

Sun., Nov. 28 - First Sunday of Advent

Memory Verse: "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because He has come and has redeemed His people." -Luke 1:68

Lighting of the Advent Wreath

Reading of Scripture: Luke 1:1-4

Message: "Most Honorable Theophilus"

Scripture: Luke 1:1-4

Blurb: As we prepare for Christmas, we begin to realize again that we need the Jesus of Christmas more than the celebration of Christmas. So, this Sunday we begin a year-long journey following Jesus through the Gospel of Luke. We eavesdrop on the letter Luke writes to a certain Theophilus, and we realize that we are Theophilus! Come this Sunday ready to listen!

Scripture Reading for Next Week: Read Luke 1:1-38

[Recorded Worship Beginning]

WELCOME -Pastor Andrew

MEMORY VERSE: -Pastor Andrew

"Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because He has come and has redeemed His people." -Luke 1:68

WORSHIP MUSIC SET -Sanctify

Joy

Show Me How to Live

Worship prayer -Pastor Andrew

[Live Worship Beginning]

GATHERING SONG: *Sing We the Song of Emmanuel* -Sanctify

WELCOME -Pastor David

MEMORY VERSE: -Pastor David

"Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because He has come and has redeemed His people." -Luke 1:68

WORSHIP MUSIC SET -Sanctify

Joy

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

Show Me How to Live

Worship prayer -Pastor Andrew

[Both Recorded & Live Worship]

ADVENT CANDLE / READING OF SCRIPTURE: Luke 1:1-4

At the very beginning of Luke's Gospel, we see that Luke is writing a letter about Jesus to a certain Theophilus. Luke has done careful research so he, and we, can have confidence in our belief in Jesus. Luke 1:1-4,

"1 Many people have already applied themselves to the task of compiling an account of the events that have been fulfilled among us. 2 They used what the original eyewitnesses and servants of the word handed down to us. 3 Now, after having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, I have also decided to write a carefully ordered account for you, most honorable Theophilus. 4 I want you to have confidence in the soundness of the instruction you have received."

SERVE MOMENT: -Pastor Cassi

Student Sunday Scholarship Fund Collection (UM Sunday Offering)

Hope Moves Christmas Party, Sun., Dec. 12 at 4 p.m. for Adult & Teen Challenge women

Family Pathways Food Shelf Collection (Include list)

PRAYERS & LORD'S PRAYER: "Advent" -Pastor Cassi

INTERGENERATIONAL BRIDGE: "How to write a letter" -Pastor Andrew

MESSAGE: The Coming: Most Honorable Theophilus

PP#1: The Coming: Most Honorable Theophilus

"Now, after having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, I have also decided to write a carefully ordered account for you, most honorable Theophilus." -Luke 1:3

The Coming: Most Honorable Theophilus. Luke 1:3, "Now, after having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, I have also decided to write a carefully ordered account for you, most honorable Theophilus."

PP#2: *Image of mess while decorating a living room for Christmas*

Well, Merry Christmas! Thanksgiving was Thursday. Friday was Black Friday. And Saturday was decorating for Christmas, right? This weekend officially begins the countdown to Christmas.

But, I think there is more going on here than just getting ready for the holiday season: the changing of the decorations, the next thing on the calendar. Yes, there's a lot of effort and planning that goes into Christmas, a lot of celebrating, and a lot of things to do and experience. But it's not *really* just about the *celebration* of Christmas. It's all such a big deal because *Christmas* is the big deal! We *celebrate* Christmas because it's the way we mark *Christmas* as a big deal. And when we focus wrongly on the *celebrating* of Christmas, we find it all a bit empty and shallow. The celebrations aren't the point, right church? Christmas is the point! We learned this last year when during COVID we couldn't celebrate like we may have wanted. But for Christians, Christmas came anyway...because Christmas is not *the way* we celebrate, but *the what* we celebrate. Or, put more correctly, *the who* we celebrate.

Christmas is God coming in Jesus to help us people struggling in sin and darkness. Christmas is Jesus showing up as a baby, born to be our Savior and, as we learned this fall, our King of Kings.

So, now, as we set our sights on Christmas, we look through all the busy celebrations to *the person of Jesus*.

And this very process—which the Church calls Advent, meaning preparing for “The Coming”—is one of the most essential, rich, deep, and meaningful movements of the human heart.

It’s taking a long, hard look at our reality: our lives, our world, what it’s all about, and honestly asking, “What’s the point?”

PP#3: *Image for how Jesus coming as savior is the real meaning of Christmas.*

And Christmas answers that the point is that Jesus comes: to bring light to our darkness, to bring peace to our violence, to bring forgiveness to our sin, to bring hope to our despairing, to bring purpose to our drifting, to bring sense to our craziness, to bring love to our insignificance, to bring salvation to our lives and world. We look through all the busy celebrations and see Jesus: the person of Christmas and the reason for the season.

So, as we count down to Christmas, we prepare by asking, who is this Jesus? What makes Him the reason for the season? Why is He such a big deal? How is He the answer we’ve been longing for? We look inward and ask, “Can He really touch that pain I’ve buried deep down?” We look around and ask, “Can He really bring peace on earth and good will to God’s people?”

PP#4: The Coming: Most Honorable Theophilus

-A Year With Jesus

Today we’re not only starting a countdown to Christmas, here at church we’re starting a year with Jesus. Our world is messed up. Amen? Things are crazy! People are unhinged. Violence is constant. Injustice is embedded. And supposedly Christmas tells us that Jesus is our hope.

So, we’re going to come alongside this Jesus, hang closely with Him for a year, go where He goes, see what He sees, listen to what He says, do what He says, all because we—you, and me, and our whole world—need what Christmas promises. We’re not just going to celebrate Christmas, we’re going to grab that Baby in our arms and squeeze Him to our chest, and commit to step up, to step in, to link our lives to Jesus, and be His disciple, because, we have come to realize now more than ever, just how much we need Him! Our lives are shallow and aimless. Our world is shallow and aimless. So, we’re committing to go deep and to focus, right on Jesus.

Are you interested? Does this appeal to you? Does this touch your longing? Anyone else with me on this?

PP#5: The Coming: Most Honorable Theophilus

-A Year With Jesus

-Reading through The Gospel of Luke

So, starting today, we’re going to spend a year with Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. Sunday by Sunday we’re going to read through the entire Gospel of Luke, and then we’re going to unpack it as disciples who are struggling to keep up with Jesus. We’ll talk about what makes sense, what we don’t understand, where we’re challenged, where we need to change. Our Sunday messages may be different...not your typical sermon. I’m going to suggest that you bring your own Bibles to church.

(We'll be taking notes.) It may get dicey at times, we may encounter some sharp turns. We may hit some road blocks and need to make some U-turns. But come what may: it's you, me, us together!, following Jesus. We're committing to 1. hang together, and to 2. hang out with Jesus. You with me?

I've chosen Luke for a number of reasons. One is that Matthew is the most familiar Gospel of Jesus for us, and throughout history. Matthew is our normal go-to Gospel for all things Jesus. Mark, which is very similar to Matthew, was the Gospel I studied closely in school. So, I kind of know Mark best. And John is my favorite Gospel, because John loves to talk about the theological symbolism of Jesus' life and ministry. That's the way my brain works. So, Luke is the Gospel I know probably least well. And therefore, I need to learn more about it. So, I proposed Luke.

Secondly, Luke contains the most complete spread of Jesus' life: from birth to childhood to public ministry, to His death and resurrection. Only Luke, for example, has the famous Christmas story.

PP#6: Luke 1:1-4 (CEB)

1 Many people have already applied themselves to the task of compiling an account of the events that have been fulfilled among us. 2 They used what the original eyewitnesses and servants of the word handed down to us. **3 Now, after having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, I have also decided to write a carefully ordered account for you, most honorable Theophilus.** 4 I want you to have confidence in the soundness of the instruction you have received.

But most importantly, I'm choosing Luke because you and I: we are Theophilus. Turn in your personal Bibles to Luke 1. You see, at the beginning of his Gospel, Luke explains, in verse 3, that he is writing to a man named, "most honorable Theophilus" to give him and others with him "a carefully ordered account" of all that happened with Jesus.

Let me explain a couple of things here. We see that the Gospel of Luke is actually a letter, a long letter. It was called a "Gospel" only much later, when the Bible was put together. Gospel means "Good News," and so the writings that told the story of Jesus' life were all labeled, "Gospels" and all put together. There were four that were found to be accurate and reliable, gospels written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Yes, there were others written, but they were found to be weak or untrustworthy.

PP#7: The Bible: The story of how God saves people

The Old Testament (Law): The old covenant with the Jews

The New Testament (Jesus): The new covenant with all people

So, rather than just picking one, the Early Church kept all four reliable accounts of Jesus' life, and just put them one after the other at the very beginning of the new collection, called the New Testament, the second part after the previous collection, the Old Testament. So, the Bible—with the Old and New Testaments, is the collection of writings about salvation, the story of how God worked the salvation for humankind. The older covenant was the covenant that God made with the Jews and centered on the law, and the newer covenant was the covenant God made with all people and was centered on the person of Jesus. Jesus fulfills the Law, fulfills the prophecies of the Old Testament, completes salvation for people and therefore shows He is indeed the Savior of the world. People, who want to be a part of the amazing relationship with God that Jesus makes possible, can do so by choosing to become a disciple of Jesus.

The first disciples Jesus called verbally, or they heard Jesus and chose to follow Him. But then, after Jesus returned back to glory, the people who knew Jesus kept talking about Him and invited others to become His disciple, too. So, right from the beginning, when people complained about life being such a struggle and seeming pointless, that their celebrations felt empty, and that the world seemed crazy and going wrong, the first Christians invited them to give Jesus a try.

PP#8: The Bible: The story of how God saves people

The Old Testament (Law): The old covenant with the Jews

The New Testament (Jesus): The new covenant with all people

Compiled to reliably answer “Who is Jesus?” and “Why should I follow Him?”

So, right from the beginning, people would ask, “Who is this Jesus, and why should I trust Him? What makes Him my savior?” At first the disciples would share from their own experiences of having personally walked with Jesus. But as word spread and original disciples became scarce, their stories and accounts were shared, and then written down so they could be shared consistently.

And this seems to be the situation in the decades after Jesus ascended back to heaven. Best guess is that there were some other early accounts written down but since lost. Mark is probably the earliest surviving one, written about A.D. 60. Matthew probably came next, and John came last, about A.D. 90. So, sometime between Matthew and John, Luke writes his account.

PP#9: The Coming: Most Honorable Theophilus

-A Year With Jesus

-Reading through The Gospel of Luke

-We are Theophilus

Now, I said that we are Theophilus. Matthew, Mark and John were all Jews, and it is clear from their writing that they were written to Jews. But we’re not Jews, right? Well, neither was Luke nor Theophilus! In your Bibles, at the beginning of Luke, draw a line to the title “Luke” and write “Gentle.” Then draw another line from “Gentle” to Theophilus in verse 3. Luke is a Gentile, writing to a Gentile! And that means that the way he writes is a bit easier for us to understand. It’s good for us to listen in on that conversation, right? And it seems that Theophilus has heard about Jesus, and maybe has heard some conflicting stories about Jesus—you know, fake news is not a new thing!—and so he seems to have asked Luke (perhaps a friend of his whom he knew was a Christian) who he knew could give him the real deal.

So, that’s us, isn’t it? We’ve heard a lot about Jesus. Some of it we’re wondering how true and accurate it is, so we, like Theophilus, want the real deal! And we’re not Jews, so we need to know how this Jesus, whom the Jews claim as their Messiah—can be our savior, too, right? So it’s good to go listen in on these Gentiles, who can tell us how Jesus is for Gentiles.

Theophilus and Luke, it seems were also both grounded in Greek culture. We call that today Hellenism, and we’ve learned that our Western culture is grounded on this Greek and Roman antiquity. So, it might be just a bit easier for us to listen in on the conversation about Jesus with others who share a similar Greek and Roman world view, as Luke and Theophilus do.

Also, neither Luke nor Theophilus ever met Jesus. So, by the word “Gentile” you just wrote in your Bibles and drew lines to both Luke and Theophilus, also write, “never met Jesus.” This is also like us. They—and we—have just heard about Him. So, as he says in verse 3, Luke has carefully done the research, investigating everything from the beginning, including all the other writings and

the eye witnesses, and has written an orderly account of what happened with Jesus. He wants Theophilus to have confidence in the reliability of what he has been taught as accurate about Jesus. That's us! We want a careful account of what really happened, so that we can have confidence in what we've been taught.

Now, side note, Luke never reveals his name, but it's almost certain it has to be Luke. In Acts, the author's second letter to Theophilus, the author says that he was a working companion of the Apostle Paul. Paul credits Luke as among his most reliable friends. A couple of other internal clues point to that is must be Luke. And Paul says that Luke was a physician. Draw another like from just Luke and note "Physician, see Colossians 4:14" in your margin. That means he was well educated with a more scientific approach. This is also us, for we look at our world with the scientific method. Luke, of sorts, speaks our language! He frames things historically and empirically.

One more: Luke addresses Theophilus as the "most honorable," a title Paul used when addressing the Roman governors Felix in Acts 23:26 and Festus in Acts 26:25. So Theophilus must be a leader, or a person of influence and means. Now, we're not governors, but we are people of means who enjoy at least some privilege and influence. What might Luke share about how Jesus connected with people like us?

PP#10: The Coming: Most Honorable Theophilus

-A Year With Jesus

-Reading through The Gospel of Luke

-We are Theophilus

-We want confidence in following Jesus

"I want you to have confidence in the soundness of the instruction you have received." -Luke 1:4

Well, phew, are you still with me? We've really unpacked this short little opening, haven't we? But we do it with a very self-invested interest. Draw a line to verse 4 and write the note, "Purpose of Luke." This Luke and Theophilus, they are talking about Jesus in a way that we can find really, really helpful. And so we join their conversation with our interest, but also our hearts: for our very lives are at stake! **We want this Jesus to be our Savior and touch our emptiness and bring us light, and hope and joy. And we seek the confidence that Luke talks about, the soundness of our instruction about Jesus, so we can know our faith in Jesus is reliable and trustworthy.**

So, **as we start towards Christmas, as we decorate our homes and plan our parties, as we work our schedules and attend celebrations, we prepare not just to *celebrate* this Christmas, but prepare to connect with this *Jesus* of Christmas. We're going all in, and we're committing to walk with this Jesus for a year.** We'll travel along with Luke and Theophilus, and we'll ask the tough and real questions. We'll be blunt as we look inward deep into our souls, we'll be authentic as we pay attention to our lives and what's going on with us, and we'll be honest as we look around to see what our world is really like.

PP#11: Advent: Getting *Ready* for Christmas *Rightly!* [*With an image about the real meaning of Christmas, such as a manger set sitting in the middle of a messy living room of decorating.*]

So, this is the main point of my message today, no neat three application points. No. It's Advent. **As you get ready, make a point to get ready *rightly!* Decorate your tree. Shop for presents. Plan your food. But also do some deep reflecting. That's Advent. Look inward. Look around. Ask**

the tough questions about life, about *your* life. Go deep. And as you do, read Luke...*really* read Luke. Ask those questions about who this Jesus is, and why and how He could possibly be for you. We listen in, like Theophilus, to discover how the life that Jesus brings can be for us, too. And that's why we will say, a *truly* merry Christmas!

Amen.

[In-person Worship Only] CLOSING SONG: *Oh Give Thanks!*(Psalm 107) -Sanctify

OFFERING: -Pastor David

-Give of your monies to God's work through this church. You can give in person, mail it in, drop it off or, most conveniently, you can make an electronic transfer or a debit card payment on the church website or by using the "square" on the bulletin.

ANNOUNCEMENTS -Pastor David

Wednesday night: Meal and Groups resume! Pancakes.

Next Sunday's message: Second Sunday of Advent: Foretold!

Read ahead: Luke 1:1-38, and bring your Bibles!

MEMORY VERSE -Pastor David

"Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because He has come and has redeemed His people." -Luke 1:68

BENEDICTION -Pastor David