

The sending, coming, and arrival of The Light of the World

Please read John 1 v 1-9, 14 and 19-28, and then pray;

*O Lord, open up your Word to me, that I may grasp something of the wonder and the glory of the sending, coming, and arrival of the Son of God into this world. **To Him be the glory.** Amen.*

I felt led by the Spirit of God to share with you today, on this 3rd Sunday of advent, some biblical truths concerning;

the sending,

the coming,

and the arrival of the Light of the world into our world! These ideas are all contained in the opening chapter of John's great gospel; the sending, coming and arrival of the Light, the Life and the Word of God; who later in the chapter is also revealed as the Lamb of God and the Son of God. (1:29, 34)

At this time of year, we may well be engaged in *the sending* of Christmas cards. We make a conscious decision who we will send a card to. We may have our list of friends and family – a list where names can be added or subtracted. Then there is the posting of the cards and the journey the cards make to their destination. The card is on its way. How long will it take to get there? Well, that's anyone's guess! But there is a day coming when the card actually arrives and is opened. So, there is the sending of the card, the coming (the journey) of the card, and the eventual arrival of the Christmas card.

I want to show you today that there was **a deliberate divine plan** in the sending, coming and arrival of the Son of God into this world – a world where you and I, and billions of others live and move and have our being. What's more, tied in with this, there was the sending, the coming and the arrival of a man named John.

There was a man who was SENT from God; his name of John. (John 1:6)

John, who is of course John the Baptist, was deeply conscious and highly sensitive to the fact that he was "sent from God." In that sense, he stood at the end of a long line of notable Old Testament prophetic figures. To use the words in the prophetic utterance of his aged priestly father Zechariah, he was called and sent to be "a prophet of the Most High"; he was sent "to go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him." (Luke 1:76) And to use the words of the angel Gabriel sent to Zechariah, "John was sent in the spirit and power of Elijah and he would be filled with the Holy Spirit from birth." (Luke 1:15-17) According to John's gospel JOHN was "sent from God" (1:6), "sent to be a **voice** with a specific message" (1:23), "sent **to baptise** (1:33) and most importantly, "sent **ahead** of the Christ." (3:28).

God sent the very specifically named prophet **John** (God is gracious) ahead of the his own specifically named son **Jesus** (God saves). This is why the first few chapters of Luke's gospel are so crucial in the gospel story. The angel Gabriel was **sent** firstly to Zechariah (the father of John) with the news that his wife Elizabeth would now become pregnant and bear a son despite the fact that she was old and barren – and that the son *must* be named John (Luke 1:13). He was to be born and to come into the world *ahead* of the Son of God. **Later**, the same auspicious angel, Gabriel, was **sent** to Nazareth to a young virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph with the startling news that she would give birth to a son who *must* be given the name Jesus. (Luke 1:26-27 & 31). This would occur through the overshadowing power and glory of the Holy Spirit – the power of the Most High God. (1:35)

Mary was also informed by the angel to her astonishment, that Elizabeth, her aged cousin was already 6 months pregnant, for **all things are possible with God.** (Luke 1:36-37)

What we can see through all this intimate and localised human history is that God had **an eternal plan** to enter and save the world – the world that was created by God – through the Word of God who was the Son of God. **Read John 1 v 1-5.** Even before the world was created through and by the Word of God, in the eternal council of God the Trinity a joint decision was taken and a plan was formed to save the world *by sending the Son of God into the world.* This is what some of the best theologians refer to as *the eternal decrees of God.* It is totally beyond our comprehension, but it was eternally known by Almighty God that the Word of God, the Son of God would be sent into this world to save it – hence the name Jesus was given to him - which means **the Lord saves.**

And what we find throughout the 4 gospels but especially in John is **the fact** that this Jesus, this Word made flesh, God incarnate, is absolutely and totally conscious that he has been SENT from God, sent from heaven into this world of darkness. There are over 20 references in John's gospel to **the sending of the Son;** the sending of Jesus into the world to do a saving work and execute a saving plan. Here are just a few such references – all very important!

*“My food” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who **sent me** and to finish his work.” (4:34)*

*“that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father. He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father, **who sent him.** (5:23)*

*“For I have **come down from heaven** not to do my will but to do the will of him who **sent me.** And this is the will of him who **sent me,** that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.” (6:38-39)*

*Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, **for I came from God** and am now here. I have not come on my own; but he **sent me.** (8:42)*

*“Father I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that **you sent me.** (11:42)*

*“Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, **whom you have sent.**”*

*“For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I **came from you,** and they believed that you **sent me.** (John 17:3, 8)*

*Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has **sent me,** I am sending you. (20:21)*

The **sending of the Light, the Son,** is taught everywhere in the NT, but perhaps the most important verse concerning the advent/Christmas message is contained in Paul's letter to the Galatians.

But when the time had FULLY COME, God SENT HIS SON, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. (Galatians 4:4)

Hopefully you can now see that both John and Jesus who were knit tightly together through the strong ties of family, kingdom message and ministry, were both sent from God, and John was purposefully sent before Jesus into this world and onto the stage of human history (Luke 3 :1 ff) to prepare the way for the One who was by far the greater of the two. John was not the light, (1:8) John was not the Christ, (1:20), nor the Saviour, but he pointed out who was, and he prepared the way for Jesus through his preaching and ministry of baptism. John, who came first, confesses that he is not even worthy of kneeling down and taking off Jesus' sandals (1:27). John confessed freely and unequivocally;

*He who comes **after me** has surpassed me because he was before me. (1:15) Jesus's greatness, glory and uniqueness far surpassed that of John, who was indeed great. (Matthew 11:11) BUT Jesus came from heaven itself – directly from the Father; Jesus always existed as the eternal Word. (John 1 v 1-2). His greatness and glory cannot be surpassed by anyone!*

Now I have emphasised this SENDING of Jesus – but what must also be understood is the **willingness** of Jesus to come and execute the plan. Jesus came willingly. He basically said within the life of the Godhead – “Send me”. Or to put it in the words of the Welsh poet R.S. Thomas; **Let me go there!**

With that in mind, I now want us to move on to focus our attention on **the coming** of the Son of God, the Light and the Life. That was the title of R. S. Thomas's brilliant poem. **The Coming.**

In John 1: 9 we read about the **coming** of the Word and the Light into the world which he made, into the world for which he would willingly and sacrificially give up his life.

The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. (1:9)

We considered the *sending* of the Son, now we consider the *coming* of the Son. This is essentially the message of advent. The light of Christ was coming into the world. The Word of God was on route to this dark world which has been marred and broken by human sin. The Son of God was coming. He is the divine gift that was coming into the world – the tangible, physical love letter from heaven itself!

And it can be argued that the Light was on his way the moment that darkness entered the world through the temptation of the serpent in the garden and the succumbing to sin of Adam and Eve. From that point on, God's eternal plan for the Light to come was set in motion. Pronouncing judgement upon the serpent, the Lord said;

*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).*

From this point, the Light of the world is going to come and destroy the darkness. (1 John 3:8) And throughout the Old Testament we see the steady unfolding of God's plan to come and enter and save the world through his Son who is the world's Light and Life. And so, we have the calling of Abraham, and the building up of the people of Israel, through whom the Messiah will come. We have the story of emerging prophets (Moses, Elijah, Isaiah etc) and Kings, especially King David. And during advent our first candles are lit in order to remind us of this story of *the coming of the Light* into the world which stretches back to father Abraham and his calling. We light a candle for Patriarchs like Abraham and Jacob, and then we light a candle for Prophets like Isaiah and Micah who prophesied about **the One who was to come, the One who was on his way.**

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. (Isaiah 7:14)

*But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you **will come** for me one who will be ruler over Israel, **whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.** (Micah 5:2)*

So, you can see that the eternal Light was on his way into the world. He was coming! This had been prophesied in many ways and at various times. And the question the people kept asking was; “*When will he come?*” They were expecting, anticipating, hoping and yearning for the coming and the arrival

of a King descended from David's line, an Anointed One, a Saviour King. And when we arrive at the point in history where we encounter simple folk like Zechariah and Elizabeth, and the young Mary and the courageous Joseph, we really are at the decisive point and only months away from the actual arrival.

And so, we now finally move on to **the arrival of the Light** and the historical story which ensued. I won't spend too much time on this because there are more candles to be lit and special occasions to celebrate the arrival, **the actual birth** of the Son of God, the Light of the world. But in our bible reading today, one glorious, immortal verse of holy writ sums up *the arrival* of God's son who was sent to be Saviour of the world.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

John the Baptist had arrived six months or so before this monumental moment in the stable. John had already been born. That is what advent means – **arrival**. John had arrived, and then the Light himself arrived. About 30 years later, John would herald the arrival of Christ and his kingdom. He would be the witness to the Light. He would encourage people to embrace the Light, believe in the Light and follow the Light. Both John and Jesus were born (**arrived**) at precise God-ordained moments in history.

From the Chronicles of Narnia written by C.S. Lewis we have these captivating and arresting words;

Once in our world a stable had something in it that was bigger than the whole world.

We think of advent as the arrival of the God into the world. We could also use the word "**appear**". In Jesus, God appeared in the world. Christmas proclaims the appearance of God on the stage of the world he created. This is mind-blowing! Is it any wonder that the gospels speak about the "appearing" of other things in the run up to the appearance of Jesus? The angel Gabriel makes appearances and gives messages. He *appeared* to Zechariah. He *appeared* to Mary and Joseph. In Matthew 2:7, we are told that "*a star appeared*" which attracted the attention of Magi from the east. On the very night of Jesus's birth, we are told in Luke 2:13 that "suddenly a great company of the heavenly host *appeared* with the angel", praising God and singing a message of glory and peace.

All these special appearances of Gabriel, the star and the angelic host correlate with the advent of the Light of the world. He has arrived. He has now appeared in the flesh. He is among us. Immanuel - God with us. As the famous carol puts it;

Word of the Father, now in flesh *appearing*. (O come all ye faithful)

And do not forget friends, that a very important part of the message of advent is that this Jesus, who was born humbly in a stable will come again, will "appear" again for a second and decisive time. This too is part of God's timetable, part of God's eternal plan for the full redemption and salvation of the world. Christ will come again. He will appear again with glory (Matthew 24:30) and then proceed to judge the world. His first coming focused on "saving" through his death and resurrection; his second will focus on "judgement" and the total restoration of all things. (Acts 3:21)

"so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will APPEAR a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him." (Hebrews 9: 28)

We have considered the 3 key ideas of the sending, the coming and the arrival of the Light of the world. We like John the Baptist are to be **witnesses** to this. John was the unique forerunner, the one

who in the divine plan, order and economy uniquely prepared the way for the Christ, the true light. We too, are called to be **witnesses** (Acts 1:8). We are called to be “a voice” this Advent and Christmas, a distinct and clear voice, telling people that God sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world, and that Jesus Christ fulfilled in his birth all the prophecies concerning the coming and arrival of God’s Saviour. Christmas is a time to use our **voices**, not just to sing about the glory of Christ’s birth as the heavenly host did, but to share with people that in Jesus, God arrived to live in this world in order to save it, to bring light and life, eternal salvation and hope. **Use your voice** for God this Advent and Christmastime, and let your actions speak about the reality of God’s perfect love and light visiting and saving our world in Jesus.

Amen!