

Message Notes December 24th, 2020
Christmas Eve: Waiting in Wonder
(Psalm 98:1-4, 9; John 1:1-5; Luke 2:8-19)

- **Everyone's Waiting for Something**

- *Waiting.*
 - Everyone's waiting for something. If you stop waiting you've either *arrived*, or you've lost your way. Everyone waits. Everyone looks ahead to *something*.
 - Students are waiting to finally be done with school. Kids are waiting to open their presents. Lovebirds are waiting to get married. Couples are waiting to be able to have kids. Young parents are waiting for their kids to finally grow up and leave the house. Middle-aged parents are waiting for their kids to finally come back. Older parents are waiting for grandkids. Military families are waiting for soldiers to return from deployment. Some are waiting for a new job, waiting for the next paycheck. Isolated people are waiting for someone to come visit them. Many Americans are waiting for a stimulus package, waiting for the vaccine to arrive.
 - Star Wars fans are already waiting for season 3 of the Mandalorian to come out. (Sorry, I had to put that in there, you may or may not get that reference.)
 - Once we all realized what 2020 was really going to be...we all started *waiting* for 2020 to be over. It's been almost a full year of...*all this*. And we've been waiting, week after week, month after month, for relief. We've been waiting for the curve to flatten, waiting for the cure, waiting for the world to reopen. To be able to see each other's faces and hear each other's voices again, to pray together and sing together again. And we've all gotten to the point where we're saying, "Let's just get to 2021 already."
 - Everybody's saying, "I can't *wait* for this year to be over!" Even at the drive-thru a couple days ago, this dear lady who handed me my coffee talked to me about the holidays and how we were ready for New Year's." She said, "I'm gonna stay up 'til midnight *just to make sure* 2020 goes away and stays away!"
 - It sure has seemed to be a year of waiting like never before.
- The thing about waiting is, there are different kinds of waiting:
 - Waiting can be the experience of anxiety, of dread, of despair, if we're anticipating *something bad to happen* or if we have a false sense of hope that gets shattered.
 - But waiting can also be a good thing, a wonderful thing: when we're expecting something good, when we're longing for something beautiful, when we're certain of our hope. Waiting can bring a distinct kind of joy that precedes the joy of fulfilment and makes that fulfilment even sweeter.
- In many ways, this is exactly what Advent is about: waiting, wondering, hoping, longing.

- **Jesus' Birth wasn't the End of Waiting**

- For years, centuries—*millennia!*—the people of God *waited* for the Promise to be fulfilled. From Adam and Eve leaving the Garden, to Abraham, to King David, to the Prophets, to Mary and Joseph (not to mention so many more) they *waited* for this Promised King.
- What I somehow always manage to forget each Christmas is that Jesus' birth *wasn't the end of the waiting*.
 - Mary and Joseph got the word from God that He was coming. And then they *waited* for him to be born.
 - Jesus was born and they were told *all these wonderful things about this Child's life!* Angels, prophets, shepherds, Maggi came to see him. *What Child is this?*
 - I love this quiet little line from tonight's reading in Luke: "...all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and *pondered them in her heart*," as she held this little baby boy.
 - And then...they *waited*.
 - Early on, the world's turbulence began to affect this Chosen Child's life: his family had to flee their home from evil King Herod's genocide of the baby boys in their village; they left to live as

refugees all the way in Egypt. And they *waited* to return home, until an Angel visited them again and said it was finally safe to go back.

- Jesus grew up and they *waited* to see what he would do. From all we can tell, he lived a fairly ordinary life, studying the trade of his dad Joseph, learning to work with his hands.
- Then Jesus turned 30 years old and something incredible happened when he went to be baptized by his cousin, John: he was finally launched out of ordinary obscurity into public ministry—with words of authority and works of wonder—and everyone *waited* to see where all of this was going.
- His disciples began to discover he *really* was and they waited for God to make His big move—for the Kingdom to come and Israel to be restored.
- And then he was crucified. And he died. And it must have been the worst *waiting* of all.
- But then *he rose again* and appeared to them! And they *waited*.
- He commissioned them to go into all the world to make more disciples, but first they had to stay in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit. He ascended up to Heaven and they waited.
- The Spirit came down and began to move, the Church was born and spread the like wildfire. Jesus spoke later to the Apostle John in *Revelation*, saying, “I am coming soon.” And they *waited*.
- The Gospel spread around the world, the Church multiplied and matured, and did some beautiful things and did some *terrible* things throughout history. And we’re still *waiting*.
- 2,000 years later we’re *waiting* for that last, greatest promise to be fulfilled:
 - Christ is coming again, to finally bring justice to the oppressed, to finally bring judgement on evil, to finally restore all things and save all those who trust in him.
 - Then there will be no more crying or mourning or sickness or pain—no more disease or poverty or pandemics—*He will wipe away every tear*. All things new: greater joy and beauty and wonder than we can possibly imagine.
 - And that, the fulfilment of all we’re *waiting* for, will just be the beginning. When that Day comes, *it won’t be the end—it’ll be the beginning of the Real Story*. All of this will just have been the prologue.
- So we *wait*.
- **Waiting in Wonder**
 - We don’t wait as those who have no hope. We don’t wait in dread. We don’t wait in despair. We don’t wait in darkness.
 - *We wait in wonder*.
 - We wait with joy and expectancy, because we know without doubt that God is a promise keeper: Christmas is *proof of that*—it’s proof that *no matter how long we have to wait*, God will come through!
 - We wait in wonder, because Christ has come, Christ is with us, *and Christ will come again*.
 - 2020 has certainly been a year we all want to be over, but I will say this: Advent this year has felt *different*. Do you know what I mean? It seems to me that, even though this has been one of the most disappointing holiday seasons—right down to the fact that we weren’t even able to meet in our parking lot for worship!—it’s also been an Advent where I have been more keenly aware of longing for Christ’s coming return than *any other Christmas season*. And that really is a wonderful gift.
 - So, while this is not the way that any of us wanted 2020 to go, this is not the way any of us wanted to celebrate Christmas, this is not the way any of us wanted to attend a Christmas Eve service (for crying out loud!)—may the disruption and strangeness of this particular Christmas, here in the infamous 2020, actually help us to get more deeply in touch with the heart of what Advent is: *the longing, the waiting* for Him. For Jesus the Christ.
 - Come, Lord Jesus. We know you will. We’re waiting. *Waiting in wonder*.
 - And now, Christians, on this Christmas Eve, let us *behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*. *Wait here and behold him in wonder*.