

December 3, 2023

1st Sunday in Advent

“And He will be Called... Desire of Nations.”

Haggai 2:6-9 (7)

Intro:

Growing up in Regina can be a little bit of a sheltered experience. There are things a Regina person can know about in theory, but when they are encountered in real life it can be surprising and not clear how to navigate them.

I recall the first missions’ trip I took into Mexico. Now, I know that Jesus is not a particularly unique name. It wasn’t even all that unique when Jesus, the Messiah, was born and lived on Earth. It is not that strange to encounter people in other parts of the world who are named Jesus today. It just wasn’t something I had encountered in my own growing up. So, when we arrived in Mexico and reached the church we were spending time helping, I was both unsurprised and not sure what to do when one of the young people helping us had the name Jesus (pronounced “Hey-zeus”). My brain had trouble catching on to the fact that it was okay for someone other than the Christ to have the name Jesus. I know, sheltered life.

This morning is the First Sunday in the Advent season, and we are beginning a new series to help us think about and meditate on what is happening as we move towards the joy of Christmas morning.

The focus of this series will be the names of Jesus that were known before the people had the name “Jesus” to work with. The inspiration for this series comes from a short little book written by Steve Bell, which is part of a seven-book series that takes the readers on a pilgrimage through the church calendar. It is called the *Pilgrim Year Series*, and the first book is on Advent. One chapter of this book caught my interest as it dwelt on the “O Antiphons”, an old monastic prayer used during the week leading up to Christmas as part of the very early liturgy of the

church. Each Antiphon highlights one name, or title, given to the Messiah, mostly as found in the book of Isaiah.

So, over the next four weeks, we will be looking at some of the names of Jesus, before anyone actually knew the name Jesus (as applied to the Messiah).

Isaiah Background:

I imagine that most of you, when asked what other names were given to the Messiah prior to the birth of Jesus, will think of the passage in Isaiah 9 that we have already read this morning. Isaiah 9:6 reads: “For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” But, of course, He was called more than just those names. He was also the Son of Man, Son of God, the Christ, the Good Shepherd, and the Word. And He is also known by the names that compose the O Antiphons: Wisdom, Sacred Lord, Root of Jesse, Key, Radiant Dawn, King of All Nations, and God with Us (which is, of course, Emmanuel). And there are more I have not listed.

That’s a lot of names to cover only 4 messages, so to narrow it down, we are only going to look at the names of the O Antiphons, and only the ones that are in the hymnal that we have typically used here at ARBC. The hymn “O Come, O Come Emmanuel” was written from the liturgical chants of the O Antiphons. It is those chants, or those prayers, put to song. In the hymnal we have most recently used here, there are four verses to the song and so those are the Antiphons that we will be looking at. This is not to say that the other ones are not worth looking at, but we only have time to look at four.

Of course, “O Come, O Come Emmanuel” has as its Scriptural foundation Isaiah 7:14, which we also read earlier. We will come back to that passage and the name Emmanuel at the end of the series.

Desire of Nations:

So, going a bit out of order from the song, we are going to start with the title “King of All Nations”, or as it is found in the hymn, “Desire of Nations”.

As it turns out, the primary Scripture passage for this line in the song is not from Isaiah, although there are references to the Kingship, or rule, of the Messiah in Isaiah. For example, verse 9:6 says, “The government will rest on his shoulders”. But our main passage of reference is Haggai 2:7, which we read as part of the second Scripture lesson this morning. It reads: “I will shake all the nations, and the treasures of all the nations will be brought to this Temple. I will fill this place with glory, says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies.”

Note that the New Living Translation doesn’t use the term “desire of nations”. It says “treasures of all the nations”. The King James Version has the connected wording: “And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts.”

“And the desire of all nations...” This is the name of the Messiah as the rabbis and teachers of the Hebrew Scriptures would have taught it.

Yet, Haggai isn’t actually referring to the Messiah here. Haggai was speaking to the remnant of Israelites who had returned to Israel during the time of Darius’ reign in Persia – well after the Babylonians had captured the majority of the people of Israel and carted them off to Babylon. The temple is being rebuilt in Jerusalem (albeit only after some fairly strong words about priorities), and Haggai was talking about how while this rebuilt temple might not be as impressive as Solomon’s temple, it will still be glorious because God will choose to dwell in it, and it will be adorned with the wealth and treasures of the other nations of the world. In fact, just the process of building it was proving this concept because it was mostly being funded by King Darius out of the plunder and tribute he received from the other nations.

How, then, does “Desire of Nations” go from the idea of wealth flowing into the temple, to being understood as a name for Jesus that was chanted and later put into song for Christians to sing about in anticipation of Christmas?

I suggest that we need to think a little differently. When we sing this verse of “O Come, O Come Emmanuel”, we interpret it to mean that the Messiah is someone that the world desires to come to them. But although there is anticipation of a Messiah, that anticipation isn’t a global phenomenon. He is the desire of one nation, but not of all nations. The secular world that does not acknowledge Jesus, or even God, does not care about whether a Messiah comes or about a Messiah at all in any way shape or form. Yet the Messiah is the Desire of Nations – the king of the nations.

What is it that nations desire? They desire wealth, not least in Biblical times. Wealth equalled power and prestige. Wealth meant one could purchase whatever was wanted. Wealth was able to fund war efforts and building projects, and to some degree help to keep the common people under control. In Old Testament days, a deity’s strength and importance was judged by the wealth of the temples. When God allowed Israel to be defeated, the conquerors would plunder and carry off the wealth that had been contained in the temple, in order to add it to their own gods’ temples, as a show of dominance over the Israelite people.

The desire of nations is treasure. So, what Haggai is saying in verse 7, and how that applies to our understanding of this as a name for the Messiah, is not that Jesus will be someone whom all the nations desire, but rather that He will be, and is, more precious and valuable than those things which nations value above all else. What they consider their greatest treasure is nothing compared to the treasure that is the Messiah. And that great treasure is brought, as it were, to the temple where God dwells. The temple, post Easter, is not a building or a specific place, but it is the people of God. We all make up the temple, and Jesus is the cornerstone that anchors the church and holds it together and keeps her on task.

Conclusion:

As you head into the Christmas season, spend some time reflecting on what it is that you desire most and how that compares with the greatest treasure that is the Messiah, Jesus Christ, the very Son of God.

Amen.