

**Message:**

We have just read the first announcement in history concerning the birth of Christ. Not too long after God placed the first man and woman in the Garden, did they rebel against their Creator. Their attempt to live independently from God brought them not only the immediate consequences of shame and guilt; it also prompted a swift response of judgment from God. It is in this context that the first promise of the coming of Christ is revealed.

Accurately realizing, correctly appreciating, and appropriately living in light of the coming of Christ, starts with the reason why He came. We can find no better explanation for the coming of Christ, then to catch a glimpse of what had occurred in the context the first pronouncement recorded in the Bible.

Our reading notes that Adam and his wife have just disobeyed God. They immediately experience real consequences for their actions. Their first consequences are not environmental, that is, something awry outside of them; their first consequences are interior, that is, something awry inside of them. Two words that describe what Adam and his wife are experiencing is guilt and shame. These inner states are affecting their relationship with each other but also their relationship with God.

Back in Genesis 2:25 we read that Adam and his wife were, *“both naked and were not ashamed.”* Now in 3:7, we read, *“Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.”* Guilt and shame had immediately brought them to a profound sense of unease with themselves. Being no longer comfortable with themselves, they were no longer comfortable in the presence of the other. No longer being comfortable with themselves in each other’s presence, they make fig aprons to cover themselves from each other. Their harmonious relationship was now lost; the openness and comfort, which they derived from each other, was now gone. There were only two people on earth but now there was deep division.

In addition to covering themselves from each other they show that their shame and guilt affected their harmonious relationship with God as well. Genesis 3:8 records, *“And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.”* Adam and his wife had just committed treason against their loving Creator. The

special relationship that they had known with God was now gone. Their guilt and shame made such a relationship unthinkable. The God that they would have run to in delight is now the One that they dreadfully hide themselves from. God's voice is no longer the voice they wish to hear; God's presence is no longer the presence they wish to feel.

It is interesting to consider how Adam answers the Lord's inquiry. Adam says in Genesis 3:10, "*I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.*" Adam acknowledges he is afraid because he was naked. That is not exactly true is it? Adam was not naked at the moment. He was previously naked, but after he ate, he clothed himself. However, he still felt naked before God. No self-made, exterior covering would lessen what Adam felt in his soul.

Not only were their hearts now filled with guilt and shame, their hearts were now hardened. God inquires in verse 11: "*Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?*" It appears that neither question is directly answered. But what they do next further demonstrates their heart calcification: they resort to blame shifting. Their hardness was seen in their avoidance of the Lord, their refusal to confess their wrong in light of God's direct inquiries, and commitment to shift their blame.

God's response to their treason is swift. The Lord issues a series of judgments. Verses 14-15 states that the serpent-the being in which Satan manifested himself in order to entice this rebellion-is cursed and soon to be crushed. The woman and Adam would experience punishment. For the woman, she would experience pain, sorrow and toil in birthing children. In addition, she and her husband would now be in conflict with each other over who's in charge. For the man, he would experience pain, sorrow, and toil in work.

Back in Genesis 2:16-17, when the Lord issued his command to not eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, the Lord said: "*You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.*" The judgments of chapter 3 do not seem, at first glance, to be that sentence of death-Adam will live another 930 years. However, Adam's life and work would be very hard. Adam would no longer with in a harmonious relationship with God; he

would also no longer be in harmonious relationship with his environment. Man's environment would now work to kill him everyday. The earth would seek to devour and harm. Sun would burn skin, mosquitoes and snakes would bite, bees and scorpions sting, bears and mountain lions attack, weeds and pests impede the growth of fruits and vegetables, diseases would inflict the body and food sources. In addition, the weather and the climate would consistently threaten. Physically, Adam did not immediately die that day, but he immediately experienced the daily threats of death, until life would finally give way. In the meantime, Adam was nonetheless dead for he would now be estranged from God in that he would be banned from the Garden. With the loss of communion with God, Adam would lose the essence of being human. While man still breathed and carried on, humanity just died.

But the account does not end at this point. Although man had made himself an enemy with God, and God had judged man, still, man's only hope and help would be found in God himself. There are several indications from our passage that God would be up to something. While it seemed that Satan had achieved his plans of estranging God and man, Satan didn't grasp the love and mercy and grace of God. God's redemptive character is seen in several smaller ways and in one huge way.

The first way that God displays love and grace and mercy, was the sheer fact that He sought them out and patiently engaged them. God draws Adam out of his hiding. Second (see v. 21), God clothed them with animal skins even after he had judged them. Even though God had stirred up the earth to fight against Adam, God was still going to protect and provide. Third (see vv. 22-24), God guards the Tree of life and bars Adam and his wife from entering back into the Garden and eating from the Tree of life now that they had eaten from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, Apparently, this barricading, while it severed man from communion with God, served to prevent Adam from bringing further disaster upon himself.

But the huge way that God displayed love and grace and mercy in this situation is the first promise of Christ's coming. Looking beyond his immediate provisions and protective acts, God declares how he will work through Adam and his wife in bringing about the ultimate reversal of consequences and curses: *"I will put enmity between you and*

*the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.*" (Genesis 3:15).

God promises that He will bring someone through the woman's painful birthing process that will become the One to defeat the serpent and release man from his judged state. That promise begins with Genesis 3:15. And you thought the retail stores start promoting Christmas early, the Lord began, at the earliest occasion possible, promising the arrival of Christ. For thousands of years and through a thousand pages of Scripture, the Lord will progressively announce the arrival of Jesus. Then to Mary's husband to be, Joseph, an angel declares, "*She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.*" (Matthew 1:21). Jesus is the One introduced in Genesis 3:15.

### **Implications:**

**Head (knowing):** The context for the first announcement of Christ's coming teaches us some vital truths for the renewal of our grasp of Biblical Christianity.

The point of celebrating the birth of Christ must involved renewing our understanding of the essence of Christianity. If we redefine the purpose of Christ's coming to mean something other than what the heart of the Christian Gospel is, then ironically we attempt to destroy Christianity through the celebration of Christmas.

I fear this is happening in our broader culture. The widespread celebration of the Christmas season is a mixed bag. It certainly is an opportunity for the church to engage the culture with the Gospel message; but it can also be an opportunity for the culture to influence the church to redefine Christianity.

Our culture will have no qualms with celebrating the birth of Christ as long as they get to determine the ultimate meaning of the message. For example, one of our nation's political leaders recently spoke at a civic religious event about the importance of Christmas. In his talk, he said that Jesus, "grew up to become a leader with a servant's heart who taught us a message as simple as it is powerful: that we should love God, and love our neighbor as ourselves." Then he went on to say, "So long as the gifts and the parties are happening, it's important for us to keep in mind the central message of this season," then he said, "and keep Christ's words not only in our thoughts, but also in our deeds."

The words of this political leader may be the core of civic religion and do-good moralism, but they do not constitute the heart of Biblical Christianity. We cannot boil Christianity down to a pep talk of “be good and nice, and fair to each other,” for if you do, such, “good people go to heaven when they die.”

The purpose of Christ’s coming is to reiterate God’s intense condemnation on sinners by sending Christ to the Cross. And yet, in sending Christ to live the life required of us, dying the death deserved for us, and in taking upon Himself the punishment reserved for us, the restoration of our humanness and freedom to live in communion and service to God is lovingly returned to us as a gracious gift. The miracle of His birth cannot be highlighted to the diminishment of His heel-bruising death: *“that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery”* (Hebrews 2:14-15).

**Heart (being):** The context for the first announcement of Christ’s coming teaches us what is essential response required of each of us. Christ is to me received through faith and repentance.

Adam shows that the announcement of Christ’s arrival is not just something that he needed to know; it is something that he needed to practically live in light of. In other words, Adam received God’s promise to the point that it affected the way he proceeded with his life. We can see this in two ways. First, Adam demonstrated that he not only understood what God had promised in verse 15, but that he also lived in light of that truth. Verse 20 tells us about the point I am making: *“The man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all living.”* The wife gets a name and her name Eve literally means “life.” Adam’s name for his wife demonstrates that Adam is acknowledging God’s promised solution. Adam is showing not only great honor for his wife, but also great confidence in God.

A second way that Adam showed that the announcement of Christ’s arrival was not just trivial information, but, in fact, life sustaining and directing truth, was in how Adam received God’s provision and protection. Adam was clothed by his own doing but still naked before God. However, God does an incredible thing: He replaces Adam’s clothing consisting of fig leaves with animal skins. Even this action by God prefigures the death of

Christ for an animal would have needed to be slaughtered in order to provide Adam with its skin. As it turns out, someone did die the day Adam sinned-an innocent substitute.

In receiving the garments provided by the Lord, Adam is acknowledging not only his own inadequacy in clothing himself before God, but also the sufficiency of the Lord's provision for him. Long before Paul penned his words to Timothy, Adam is declaring in essence, *"The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life."* (1 Timothy 1:15-16).

If we grasp who Christ is and what He has done, then we are to receive Christ by turning from ourselves and relying solely upon Him. This change of heart most certainly has a decisive starting point, but it must also have a continual and deepening quality of turning from ourselves and relying solely upon Christ.

**Hands (doing):** The context for the first announcement of Christ's coming brings the church back to its mission to proclaim Christ to the world. Christ is to be declared to all the world by those who truly know Him.

In a way, it doesn't greatly matter whether the clerk at the store says "Merry Christmas" or "Happy Holidays." They probably don't understand the difference between the two greetings. Besides, it is not their mission as a store clerk to get the announcement of Christ right; their mission is to try and convince us to brought the junk they see. Quite frankly, whichever greeting sells more product will be the greeting they deploy.

Instead, it is our mission-it is the church's mission-it is the mission of followers of Christ to explain who Christ is and what He has done. Let's refrain from getting upset when someone hijacks this season with their own agenda; let's remember our calling to explain Christ declaring Him to be God who took on flesh, becoming a man who become obedient in all things, even to the point of death, and yet God raised Him from the dead. In light of these historical realities we are to call people to follow the Lord Jesus Christ by turning from sin and relying solely upon Christ. All who do are pardoned, given new life, and brought into communion with God.