

Advent

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Let's set the tone for our Advent broadcast and interview with singer Michael Harris as the Adventist Christian School Bell choir plays, "Soon and Very Soon We Are Going to See the King!"

[music – "Soon and Very Soon"]

Part 1

Some Protestant churches divide the year into seasons. Those churches that do, call the four weeks before Christmas, the Advent season. The English word, "Advent" is derived from the Latin word *adventus*, which means "coming." It is a time of expectant waiting and preparation for the celebration of the Nativity of Jesus at Christmas. The church decorations typically feature an advent wreath, which consists of four small candles surrounding a big candle. Only one of the small candles is lit on the first Sunday in Advent. On the second Sunday in Advent, two of the small candles are lit. One more candle is lit on each subsequent Sunday. Finally, all four small Advent candles, and the large Christmas candle, are lit on Christmas.

The lighting of the candles is essentially a countdown to the birth of Jesus. It is a time to reflect upon the promises of the coming Messiah and eagerly await their fulfillment. But not all of the advent prophecies have been fulfilled. The prophecies concerning the birth, death, and resurrection of the Messiah were fulfilled 2,000 years ago; but the prophecies concerning Jesus second coming have not. So, Advent is a season during which we should remember the anticipation of the birth of Jesus and continue to anticipate the second coming. The perfect fulfillment of the First Advent prophecies should give us confidence that the Second Advent prophecies will be fulfilled as well.

The Bible is full of Messianic prophecies. The first is in Genesis, chapter 3, verses 14 and 15. Satan, the serpent, had successfully tempted Eve to sin, so God pronounced this curse on Satan:

So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this,

**"Cursed are you above all the livestock
 and all the wild animals!
You will crawl on your belly
 and you will eat dust
 all the days of your life.
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."**

It is the last phrase, "he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel," that first hints at the coming Messiah. Satan will inflict a minor wound on Christ by nailing His feet to the cross; but the cross is where Jesus delivers the crushing blow to Satan.

There are many other Messianic prophecies that really need charts to be adequately explained. Since you can't see charts on the radio, we will just mention a few of the ones that can be easily understood without visual aides. One of the most important prophecies begins in Daniel 9, verse 24. It predicts when Jesus, the Anointed One, would begin His ministry. It specifies time in terms of groups of seven years, sometimes called "weeks of years." The prophecy was given when Jerusalem was in ruins because of the Babylonian captivity. Daniel said there would be 7 plus 62 (that is, 69) sets of seven years between the time when there would be a decree to rebuild Jerusalem and the coming of the Messiah.

“Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven ‘sevens,’ and sixty-two ‘sevens.’ It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble.

The prophecy is broken up into groups of seven years because it tells what will happen during some of those seven year periods. Of most interest to us is what the Messiah will do in the 70th group of seven years.

He will confirm a covenant with many for one ‘seven.’ In the middle of the ‘seven’ he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. (Daniel 9:27)

The beginning of the 70th seven was the very year that Jesus was baptized and began His ministry. The middle of seven is three and a half. Jesus ministered in the flesh for three and a half years, and then was crucified, putting an end to the Levitical sacrificial system. Three and a half years later, the probation of the Jewish nation ended with the stoning of Steven, At that time many disciples fled Jerusalem and the gospel was given to the gentiles.

When Christ was born, it was well known when the decree to rebuild and restore Jerusalem was made. Therefore, wise men who studied the prophecies knew it was about time for the Messiah to come. They also knew that the birth would be marked by a star, as predicted in Numbers 24, verses 15 through 19.

Then [Balaam] uttered his oracle:

**“The oracle of Balaam son of Beor,
the oracle of one whose eye sees clearly,
the oracle of one who hears the words of God,
who has knowledge from the Most High,
who sees a vision from the Almighty,
who falls prostrate, and whose eyes are opened:**

**“I see him, but not now;
I behold him, but not near.
A star will come out of Jacob;
a scepter will rise out of Israel.
He will crush the foreheads of Moab,
the skulls of all the sons of Sheth.
Edom will be conquered;
Seir, his enemy, will be conquered,
but Israel will grow strong.
A ruler will come out of Jacob
and destroy the survivors of the city.” (Numbers 24:15-19)**

When the wise men in the East saw the star, they wanted to be on the side of great conqueror, so they came to the king of Jews to offer him gifts. But King Herod was no Bible scholar, so he turned to the priests.

When [King Herod] had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

**“But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.” (Matthew 2:4-6)**

The prophecy they were quoting is found in Micah 5, verse 2.

What wasn't clear from the Old Testament prophecies is that the Messiah is coming multiple times for different purposes. The New Testament makes it clear that Jesus came the first time to reform the church and redeem mankind from its sins by dying on the cross. He is coming the second time to resurrect the righteous and take them to heaven for 1,000 years. At the end of the 1,000 years he will resurrect and finally destroy the wicked, and bring the righteous back to the recreated Earth to live forever. The prophecies about what will happen just before the second coming make it clear that Jesus could return soon.

So, this advent season we should not only be eagerly awaiting Christmas, we should be eagerly awaiting the second coming. While we are waiting for Jesus to come, we have enough time for me play “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.”

[music – O Come, O Come, Emmanuel]

Part 2

In chapter 3 of her biography of Christ, Ellen White describes the prophecies about Emmanuel—God With Us—and the implications for us today. Here is an excerpt from that chapter, titled, “The Fullness of Time.”

The Saviour's coming was foretold in Eden. When Adam and Eve first heard the promise, they looked for its speedy fulfillment. They joyfully welcomed their first-born son, hoping that he might be the Deliverer. But the fulfillment of the promise tarried. Those who first received it died without the sight. From the days of Enoch the promise was repeated through patriarchs and prophets, keeping alive the hope of His appearing, and yet He came not. The prophecy of Daniel revealed the time of His advent, but not all rightly interpreted the message. Century after century passed away; the voices of the prophets ceased. The hand of the oppressor was heavy upon Israel, and many were ready to exclaim, "The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth." Ezek. 12:22.

But like the stars in the vast circuit of their appointed path, God's purposes know no haste and no delay. ... So in heaven's council the hour for the coming of Christ had been determined. When the great clock of time pointed to that hour, Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

"When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son." God had directed the movements of nations, and the tide of human impulse and influence, until the world was ripe for the coming of the Deliverer. The nations were united under one government. One language was widely spoken, and was everywhere recognized as the language of literature. From all lands the Jews of the dispersion gathered to Jerusalem to the annual feasts. As these returned to the places of their sojourn, they could spread throughout the world the tidings of the Messiah's coming. ... With longing eyes they looked for the coming of the Deliverer, when the darkness should be dispelled, and the mystery of the future should be made plain.

Outside of the Jewish nation there were men who foretold the appearance of a divine instructor. These men were seeking for truth, and to them the Spirit of Inspiration was imparted. One after another, like stars in the darkened heavens, such teachers had arisen. Their words of prophecy had kindled hope in the hearts of thousands of the Gentile world.

For hundreds of years the Scriptures had been translated into the Greek language, then widely spoken throughout the Roman Empire. The Jews were scattered everywhere, and their expectation of the Messiah's coming was to some extent shared by the Gentiles. Among those whom the Jews styled heathen were men who had a better understanding of the Scripture prophecies concerning the Messiah than had the teachers in Israel. ...

Through nature, through types and symbols, through patriarchs and prophets, God had spoken to the world [with little success]. Lessons must be given to humanity in the language of humanity. The Messenger of the covenant must speak. His voice must be heard in His own temple. Christ must come [in person] to utter words which should be clearly and definitely understood. He, the author of truth, must separate truth from the chaff of man's utterance, which had made it of no effect. The principles of God's government and the plan of redemption must be clearly defined. The lessons of the Old Testament must be fully set before men.

Among the Jews there were yet steadfast souls ... through whom a knowledge of God had been preserved. These still looked for the hope of the promise made unto the fathers. They ... read how the Lord would anoint One "to preach good tidings unto the meek," "to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives," and to declare the "acceptable year of the Lord." Isa. 61:1, 2. They read how He would "set judgment in the earth," how the isles should "wait for His law," how the Gentiles should come to His light, and kings to the brightness of His rising. Isa. 42:4; 60:3.

The dying words of Jacob filled them with hope: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come." Gen. 49:10. ... The prophecy of Daniel pictured the glory of His reign over an empire which should succeed all earthly kingdoms; and, said the prophet, "It shall stand forever." Dan. 2:44. While few understood the nature of Christ's mission, there was a widespread expectation of a mighty prince who should establish his kingdom in Israel, and who should come as a deliverer to the nations.

The fullness of the time had come. Humanity, becoming more degraded through ages of transgression, called for the coming of the Redeemer. ...

Through heathenism, Satan had for ages turned men away from God; but he won his great triumph in perverting the faith of Israel. By contemplating and worshiping their own conceptions, the heathen had lost a knowledge of God, and had become more and more corrupt. So it was with Israel. The principle that man can save himself by his own works lay at the foundation of

every heathen religion; it had now become the principle of the Jewish religion. Satan had implanted this principle. Wherever it is held, men have no barrier against sin. ...

The people whom God had called to be the pillar and ground of the truth had become representatives of Satan. They were doing the work that he desired them to do, taking a course to misrepresent the character of God, and cause the world to look upon Him as a tyrant. The very priests who ministered in the temple had lost sight of the significance of the service they performed. They had ceased to look beyond the symbol to the thing signified. In presenting the sacrificial offerings they were as actors in a play. The ordinances which God Himself had appointed were made the means of blinding the mind and hardening the heart. God could do no more for man through these channels. The whole system must be swept away.

The deception of sin had reached its height. All the agencies for depraving the souls of men had been put in operation. The Son of God, looking upon the world, beheld suffering and misery. With pity He saw how men had become victims of satanic cruelty. ... Sin had become a science, and vice was consecrated as a part of religion. Rebellion had struck its roots deep into the heart, and the hostility of man was most violent against heaven. ... But instead of destroying the world, God sent His Son to save it. Though corruption and defiance might be seen in every part of the alien province, a way for its recovery was provided. At the very crisis, when Satan seemed about to triumph, the Son of God came with the message of divine grace. Through every age, through every hour, the love of God had been exercised toward the fallen race. Notwithstanding the perversity of men, the signals of mercy had been continually exhibited. And when the fullness of the time had come, the Deity was glorified by pouring upon the world a flood of healing grace that was never to be obstructed or withdrawn till the plan of salvation should be fulfilled.

... Jesus came to restore in man the image of his Maker. None but Christ can fashion anew the character that has been ruined by sin. He came to expel the demons that had controlled the will. He came to lift us up from the dust, to reshape the marred character after the pattern of His divine character, and to make it beautiful with His own glory. ¹

During Advent we focus on Jesus' first coming and dwell upon His birth, as well we should. But if we stop there, we miss half the story. His first coming was just Phase 1 of the Plan of Salvation. Phase 2 is about to begin. Since we are likely to be alive when Jesus returns, let's not let get so wrapped up in the Jesus first coming that we aren't ready for His second coming.

Michael Harris runs a non-profit drug rehabilitation program in Fiji. He raises money for this project by traveling all around the world giving concerts and selling CDs. The last time he was in Ridgecrest to perform, he stopped by the studio for an interview. During that interview we talked about a couple of the unusual songs on his Christmas album. They both put Jesus birth into the larger vision of the plan of salvation. Let's play one of them now, talk to Michael about those two songs, and then play the other one.

[music – “Born to die”]

[Interview with Michael J. Harris]

[music – “Still Her Little Child”]

¹ Ellen White, The Desire of Ages, Chapter 3, “The Fullness of the Time”, <http://www.whiteestate.org/books/da/da3.html>

Let's close our broadcast now as Susan Pogge and JoAn Witzel play this lovely arrangement of "Joy to the World."

[music – Joy to the World]