

WEEK 1: HOPE – THE PROPHECIES ABOUT JESUS

“O Holy Night” not only sings of the “thrill of hope,” its history conveys a remarkable hope. It was originally written by Placide Cappeau, an unchurched French poet commissioned by his parish priest. It was then put to music by Adolphe Adams, a famous Jewish composer, and was brought to North America where it was translated by John Sullivan Dwight. Dwight was an ardent abolitionist who was deeply moved by the song’s third verse which says, *“Truly He taught us to love one another; His law is love and His gospel is peace. Chains shall He break, for the slave is our brother, and in His name all oppression shall cease.”* The hymn quickly found favor, especially in the North. Legend has it that it was the singing of this hymn by a French soldier in the middle of the battlefield that drew both German and French troops out of their trenches to join along and enjoy a 24-hour ceasefire on Christmas Eve, 1870 in the middle of the Franco-Prussian War. Just 35 years later to the day, Reginald Fessenden, a university professor, and former colleague to Thomas Edison, read Luke 2 into a microphone, becoming the first to broadcast the human voice over the radio. He followed his reading by picking up his violin and playing “O Holy Night,” the first song ever sent through the airwaves. May the story of this sacred hymn remind you that God brings forth hope from and within the most unexpected places.

O Holy Night

Written by Placide Cappeau, music by Adolphe Adams, translated by John S. Dwight

O holy night! The stars are brightly shining;
It is the night of the dear Savior’s birth.
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
Till He appeared and the soul felt its worth.

A thrill of hope- the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn!
Fall on your knees! O hear the angel voices!

ADVENT READING PLAN 2021

O night divine, O night when Christ was born!
O night, O holy night, O night divine!

Led by the light of faith serenely beaming,
With glowing hearts by His cradle we stand.
So led by light of a star sweetly gleaming,
Here came the Wise Men from Orient land.

The King of kings lay thus in lowly manger,
In all our trials born to be our Friend.
He knows our need— to our weakness is no stranger.
Behold your King, before Him lowly bend!
Behold your King! Your King! Before Him lowly bend!

Truly He taught us to love one another;
His law is love and His gospel is peace.
Chains shall He break, for the slave is our brother,
And in His name all oppression shall cease.

Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we;
Let all within us praise His holy name.
Christ is the Lord! O praise His name forever!
His power and glory evermore proclaim!

His power and glory evermore proclaim!

Sunday, November 28

Isaiah 7:14 & Luke 1:35

PROPHECIES ABOUT JESUS: THE VIRGIN BIRTH

Ryan Worsley

Someone once asked Larry King to choose the person he would want to interview above all. He famously responded that it would be Jesus and said, "I would ask him if he believed that he was born of virgin birth, because whatever the answer is changes or reinforces the world." Even Larry King, a Jewish agnostic, recognized the significance of the claim of the virgin birth, for it would mean Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecy and set into motion the plan of redemption for the entire world.

Many people wrestle with the veracity of the virgin birth, wondering how it could be true. But, when we remember that Jesus was both fully God and fully man, the Immaculate Conception paints a beautiful picture of God's design for Jesus' birth. This Christmas may the wonder of God's plan to redeem mankind bring you hope in a darkened world.

Monday, November 29

Hosea 11:1 & Matthew 2:14-15

PROPHECIES ABOUT JESUS: OUT OF EGYPT

Kim Huffman

If you would have told me growing up that I was going to become a marathon runner, I would have laughed long and hard. I hated running. But God knew. And He knew the exact time (age 44) to call me to run (during my first missions' trip to Kenya) for His purposes, so I would be ready to run my first marathon for orphaned kids in Kenya.

God also knew the exact time and circumstances (political, social, etc.) under which the Messiah would arrive. God wanted everyone to know that He knew well in advance, and so He left some tell-tale clues through His prophets about the coming Messiah. One of those clues was a location, spoken through the prophet Hosea about God's son being called out of Egypt. Sure enough, 700 years later, a threat to the newborn Messiah sent His family to Egypt, where He would need to be "called out" when the time was right. God knew.

Take a moment to celebrate that God knows. He knows your days and is directing your path. Ask Him to show you what He is calling you "out of" or what He might be calling you "to."

Tuesday, November 30

Micah 5:2 & Matthew 2:4-6

PROPHESIES ABOUT JESUS: BORN IN BETHLEHEM

Paul Giersz

The Savior of the world born in Bethlehem? No way! That's what the people of the day would have said. They would have thought He would be born in Athens (the cultural hub) or Jerusalem, the religious center. If Jesus was coming today, it would be like saying the Savior of the world is going to be born in LeRoy, Illinois. Where is LeRoy? Exactly!

But was Bethlehem really that obscure? Not to God. Bethlehem means the "house of bread" and it was the hometown of Ruth's father-in-law, Elimelech. This is where Ruth met Boaz, a man who married, protected, and provided for her. Boaz was Ruth's kinsman redeemer. Jesus is our kinsman redeemer from Bethlehem. He paid the price of death to redeem us and continues to protect and provide for us.

God always has a *grand plan*. Even though we don't always recognize it.

Today, think about the ways that God has surprised you with the ways He has protected and provided for you.

Wednesday, December 1

Genesis 3:15, Matthew 1:20, & Galatians 4:4

PROPHECIES ABOUT JESUS: BORN OF A WOMAN

Diane Beers

There are numerous thoughts that can overtake our minds when tragedy or sin strikes. A common question we ask is “why me?” The answer is . . . *“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers, he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel,”* (Genesis 3:15). Due to the Fall, we all experience loss, pain, disappointment, rejection, illness, and more.

Let’s reflect a bit on Eve and the HOPE that is offered through her. Eve is Adam’s helper. She is the first woman, first wife, and first mother of all humanity. She shares in the image of God. Eve is a vigorous woman, a woman with hefty responsibilities who also gives birth to the first naturally born human, Cain. Additionally, she was part of the Fall. Through her comes both life and death, both curse and cure, both hurt and hope.

HOPE is intertwined throughout the Bible and God figuratively and literally offers both Mary and Joseph significant glimpses of HOPE through their obedience. *“Do not be afraid,”* the angels said, *“because what is conceived in her (Mary) is from the Holy Spirit.”* (Matthew 1:20) God was moving, reminding them of the promise He made at the beginning in Genesis 3:15. Reread that verse now.

Though Eve’s offspring would be wounded, ultimately the offspring of Eve would crush the head of the serpent, foreshadowing Jesus’ triumph over sin and Satan at the cross. Jesus showed complete dominance over Satan by a crushing, mortal wound to his head. Because of the promise, the victor of Genesis 3:15 had to be human, *“born of a woman,”* (Galatians 4:4) to redeem all of humanity.

It is inspiring to remember that each woman, from Eve to Mary to each woman today, has been called by God to fulfill His purpose. Ladies, you are part of God’s great plan of redemption. Through your obedience and faithfulness, Jesus, our Victor, will be delivered to a hurting world in need of a Savior. Gentlemen, let’s treasure the ways God is using our wives, mothers, daughters, and sisters to show us and others the love of God in Jesus the Son.

Thursday, December 2

Isaiah 40:3-4 & John 1:23

PROPHECIES ABOUT JESUS: JOHN THE BAPTIST

Gerald Aloran

Israel's history is filled with glorious victories and horrendous decay. The people were only an independent nation for a short time compared to the long history of enslavement by the surrounding nations. They were in darkness, but God, through the prophet Isaiah, said that the Savior King was coming. There would first need to be a herald, one who comes before the King enters. That would be John the Baptist, who proclaimed that he was not the Messiah but the one preparing the way for Him.

Christmas celebrates the arrival of our King, while Advent is preparing the way for the King. How are you preparing yourself for Christmas? Our culture waits expectingly for shopping deals, presents, families, parties, Christmas movies, and religious services. I personally love this season and what it brings.

The ancient Christians saw Advent not as the enactment of the birth of Jesus but as remembrance that we are between the resurrection and second coming of Jesus. While living in our failing world, let us continue to hope like the ancient Israelites who were in darkness, but believed that the King is coming. "Come Lord Jesus, Come!"

Friday, December 3

Daniel 7:13-14 & Luke 1:30-33

PROPHECIES ABOUT JESUS: THE EVERLASTING KINGDOM

Pete Sutton

What does Daniel have to do with Mary? And what do Mary and Daniel have to do with us today? Babylon. Daniel's vision came while in exile in the kingdom of Babylon, under the rule of Belshazzar. Mary's angelic visitation came to her in Nazareth, a city pinned under the thumb of King Herod and the Roman Empire, a symbolic Babylon captured in the visions Daniel received and interpreted in Chapters 2 and 7 in the book of Daniel.

Today, we too live in a symbolic Babylon, where those of the Kingdom of God live as foreigners and exiles in this world (1 Peter 2:11). Empires rise and empires fall, but there is One King who remains enthroned and sovereign through it all. This truth comforted Daniel as he awaited return to the Land of Promise. This truth comforted Mary as she awaited the coming of her son, the Messiah of Israel. And this truth still comforts us today as we await the glorious return of King Jesus and the advent of His eternal kingdom that will never diminish or be destroyed.

May your hope be eternally grounded in the sovereign reign of King Jesus and His eternal kingdom.

Saturday, December 4

2 Samuel 7:12-13 & Matthew 1:1

PROPHESIES ABOUT JESUS: LINEAGE OF KING DAVID

Gerald Aloran

The Gospel of Matthew provides the genealogy of Jesus showing the link to Abraham, the father of Israel, and more specifically to David, from where the Messiah would come. Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise of salvation for all people: Jew and Gentile, men and women, commoners and kings, adulterers, fornicators, liars, spies, idolaters, and those who sought to live for Yahweh.

God, since the beginning, had a plan of salvation that would bless the nations. It is through Christ that this plan is being fulfilled. God made promises in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, the promises are now being fulfilled.

There is hope now that the Messiah King, for whom we all have been waiting, has arrived. Now the world needs to know. We are His ambassadors of this Gospel, the Good News that God is reconciling the whole world through Christ, not counting their sins against them (2 Corinthians 5:19).

Your new life in Christ is a carrier of this Good News. May the Lord keep you and remind you of your call as ambassador of good news to a world that only offers bad news.