**THE HOPE OF THE PROPHETS, IS. 7:13-14, MIC. 5:2-5, MATT. 1, ADVENT 121, NOV. 28/21.**

**In Eph.** 1 Paul asked God that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened so **that you may know the hope that He has called you to. God is calling each of us to hope**.

This 1st Sunday of Advent focuses on hope. **God is calling you to hope.** T**hat hope includes** **the “riches of His glorious inheritance**” for each of us, when we receive Jesus Christ as our personal Lord & Saviour we become children of God. Isn’t that remarkable! And when we become children of God, **we also receive “His incomparably great power** for us who believe”! That’s “the working of God’s mighty strength which He demonstrated when He raised Jesus from the dead. God wants us to know & partner with Him in that kind of power! **Do you think you could have hope if God says** He wants to share His “incomparably great power” with us? I could get a little excited about that!

In Romans 15 Paul tells us “**everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so through endurance & the encouragement of the Scriptures** **we may have hope**.” He adds: “**May the God of hope** fill you with all joy & peace as you trust in Him, **so that you overflow with hope** by the power of the Holy Spirit**.” You see, hope is a gift from God.**

Then Paul quotes Isaiah: “The root of Jesse will spring up—that’s Jesus—one who will arise to rule over the nations; **the** **Gentiles—that’s us—will hope in Him.”**

What do you hope for? **This hope isn’t just** for a better day or end to suffering **but hope that** our lives have meaning & possibility beyond our present situation. It’s hope in God who makes all things new; not in our circumstances, no matter how badly we want them to change.

**Is there enough here to convince you to have hope?** Are you filled with hope this morning? The prophets oozed with hope. In Gen. 1, God says, “Let us make man (humanity) in our image.” The “us” is the Trinity in Holy Communion, in agreement about the high calling & high expectations God has for all of us. In Lev. 11 God says, “Be holy because I am holy.” But we all fall short of that mark; sometimes very far short. We need someone to stand in for us who is without sin. Moses, in Dt. 18, speaking God’s word said, “I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put My words in His mouth. That prophet is Jesus. So at least from the time of Moses, the Israelites had been looking for this promised prophet, the Messiah, the Christ. The promise was that the Messiah would come through the line of David.

We’re familiar with Isaiah’s prophecies:

“For to us a child is born, to us a Son is given; the government will be on His shoulders. He will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to His authority & peace. He will reign in justice & righteousness forever (Is. 9).

“Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God also? Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and will call Him Immanuel—God with us.” (Is. 7:13-14)

It was Ahaz, king of Judah, who was trying God’s patience. In spite of Isaiah’s words of encouragement that God would take care of the attacks from Syria & Ephraim, Ahaz insisted on calling upon the help of Assyria to defend Jerusalem. Isaiah, speaking as the prophet of God, told Ahaz to ask God for a sign, but Ahaz refused, offending God. Nevertheless, God gave a sign. The 1st sign would have given assurance of the swift defeat of Ephraim & Syria, but the 2nd is 1 which only time could bring around; the virgin birth. The sign we didn’t read speaks of the devastation that will happen to Ephraim, Syria & Judah by a northern kingdom (Assyria). Between the time when Isaiah speaks & the virgin gives birth, Judah will fall into captivity in Babylon.

But why is the child called Immanuel? It’s an announcement by God to the house of David of the birth of a Child highly named & expected as the coming of a glorious Prince within this royal family. While it seems mysterious & abrupt to us, it fell from Isaiah’s lips on hearts which **cherished as their dearest hope** the appearance of a glorious descendant of David. At the time of the prophecy people were particularly sensitive to this hope because both David’s city—Jerusalem & David’s dynasty, were in peril. Ahaz would have understood this; by his unbelief & refusal to ask God, he excluded himself from the victory God would have given through him & he mortgaged the hope of Israel. By his refusal to ask God, he disinherited the promised King. But God’s plan is unstoppable. **The Child, who is Israel’s hope**, will be born—God with us! He will receive the Divine Name; Ahaz has spoiled everything about the event but the Name. Ahaz, is like the Judas of the OT. He has betrayed the Messiah and the Deliverer of his people.

The birthplace of Messiah is given in Micah’s prophecy, the town of David—Bethlehem:

“Out of you will come…one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times…He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord in the majesty of the name of the Lord His God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And he will be their peace.” Again, hope oozes.

1 more prophecy before we go to Matthew. Malachi, the last book in the OT, was written 400 years before Christ. During those 400 years there were no prophets; God was silent and the people waited expectantly, **hopefully**, because Malachi says,

“See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to His temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come…I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great &dreadful day of the Lord comes.”

Jesus later reveals the prophet Elijah who comes to prepare the way is John the Baptist. The messenger of the covenant is none other than Jesus Himself. So you see, there was great antic-

Ipation, great hope of the coming Messiah.

Doesn’t it amaze you? Matthew starts his gospel with a list of names—& who thought we’d ever read them! For us, yes, but for Jews it is the most natural thing; purity of lineage is uber important. If any foreign blood was discovered, a man lost his right to be called a Jew & be a member of the people of God. This pedigree of Jesus Christ is carefully arranged into 3 groups of 14. It is symbolic. The 3 sections represent the 3 great stages of Jewish history. The 1st takes the history down to David, who forged Israel into a powerhouse nation. The 2nd takes Israel to the exile to Babylon, a time of shame & tragedy for Jews. The 3rd takes the history to Christ. He alone liberated people from their slavery & shame, turning tragedy into triumph.

Since God created us in His own image, we’re born for greatness. That’s always been God’s dream for us—we’re designed to have fellowship with God. Bu we lost our greatness. Instead of becoming servants of God, we became slaves of sin. We’re not what we were meant to be. Our free will’s been used to ignore & disobey God, rather than honor Him & enjoy His friendship. Thankfully, our greatness is retrievable, not because of us but because of God, who didn’t abandon us when we strayed. God sent Jesus into our personal brokenness & our brok-en world to rescue us from our mess of sin & free us—restoring us to right fellowship with God.

The Jews never forgot that they were the chosen people of God. In spite of their many disasters they never forgot their destiny. This Son of David, as the Messiah was always called, would lead them to the glory they believed was their birthright. He would bring fulfilment to their desires for peace, loveliness & greatness. He offers real life where no other can.

Jesus is the fulfilment of prophecy. He fulfils over 350 OT prophesies! **There is both**

**purpose & design in this universe. Through the prophets come the great hope & the eternal truth that life & the world are not spinning their wheels, but moving toward the goal of God!**

But there’s more. 4 women appear in this pedigree. This isn’t normal. Women had no legal rights & were regarded more as possessions than persons. More amazing is who these wo-men were. Rahab was a prostitute. Ruth wasn’t even Jewish. Moabites weren’t to enter the ass-embly of the Lord. Tamar was a seducer & adulteress. Bathsheba, Solomon’s mother, was the woman King David seduced, then had her husband, Uriah, killed. You couldn’t find 4 less likely ancestors of Christ! **That’s the point, the core of the Gospel. Jesus came to blow out barriers.**

Jesus exploded the barrier between Gentile & Jew. Rahab & Ruth find their place in the pedigree. God’ love reaches everyone. Jesus blew out the barriers between men & women. To God both are equally loved & important. He blew out the barrier between the righteous & the sinner. **This is the depth of Jesus’ identification with all of us. There’s hope for all of us!**

And both angels & dreams herald His coming to us. For the only time in all eternity a child was born to a virgin. You can imagine if you were to hear this today, it would be greeted with cynicism & ridicule. So it was then. Joseph no doubt was himself incredulous. Rather than have Mary publicly disgraced, he resolved to divorce her quietly. The 2 were promised to each other & considered like a married couple for the year prior to their wedding, except that they had no sexual relations throughout this year. God appears to Joseph in a dream, addressing him as “son of David”, & assures him “what’s conceived in [Mary] is from the HS.” The child is to be called “Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins (Jesus means ‘the Lord saves’)”. Matthew points out that all this took place to fulfill Isaiah’s prophecy that the virgin would be

with child and they will call Him Immanuel—God with us.

Do you see how God is with us? Do you see how He has established an appointment with all humanity from the beginning? Do you see how He has identified with every one of us through the genealogy Matthew gives us? Do you understand that He came for you personally? Do you realize He desires to restore you to right fellowship and friendship with God, in a way you could never accomplish on your own? Will you accept His invitation to leave your old self behind & give your new self to Him to mold and make you into His image? Jesus says, “Come!” **Our eternal hope comes through the prophets who reveal the ultimate hope we have in life & in death—Jesus**. How can you not tell others this week about the greatest of all hopes? Don’t hoard it, share it openly!