

## OUR ADVENT HOPE

A number of years ago a U.S. submarine sank in the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of New England. Immediately after it sank, our government launched a rescue operation to find it. They eventually found it on the bottom of the ocean. As the divers swam close to the submarine, they heard a noise and realized someone was tapping from inside the submarine. As they listened closely, in Morse Code the message being tapped was "Is there any hope?" These trapped men seemed to be in a hopeless situation and couldn't do anything about it. Their only hope was for someone to come and save them. Someone did come and their lives were spared.

The message of Advent tells us that all mankind was in a similar situation, trapped in the submarine of sin and death, in a hopeless situation with nothing we could do to get ourselves out. Our only hope was for someone to come and rescue us. That someone came in the form of God's Son, Jesus. He came to our rescue, a coming we are preparing our hearts to celebrate once again. To help us do that, we are going to focus on Jesus who is **Our Advent Hope**.

When the husband of the famous scientist, Madam Curie, was accidentally killed, she cried out over and over again, "This is the end of everything, everything." That is an example of hopelessness and despair. In 1945 on the night before the Nazis executed a German theologian, he said "This is just the beginning." That is an example of hope. Why the difference? The apostle Paul gives us the answer in our text. To understand his words though, we need to realize that all the sinful world can offer is hopelessness. It's all around us. Why do you think thousands of people commit suicide every year and many more attempt it? Why do you think the writer of Ecclesiastes wrote the words, *Meaningless! Meaningless! Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless! What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun? Generations come and generations go. What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.* Think for a moment about the point he was making. Nothing has really changed over all the years. We work to pay the bills but there are always more bills. We buy food but always have to buy more. We buy clothes that get worn out or too small. You have some fun times but also some not so fun times. We feel good for a while but then we have our sick days. We grow older and the body and mind don't work like they once did. Finally we die. If this is all life has to offer, it is really meaningless and hopeless.

I'm not done yet. Add to this the threats of terrorism, violence, sickness and disease that can strike at any time; an accident that can suddenly affect our lives for the worse. More hopelessness. I'm not done yet. Add to this all the sinful things we do that hurt others and ourselves. Add to this the fact that God says we deserve to suffer forever the fires of hell because of our sin and there's nothing we can do to change that. Here we have the perfect recipe for hopelessness.

So how or where can we possibly find hope in a hopeless world? Paul writes, *For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.* My friends, our only source of hope lies in God's Word and Paul

points us to the Old Testament. The Old Testament is not just the creation account followed by the history of God's people. The main focus of the Old Testament is the central message of the entire Bible, and that is that Jesus is the Savior of the world. The Old Testament believers had hope, hope in God's promise that Jesus was coming. Without that hope, what meaning or purpose could life possibly have had for them? Think for a moment back to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. After they fell into sin, God told them there would be many consequences of sin, like pain and sorrow, hard work with lots of weeds growing, sickness and death. Even worse, sin made them worthy of damnation in hell. Not a picture that offers any hope. Sickness, pain and death are not a pleasant threesome. So why would Adam and Eve even want to live? It was a hopeless situation but a situation God in his grace did not leave them in. He immediately gave them hope, something to look forward to, a Savior who would come to defeat Satan and sin; a Savior who would come to win their forgiveness and salvation; a Savior who would come to them with hope and a future.

Don't you and I have the same hope, a hope that is built on the solid rock of God's Word, the law which shows us our sin and the Gospel which shows us our Savior? We have the same hope as Adam and Eve and all the believers in the Old Testament had as well as all the believers who have ever lived. That's why Paul wrote, *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.* The sinful world in which we live cannot offer any hope but our God who created the world can and does by filling us with faith, joy and peace which he works in our hearts through the power of the Holy Spirit. He fills us with faith in our Savior through our contact with the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. He fills us with the joy and peace of knowing that all God's promises are true and that because Jesus lived perfectly, died perfectly and rose again, we have full and free forgiveness for all our sins. We also have the peace and joy of knowing that the sinful and hopeless world in which we live will one day come to an end. When that day comes, we will enjoy life in heaven that will never end. That gives us hope to face any situation in this hopeless and sinful world.

An elderly Christian woman was confined to her bed every day. In spite of this, when people came to visit her, they always found her smiling and cheerful. Her room was up in the attic of an older four story home. One day a friend of hers came to visit and brought with her a fellow church member who was quite wealthy but was pessimistic and complained about this and that. When they walked into the house on the first floor, the wealthy woman said, "How dark and dusty it is here!" The friend replied, "It's better higher up." As they walked through the second and third floor, the woman made the same comment and the friend once again said, "It's better higher up." Finally they arrived at the fourth floor, opened the door and there was a beautiful carpet on the floor, paintings on the wall, plants in the window and birds singing. There in the bed was the woman with a big smile on her face. The visitor went up to her and said, "I feel so sorry for you. It must be so hard for you to be here and not able to get out of bed. I don't know how you make it through each day and have that smile on your face." The woman smiled and said, "It's because I know that it's better higher up."

My friends, that's what we call hope, a confident hope, a hope that we call faith. This woman was filled with peace and joy and was overflowing with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. When things are going bad for us; when we are going through one of those rough times and there are many,

how we need this kind of hope as we also remember that no matter how hopeless life may appear at times, life here is temporary and it's better higher up all because of our Savior.

My friends, in a world filled with hopelessness and despair, how blessed we are that God in his grace has given us his Word that gives us hope! God's Word gives us hope by pointing us to the manger in which the baby Jesus was placed; the perfect life Jesus lived in our place; the cross on which he was placed to win our forgiveness; the empty tomb that proclaimed his victory over sin, death and the devil; his promise that he will return on Judgment Day to judge the living and the dead and gather all his people around him in his home of heaven. So during this Advent season as we prepare to celebrate the birthday of our Savior, let's keep our eyes focused on Jesus, our Advent Hope. Jesus has come and because He has, we have hope, hope that only our Savior can give; hope that is overflowing and fills us with joy and peace. Amen.