

## Pray More Advent Retreat 2019 - Transcript

### **The Messiah Fr. Patrick Briscoe**

*In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.* As we begin this Advent conference, we recall all of the great beings of Advent that we've been praying about and discussing, one that always strikes me that's often discussed is the idea of waiting; that Advent, at its heart, is a season of expectation, of patiently desiring that something would come, something would happen. But, you see, if we don't understand what we're waiting for, if we don't have a clear idea of what is to come, Advent begins immediately to lack the fullness of its meaning. Without some clear idea of who Jesus is - especially that Jesus is the Messiah, the one who is to come - without this idea, Advent is nearly completely empty of its meaning. Jesus becomes just another in a long list of prophets, another in a long list of founders of religions, of wise moral teachers.

The Oxford don C. S. Lewis was known for this famous argument that he called his trilemma. In *Mere Christianity*, Lewis writes "I am here trying to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Christ. That is: 'I am ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.'" Lewis continues "That is the one thing we must not say. A man who is merely a man, and said the sort of things Jesus said, would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic - on the level with the man that says he is a poached egg - or else he would be the devil of hell."

This is Lewis' argument that Jesus is one of either three things: He's either a liar, because He says a number of things about Himself which aren't in fact true; He's either crazy, maybe the man has no ill intention, He's simply insane; or Jesus is exactly who He says He is - He's the Lord of all creation. Some people talk about this argument from Lewis as the trilemma. That Jesus is either a liar, a lunatic, or a Lord.

Think of all the extraordinary claims Jesus makes in the gospels. They are even more shocking than some of the things Jesus does. They are even more startling than lame people walking and the dead being raised. Among these claims, Jesus says that He can forgive sins, He says that He has existed before all time began, that He alone knows the Father, and that He, Jesus, will come to judge the living and the dead. These claims from Jesus are either true or they're false. If they're false, then either Jesus knew they were false or He was ignorant. Jesus is either a liar, a lunatic, or He's Lord. And if He's Lord, it changes everything.

So, what were the people of Israel expecting? How is Jesus the one who is to come? What are we waiting for? What does it mean to say that the Lord has come,

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that He's come into the world? There are a number of aspects behind this, there are many things that could be said here, and this is not an intellectual lecture. This is an Advent retreat, this is supposed to feed us spiritually, so I want to focus on just a few things.

The first is the idea that Jesus was preannounced. Jesus didn't simply show up and say "I'm here" out of nowhere. That there were many prophecies spoken of Him. We hear these prophecies over and over during the Advent season. We can think of the great prophecy from Isaiah, that: *A virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and she shall call Him Immanuel*; or of the great prophecy from Micah: *But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, least among the tribes of Judah, from you shall come forth for Me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from old, from ancient times*. These and many other prophecies show us that God has sent His son, that eternal wisdom had designed this course of events from before time began, that Jesus existed before He became incarnate, and that this plan of coming into the world was part of the way that the Lord would draw all mankind to Himself.

Fulton Sheen points out in his lovely book about the Lord that even car dealers announce when the new model is coming. If God were to send anyone from Himself, how could Jesus be unannounced? And the fact that Jesus was preannounced makes Him different from everyone else who has claimed to found a religion - that there have been all of these signs so that He could be known and recognized, so that people could have confidence in saying that He's the Lord. Jesus is a Jewish Messiah, Jesus is our Messiah because He was preannounced, because He came as part of this plan of eternal wisdom.

Another beautiful way we recognize Jesus as Messiah is because of His Proclamation of the Kingdom. One of the promises that the Lord first made to His people was that He would establish a king, and that this king, always from the House of David, would reign forever. That this king, the Messiah, the one who is to come, would sit on David's throne. Recognizing that Jesus is an heir to David's throne is an important way that we see Him and identify Him as the Messiah.

And not only are we able to do that, we were able to know in the scriptures when Jesus was to come. The prophet Daniel, in fact, has this incredible prophecy about when to expect the Messiah. The Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, has a dream in which he saw a fearsome statue composed of four different materials. The four materials of the statue were gold, and that was kind of the statue's head; and silver, its belly; and bronze, and then its legs were iron and clay. And Nebuchadnezzar turns to the prophet and he asks for Daniel to interpret the dream, and Daniel says that the materials are four kingdoms.

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Looking back, we can see that these four kingdoms are the four great ancient empires. That Babylon was the gold, Persia the silver, Greece the bronze, and Rome the iron. And then Rome fractures into an east and west empire and is clay, the iron and the clay, the two parts of the broken Roman empire. These four great empires, these four kingdoms that Daniel says are the four kingdoms that ruled over Israel before Christ came. Seeing these four kingdoms and identifying them with history as we know it points to Christ as the Messiah, the one who is to come. The proclamation of when the Kingdom of God would come is not a thing that's spoken of by chance. We have hints, like this prophecy from Daniel, about exactly when it was going to come and what it consists in. That a king from the line of David would rule forever.

Another great idea from the book of Daniel is the idea that the Messiah would be the Son of Man. This is a title that Jesus assumes and uses of Himself. That He's not just a son of man, He's not just one human, but He is the Son of Man, the one who totally represents humanity, who perfectly comes from Adam's race and encapsulates in His very self all that it means to be human. This is Christ. Who else could it be? This is the Messiah, the Son of Man.

Another important idea about the Messiah is that He would lead the people who are captives into a new freedom. For Israel, this was always seen as a fulfillment or a rearticulation of Exodus, that first great moment where God came to His people, saw them in bondage and slavery, and led them to freedom. The Messiah then would be a new Moses, who would establish a new covenant, who would build a new temple, would lead His people to a new land. For us Christians, we look at all of these ideas and we see clearly in them Jesus. Jesus, the new Moses, the new lawgiver, who takes the Ten Commandments and fulfills them in the great beatitudes, in His teaching, in the Sermon on the Mount. Who gives a new covenant not by the sacrifice of the blood of animals, but the sacrifice of the cross, His own blood spilled out for the redemption of sins.

Jesus, in His body, is the new temple. He is where God dwells, where He, God, is with His people in a privileged and exclusive way. St. John knew this and beautifully writes in the Prologue to his gospel: ***The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us, and we saw His glory.*** The glory of the temple, the place where the Lord dwells, is here in the Messiah Himself.

And, lastly, this Messiah, this new Moses who leads His people again to freedom, gives us a new kingdom, a place to be with Him forever in peace. Not just a land of milk and honey like the land of Canaan was to the Israelites, but a land where we are reunited with all of the just who have come before us. This Messiah leads us to the great Kingdom of Heaven. Finally, when this Messiah comes into the world,

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He reveals how His people shall be saved. The Nativity is marked by signs of the work that Christ will accomplish by His death. Think of every major scene you've seen, with Joseph on one side, Mary on the other, and the infant Christ in the crib in the middle. This man and woman standing at the feet of Christ point us to the cross. The wood of the manger is the wood of the instrument of Christ's death. Jesus is wrapped in swaddling clothes, just as He would be clothed in linen and lain into the tomb. The gifts of the king point to the kinds of precious things that are used to anoint bodies.

It's clear that Christ, the Messiah, has come into the world to accomplish one thing: The redemption of His people. He, Jesus, whose very name means that God saves, has come into the world to set us free. When we hear these and other ancient prophecies proclaimed this Advent, may we, like the first disciples, declare "We have found the one of whom the prophets spoke. You, Jesus, are truly the one who is to come. We confess that You are the Lord. You, Jesus, are the Word incarnate, God come to save His people."

*All glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be. World without end. Amen. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*