Family, I hope all had the best Thanksgiving. Today is the first Sunday in Advent. Advent is a season of the liturgical year observed by many Christian denominations. The word “advent” comes from the Latin word meaning “coming.” It is the season of both celebration and expectancy for the nativity of Christ at Christmas and the return of Christ at the Second Coming--a time of reflection and preparation for the coming and them coming again. Over the next four Sundays we are going to unpack the four gifts of Advent. In this period of already but not yet, we will reflect on the truth that in this period of waiting we have been given everything we need to live the Christian life: Hope, peace, joy and love, found only in Christ and sustained us in the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:3\*). Everything we need while we wait has been supplied for us.

 Today, let’s talk about hope. In our first Gospel reading, Zechariah and Elizabeth were told to get ready for something beautiful. Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in years. Yet, an angel of the Lord appears and tells Zechariah he will have a son (Luke 1:11-18\*\*). Zechariah responds first with

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\*2 Peter 1:3 His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

\*\*Luke 1:11-18 11 Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. 12 When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. 13 But the angel said to him: “Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. 14 He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, 15 for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. 16 He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. 17 And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” 18 Zechariah asked the angel, “How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years.”

skepticism but then with singing—from hopelessness to full of hope. In verse 78, Zechariah answers his own question about *how*—because of the tender mercy of our God. Christian, listen! We are people of hope, hope not dependent on circumstances but on a Savior. The words of the angel brought Zechariah and Elizabeth hope. For you and me, it is the Word that gives us hope (John 1:1-5\*). Hope means that I choose to take God at his word. His gift of Hope equips us to walk in boldness of faith. Listen, Church, biblical hope is not wishful thinking but a confident security according to His great mercy—it means we take God at His word!

 What we fell and believe about this blessed hope and about the Word of God is absolutely crucial. It should reflect what we feel and believe about Jesus. The word hope is found between 142 and 182 times throughout scripture—depending upon

translation. The appearances are nearly equally divided between the Old and New Testaments. This hope we have is a living hope based upon the living Savior through His living Word. Hope is on display throughout the pages of scripture. This message endures, year after year: Jesus is the only way—the only way to eternal life. God made a way when there seemed to be none. And family, He is still a way

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\*John 1:1-5 The Word Became Flesh

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

maker (Romans 8:19-25\*). Our hope is not blind hope. It is confident expectation, a waiting with perseverance, a waiting with eagerness for the arrival of our King. It is a patient watchfulness, a time of preparing ourselves for the coming kingdom (Hebrews 12:1-3\*\*). The hope we have in Christ should demonstrate eternal trust. It should cause us to lay aside every encumbrance!! Very simply, stop sweating the small stuff! Our world is in desperate need of hope. Do others of the world see that in us? Do they see in us the living hope (1Peter 1:3-5\*)? Do they see a flood of light piercing the darkness? Hell is still hot; Heaven is still real. Christ is still King, and He’s really coming back. Hope has come, is here, and is on the way (Titus 2:13\*\*\*).

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\*Romans 8:19-25

19 For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. 20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. 22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? 25 But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

\*\*Hebrews 12:1-3

1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

\*\*\*Titus 2:13 13 We wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ . . .

Our hope is sure because Jesus is certain. To the one struggling with addiction, God is trustworthy. To the lonely, He is trustworthy. To the lost, God is trustworthy. To the Christian who has lost his way and become lukewarm, God is trustworthy and HE WANTS YOU TO COME HOME! Hope is the culture of the church and will not be canceled.

 But, Family, listen. The assurance of our hope is a person. His name is Jesus. As we approach the manger on our advent journey this year, lets remember a few things: That we have a “Nothing is impossible God”; that Christ made the way for us; and that God is not a baby in a manger anymore. We can have confident hope, expectant hope, fulfilled hope—even in the middle of the already but not yet season of advent. And empty manger, an empty cross, and empty tomb—produce hearts filled with hope. Confidently, we expect the return of the King. And our hope of this season is foundational to faith. It is a hope that I can’t be talked out of; circumstances won’t change my mind. So let us throw off all that hinders. Family, listen: As Christmas draws nearer, I want to encourage you that real hope is confident security. He loves you, gave Himself for you, and if you have received Him as Savior and Lord, you have confident expectation. Here is the challenge for you: This season, prioritize His Kingdom, not your own. True hope magnifies Holiness. Our hope is a living hope. His name is Jesus—*the* Way, *the* Truth, *the* Life. Don’t sweat the small stuff. Magnify the Kingdom.

Passages Supporting This Message:

Luke 1:67-80

*Zechariah’s Song*

67 His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied: 68 “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them. 69 He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David 70 (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), 71 salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us— 72 to show mercy to our ancestors and to remember his holy covenant, 73 the oath he swore to our father Abraham: 74 to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear 75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. 76 And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, 77 to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, 78 because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven 79 to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.” 80 And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the wilderness until he appeared publicly to Israel.

John 1:1-13

*The Word Became Flesh*

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. 6 There was a man sent from God whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. 8 He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. 9 The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. 11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. 12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.