Alleluia. (Matthew 1:23)

Sermon Text:

I have always loved this Sunday in the church year, the Fourth Sunday of Advent. As a kid it meant that presents were waiting just around the corner. It meant the joy of Christmas services was coming too. The excitement was building and it was reflected even at church. The lessons seem to jump the gun they can't contain the excitement and the announcement of the birth is heard already before Christmas has even begun in the Gospel Lesson. And of course, it is the Sunday for the most well known of all Advent hymns, *Oh Come, Oh Come, Emmanuel*. The name means "God with us" as Christians have recited for centuries in churches and Mary and Joseph name Him "Jesus" which means "God saves". You can't miss the fact that is so intertwined within it all, We, You are **LOVED BY GOD**.

That's really the point Paul is driving home as he opens up the letter to the Christians in Rome. In fact, he says it there in the last verse, "*To all those loved by God who are in Rome, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*" And it was for this love that Saul became Paul, He began, "*Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God.*"

The Gospel is literally the Good News, a message from God of glad tidings. Paul says this "good news" is well known and promised ahead of time by the prophets of God. And of course you don't need to look any farther than the Old Testament Lesson today to see that's absolutely true. We read the words of the prophet Isaiah, *Therefore 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* (Isaiah 7:14). Of course it goes back even farther than that. For God Himself had first proclaimed it to the serpent as Adam and Eve cowered in fear and clung to fig leaves to cover their nakedness and sin, "*And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.*"

From that time forward God had sent his messengers to remind His people to prepare, to repent, to be ready for this Child who would be God made flesh for them, come to rescue them from sin, to defeat the evil plans and purposes of the Devil and to conquer the yawning gates of

Text: Romans 1:1-7 (EHV)

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ²which he promised in advance through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures. ³This gospel is about his Son—who in the flesh was born a descendant of David, ⁴who in the spirit of holiness was declared to be God's powerful Son by his resurrection from the dead—Jesus Christ, our Lord. ⁵Through him we received grace and the call to be an apostle on behalf of his name, to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles, ⁶including you, who were called by Jesus Christ. ⁷To all those loved by God who are in Rome, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

hell for all people. *This gospel is about his Son—who in the flesh was born a descendant of David, who in the spirit of holiness was declared to be God's powerful Son by his resurrection from the dead—Jesus Christ, our Lord.*

And so our Gospel lesson opens with Joseph wrestling with a serious dilemma. His betrothed is pregnant, great with child. The Babe is not his own but he shall be the caretaker of the Son of God whose human ancestry shall be of the line of David. When he is grown, His divinity will be known in teaching uncommon to human teachers, in miracles impossible for humans to contemplate, but He shall die that in death our enemies would be defeated and that by His resurrection we might see who He has always been God with Us that we might be saved.

Though we have hidden our sinfulness in was less clever than fig leaves and made dilemmas of our own devilishness, God himself has cleansed us by His holy precious blood and placed His robes of righteousness upon us. His resurrection is the power of God declaring us free from sin, purchased in His blood. Because His names proclaim Him to be everything He is, We are **LOVED BY GOD!**

Through him we received grace and the call to be an apostle on behalf of his name, to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles, including you, who were called by Jesus Christ. So Paul says this message will change everything, has changed everything. You are an apostle not by human right or work but by grace. Paul's life story proclaims it so. Chief of sinners, persecutor of Christ and His Church, yet solely in love deserved he was made an apostle of Christ Himself and for the glory of His name.

So it is with all Gentile sinners, with you and me. John will announce *this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent His Son as the atoning sacrifice for all of our sin* (1 John 4:1). The Romans and the Gentiles like Paul have been called into service to carry this message. As they are called, so are we through saving faith in Immanuel, in Jesus. By grace we are called into this faith, this obedience of faith which believes in God's amazing message of love and seeks to hold it out to others.

You have been called by Christ into the grace in which we now stand. Like Paul we have been given a charge to bring about this faith using the tools God has given us. So we hold out the Gospel, God's good tidings in Word and in Sacraments. We hold it out to Gentiles who do not know it and for the strength of those who do.

And when we falter, we return to the grace of a loving God. When sinfulness rages and death knocks upon our doors, we run to the peace which Jesus has won and given to us. We live in the hope of the resurrection, which proves the power of our God even as it displays His love for us. *To all those loved by God who are in Rome, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

This Sunday has always been one of my favorites. It brings back memories of the excitement of Christmas soon to come. It echos the yearning of hearts to rejoice in the truths of the Babe born in the manger. But most importantly it serves as a final reminder in our Advent preparations. In our sinfulness, though we are unworthy of it, God is with us. He is with us to save. In the days to come, as strive to live for Him, don't miss the facts that are so intertwined within Christmas which leads to Easter, We, You are **LOVED BY GOD ENOUGH THAT WOULD GIVE US HIMSELF THAT WE MIGHT BE HIS SAINTS.** Amen.