

Series: Christmas 2020

Sermon #1: Jesus As Prophet

John 1:1-3, 14; Hebrews 1:1-3

Kevin Maurice --- December 6, 2020

Good morning, Church. My name's Kevin Maurice and I'm the Youth Pastor here at Grace. Allow me to state the obvious and say that this has been a weird year, hasn't it? We've all felt and experienced a number of changes in 2020, perhaps none more so than the fact that we all use the word "zoom" regularly. Because for better or worse, the way we learned to communicate for work, for school, even with our families, has changed remarkably this year, likely forever. Because communication is an essential part of our lives and what we saw this year was this dramatic shift in how we communicate.

If you think about it, the history of humankind--human civilization--can be studied as the history of how people communicate with one another over time. Spoken language, stone tablets, scrolls of papyrus. Then paper. Letters carried by foot and then horseback. Then the printing press. Nothing changes the course of mankind quite like the ability to communicate, especially at great distances. And that's no small feat. But it's pretty easy to take it for granted in an age where we can text, and FaceTime, and even Zoom, regularly. But there was a day, not too long ago, when the greatest achievement in technology for how humans communicate quickly and from afar, was this sound...

[Sound of Morse code radio signals]

Morse code: it's just a series of dots and dashes. As a means of long-range communication, it's highly effective.... if you can interpret it. There's a message, but it comes in pieces, slowly, and it must be decoded. And so, for most of us, it means very little. But in the 1800s, this is how people sent messages quickly at long-distance. It was the height of communication technology. But at the turn of the 20th century, a man named Reginald Fessenden dreamed of something greater. And in 1903, he created a technology to utilize something called amplitude modulation. We know it better as AM radio.

Reginald Fessenden, was an inventor who developed a way to use radio waves instead of cables and wires buried underneath the ground to send communication from one place to another. At first, all it could do with this new technology was transmit those same Morse code signals. So, he began to experiment with his invention on ships up and down the northeast coast of the US. He was carrying those AM radio waves.

But this was just a small part of Fessenden's vision for this infant technology. He wanted to revolutionize communication. And on December 24th, 1906, he did just that. After 36 months of effort, working on signal frequencies and strength, Reginald Fessenden did the unimaginable and he spoke the very first words over the radio. Here's what he read....

“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

In the middle of the night, in the winter cold, on Christmas Eve, Reginald Fessenden opened up his Bible and into the silence came the Christmas story from Luke chapter 2--the very first words ever spoken on the radio.

That's an incredible moment! Can you imagine, if you were a ship captain, somewhere in the North Atlantic, and you're listening for the distinctive taps of a Morse code signal, and all of a sudden, a human voice starts speaking directly to you? Spoken words, out of silence, something completely new that would change the world forever. And what a great opening line. Good news, great joy. It's the Christmas story, it's the foundation of the Gospel. It's a message from God that changes everything.

The birth of Jesus is direct communication between God and His people. And that's what we're going to study this morning – how God communicates and interacts with humanity. Because, before this moment, before the birth of the Christ, how did God communicate with His creation, with humankind?

Throughout the Bible, the way that God spoke with His people was through various messengers, sometimes angels, but often through prophets. The word “prophet” has many connotations but defined simply, a prophet is a person who brings a message from God to people. If you joined us in the Year of the Bible here at Grace, or if you've read through the yearlong plan with us, you've heard and you've read the words of these prophets. We've learned

their stories. God would choose a prophet, a man or a woman, He'd give them a message or a vision, or sometimes even dreams, and then they would share that with people.

And their message was often about turning back to God--repentance, changing their heart, changing behavior. The prophets would hear from God about how sin was affecting the community or the kingdom and then, how to remedy that. Communication between God and man – that's the role of a prophet.

And among these biblical prophets, there was one who was regarded as the great prophet of the Old Testament because he had this unique relationship with God. Deuteronomy 34 declares Moses to be this prophet and it makes sense. Moses is the one to whom God spoke through the burning bush, Moses is given the mission to bring the people of God out of slavery in Egypt. He brings the Ten Commandments down from the mountain. He gets to watch God pass by!

And before Moses dies, in part of his final message from God to people in the Book of Deuteronomy, God tells him about a future prophet. And God says, **“I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brothers. I will put my words in His mouth and He will tell them everything that I command Him. If anyone does not listen to my words that this Prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account.”**

God tells Moses that another prophet is coming. And this prophet will be unlike any other. He will be the spokesman for God and people must obey Him. God is telling His people, “Just wait, because what you're going to hear will change everything. You've been listening to Morse code; you're about to hear my real voice.”

And all of the prophets who come after Moses – Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Haggai, Malachi, they all continue to point forward to this true and better Prophet. They say, *It's not me, He's not here yet. But he's coming.* And that's how the Old Testament ends, with this hope passed down through generations, that God would come and do the things that He promised.

And so, the people of God waited for the arrival of this Prophet. And they waited. And they waited. Between the Old and the New Testament, there were four hundred years without a messenger, without a prophet. Four hundred years with no direct word from God. Four hundred years of silence.

Imagine a small boy, reading the words of Scripture and asking his father, “Dad, I’ve been reading about God and I’ve heard you talk about God, and I want to know – have you ever heard anything from God?”

And his dad would have to reply, “No, Son, I’ve never heard anything from God.”

The boy might pause and think for a moment and then ask, “Okay, but what about your dad? Did Grandpa ever hear anything from God?”

“No, son, Grandpa never heard a message from God. And to be honest, neither did his dad or his dad or even his father. Son, for a long, long time, no one has heard anything.”

And if that were your situation, if you were that little boy, this revelation might lead you to believe one of three things. You might think that God had left; that His silence could be explained by the fact that He was no longer interested in the world or the people that He created. Or you could conclude that God was angry. He was upset and so mad with His people that He had finally given up on them for good. Or you might believe that God just didn’t have anything else to say. Because all you were hearing was silence.

And into that silence came the most incredible sound. It was a baby crying in a manger that pierced the silence of four hundred years. Jesus. Emmanuel. God with us. God’s definitive communication and communion with mankind. And that moment changes everything, because in the birth of Christ that expectant hope is realized. But the child that was born is not just another prophet – He is the One whom all the prophets foretold.

John chapter 1 says this about the birth of Christ – **“In the beginning was the WORD and the WORD was with God, and the WORD was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that has been made...And the WORD became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”**

Another name for Jesus is the Word. The claim that John makes in his gospel is that Jesus is not just a prophet or a messenger from God, He is the message itself, He is God himself. In Jesus, we have the person and the voice of God: Word made flesh. In Him, this hope, this longing for direct communication and interaction with God is fulfilled.

And Jesus grows up. And He begins to teach and speak. And because He is God, He says things that only He has the authority to communicate. And He tells people, **“I have not come to abolish the law or the prophets; I came to fulfill them.”** He defines truth and faith, and He

explains deep theology, and He does so in a way that is relatable and understandable, because He is both human and divine. The way that Jesus taught was so remarkable. When He speaks, people are astounded. They said “We’ve never heard anything like this.”

So, crowds listened, and they came from far and wide. They followed him across lakes and rivers and up mountains. They hung onto every sentence, because they knew that what He was saying was unique and that He was significant. But there was some confusion about who He was. Some people, some of the religious leaders, thought He was a lunatic just roaming around in the wilderness. Others thought He was this political figure, that He was destined to bring about their desired societal change. And many of them thought He was a prophet, a very good one no doubt, but a prophet just like those who had come before.

But we cannot misunderstand who Jesus is. The entire point of John chapter 1 is this – Jesus was with God and Jesus is God. And Jesus took on flesh and dwelt among us. He is a profoundly different type of message from God, because He is not just the next prophet in line. He’s not just a new kind of messenger. **Jesus is the true Prophet.**

The book of Hebrews echoes the truth of John’s Gospel and it reiterates the importance of Jesus as the Word of God and Jesus as the true Prophet. You can turn to Hebrews chapter 1, if you have your Bibles. And starting in verse 1, the author says this: **“In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ² but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, and through whom also He made the universe. ³ The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His powerful word. After He had provided purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.”**

Jesus is superior to all of the prophets and all the angels that came before because they were only messengers; He is the message. They gave the word of God; He is the Word of God. They were the servants; He is the heir, the rightful ruler. They told us what the Creator desired; He is the Creator himself.

Verse 1 says, **“In the past...at many times and in various ways, God spoke through the prophets.”** Other translations of that sentence say “at many times in many ways”. Many or various ways--those are English translations of the Greek word *polytropos*, which means “many pieces”.

Essentially, what God is saying is that in the past, He spoke using Morse code, these human prophets. He used them to communicate different pieces of the overall message. Now, though, in the person of Jesus, He is speaking this whole message, His word, in His crystal-clear voice – through His Son.

You can comb through the books of the Old Testament, the many prophecies that point to Jesus' birth and who He is, and there are so many examples of Jesus fulfilling what was spoken: where He would be born, to whom He would be born, how He would live and how He would die – the Scriptures are rich with these prophecies that tell us about Jesus. And we could spend hours studying those passages.

But for now, today, I just want us to look at the final three books in the Old Testament. Three prophets: Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. And I want to show you how their message is fulfilled in Christ. Because all three of these prophets carried a message of expectation and this longing for a coming day when God would make things right. If you read the book of Haggai, you'll see there's this question that stands out, and it's: When will God come to be with us? When will God dwell with His people again? When will His temple be restored?

In John chapter 2, Jesus walks into the temple in Jerusalem, and He looks around and He says, **“Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.”** And the Gospel writer explains... **“He was speaking about the temple of His body. When he was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.”**

Jesus the Prophet – He is the temple. He came to dwell among His people. He echoes and then He fulfills the message that Haggai spoke.

Look at the prophet Zechariah. His message is of this coming era when God would set things right, when there would be righteousness and justice and mercy forever, when God would reign among His people. And this is what Jesus came to do.

Jesus brings the righteousness of God through himself, and the justice that we sinners deserve is met with His unmerited grace and mercy. 2 Corinthians 5:21 tells us that, **“God made Him, Jesus, who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God.”** Matt talked about this last week. The Book of Revelation declares to us that Jesus will come and reign again over all of creation and that justice, true justice, will endure forever. Again, Jesus – the Word – fulfills the words that were spoken about Him.

And then, if you look at the final book of the Old Testament, the prophet Malachi--the words of Malachi are a desperate plea. Malachi chapter 1, verse 2, shows us that the people have forgotten God's love. God tells His people, **“I have loved you,” says the Lord. And yet you ask, ‘How have you loved us?’”** And the rest of the book of Malachi, this prophet, on behalf of the people, acknowledges – “We have broken all of our covenants, every single vow with our Creator—we’ve destroyed it.” And there’s this doubt – “Could God still love us? Does God still love us?”

And the birth of Jesus answers that question resoundingly – John 3 tells us that God loves the world so much, that’s why He gives His Son--not to condemn but to save us. Jesus’ life and death further demonstrates God's love for His people – Romans 5 says, **“While we were still sinners He died for us.”** And as for those broken covenants and these shattered vows, Jesus tells us, on the night before He was crucified, “I will establish a new covenant in my blood, and it’s a covenant of grace.”

Haggai and Zechariah and Malachi--their hopes, their dreams, their messages from God—all—all of them--were accomplished by Jesus. Paul David Tripp, a pastor and author, says this in regards to who Jesus is: **“All the promises of the prophets were carried on the shoulders of the one born in Bethlehem, and He fulfilled them all.”**

Jesus the Christ is superior to all other messengers. He is the true Prophet. And all of the words of the prophets and the entire Bible ultimately point us to the Word himself. As we've studied the Bible together this year, in the Walk Thru the Bible, on Sundays in our teaching times, or in your personal reading, I hope that this has become more and more clear--that the story of Scripture is all about Jesus.

Every story in the Bible is really all about Him: our need for Him, His redemptive work, His character, who He is. The books of the Bible, the various stories and verses, they're precursors, sign posts pointing us to Christ. Everything in the Word of God is intended to draw us nearer to the Word himself.

And so, this should affect how we read our Bibles. It's somewhat easy to read the Word of God incorrectly or improperly. If we read the Bible as if it's a just collection of hero stories that gives us people we should try to be like, or little lessons, or encouraging mantras or phrases to help us feel better, we are doing the Word and our souls a great disservice. And the reason is

because the biblical authors, the people in Scripture, the prophets, weren't given to us primarily as examples to emulate or for daily bits of inspiration. The Word of God is meant to point us to our Savior.

Tim Keller, describing the significance of the Bible, says that the truths of the biblical stories point us to Jesus – He is the True sacrifice; the True Lamb; the True Light, the True Prophet; the True Priest; the True King. In the end, the Bible's really not all about you; it's all about Him.

And the message of the Bible, that the prophets foretold through generations, the good news that the angels proclaimed to those shepherds in a field and that Fessenden communicated over the radio, the message of Jesus Christ is this: the Son of God died to forgive us of our sins because He loves us.

You can turn with me again to Hebrews chapter 1. Verse 3 says this plainly: **“The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His powerful word. And after He had provided purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.”**

The message of the prophets was about turning back to God. Jesus, the fulfillment of their message, the Word made flesh, came to bring us back to himself. Jesus did that work. He did for us what we couldn't do for ourselves. **He purified us of our sins.** And then, look at what the passage says, I love this so much – the Scripture says, **He sat down.** You sit down when the work is done. Jesus offered himself once and for all as the perfect sacrifice for our sinful, broken humanity and then He sat down. Because the job was done. As He says in John chapter 19 – **“It is finished.”**

Church, as we enter this Christmas season, this is a time to remember and to celebrate. And I know that it's been a difficult year for so many of us. And celebration may feel somewhat foreign right now. But as we approach December 25th, let's turn our hearts and our attention to celebrate this truth that we find throughout God's Word. Let's not forget, or neglect, or forgo this good news of Christ and what His birth means. Let's not simply rejoice over the baby in the manger without also falling to our knees to worship the God who came to rescue us.

Because the Word of God became flesh and came to earth, and He lived a perfect human life, He taught us and embodied for us what a restored relationship with Him looks like, and He died on our behalf, taking on our sin and shame, to redeem us. And then He rose again to restore

us back into an eternal relationship with God the Father. The message of Christmas is that Jesus Christ is born. And He is born to die --for us.

If this message is new to you, if you've never heard this good news that God loves you, that He sent Jesus for you, and that salvation is a gift – we'd love to talk to you more. If you have questions about faith or about what it means to be a Christian, let us know. If you're here in person or watching online, you can get in touch with us today by visiting grace360.org/connect. Fill that out and someone from Grace will reach out to you, because we would love to tell you more about Jesus.

And if you are a follower of Christ or if you are exploring what it means to have a relationship with Him, I want to encourage you to spend time this Christmas season, with Jesus the Prophet. Open up your Bible and let the Scriptures speak into your life. Read the Bible, not just as mere words on a page, but as the Word made flesh.

So, I want to challenge us, Grace, together as a church this holiday season, starting today, December 6th, to spend time this month reading the Bible, and let's do this together. Let's set aside some time each day. Put an alarm on your phone or put a time on your calendar – and together, let's read one chapter from the Gospel of John each day from now until Christmas.

I know some of you are participating in that yearlong Bible reading plan with us. That's amazing, keep it up, you are almost there. You're doing great. I'd love for you, though, to jump into the Book of John, come on back to the Book of John with us. For others of you--maybe you're like me, you started that plan and you fell behind somewhere – probably in the books of the minor prophets – that's okay. You can catch up and start today. Start again today in the Book of John, John chapter 1.

Let's read one chapter each day and then, check this out, on December 25th, the day that we celebrate the birth of Christ, together we'll also read about the ultimate gift of Christ – the empty tomb and His resurrection. On the day that we celebrate the birth of Jesus, let's read about His rebirth that leads to our eternal life. Let's do that together.

To close our time this morning I'll finish the story of Reginald Fessenden in 1906, and I'll tell you how that first radio transmission ended. That remarkable Christmas Eve, after that historic first reading of Luke chapter 2 over the airwaves, Reginald Fessenden stood up, he walked over to the corner of the room that he was in, and he picked up his violin. He walked back to his machine and he drew back the bow and began to play. You see, the inventor of AM

radio was not only an engineer, he was also a classically trained musician. And on the night that he read the Christmas story, he also played the very first song ever broadcast on the radio. Fessenden, without words, just instrumentally, into the silence, played a familiar hymn – “O Holy Night.”

***“O Holy Night, the stars are brightly shining,
It is the night of our dear Savior’s birth;
For long lay the world in sin and error pining
‘Till He appeared and the soul felt its worth.”***

He appeared. The Word became flesh and broke into the silence. Jesus brought the message and the hope and the reality of salvation into the world. And in Him, the soul feels its worth.

Please join me in prayer.

Father, we come before You humbled that You love us. God, You have chosen to love us; that in the midst of all our brokenness and sinfulness, God, You took on flesh, You stepped into this world that You created, and You died and You rose again to bring us back to yourself, to redeem us, to restore us into a relationship with You.

God, this season as we approach Christmas, we pray that the truth of the Gospel would be present in our hearts and our lives and our homes, and that we would remember who we are in You; God, that our souls would feel their true worth as sons and daughters of the risen King. God, we love You and we praise You and we pray these things in Your name. Amen.