

The Fourth Sunday in Advent  
St. John 1:19-28

God promises!  
Man anticipates!

Again, God promises!  
Man anticipates!

In the garden of Eden right after the fall, God pronounces judgment on serpent, woman, and man. For the serpent there is no hope. He was condemned by his pride and is forever lost. But at the same time God is pronouncing eternal damnation for the serpent, He announces the Gospel to the man and that woman:

*I will put enmity between you (the serpent) and the woman,  
And between your offspring and her offspring;  
He shall bruise your head,  
And you shall bruise his heel. (Gen 3:15)*

God promised that the serpent wouldn't have the final say. God promised that a Man born of a woman would end the tyranny of the devil and we, God's children, would be free of the serpent forever.

God promised and Eve anticipated. The first verse from chapter 4 of Genesis reads like this from the ESV:

*“Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, “I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord.”*

Now that is not a bad translation at all, and it matches other translations. Luther points out something about Eve saying “man” rather than “son:”

From this statement another reason may be gathered why Eve did not call Cain a son, namely, that because of her excessive joy and reverence she was unwilling to call him son but had something greater in mind

about him, as though Cain would be the man who would crush the head of the serpent. For this reason she does not simply call him a man, but “the man of the Lord,” of whom the Lord God had promised (Gen. 3:15): “Your Seed will crush the head of the serpent.” Although this was a false hope, it nevertheless is clear that Eve was a saintly woman and that she believed the promise concerning the future salvation through the blessed Seed. And because she believes, she is so happy about her son and speaks of him in such grand terms: “I have gotten the man of God who will conduct himself more properly and with greater good fortune than my Adam and I conducted ourselves in Paradise. For this reason I do not call him my son, but he is the man of God who was promised and provided by God.” This also could have been the reason why she did not call Cain a son. (AE1, 241-2)

I agree with this understanding as do many Lutherans and I believe it resonates with the main point of my sermon:

God promises.

Man anticipates.

At Mount Sinai, God gives His people the Ten Commandments through Moses. He makes explicit what He had written on their hearts (Rom 2:14-15). The children of Israel respond like this:

*Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off and said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.” (Ex 20:18–19)*

The people of Israel understand that if they stand near the presence of a holy God they will be consumed for they are a stiff-necked people. God promises to send them the Prophet with whom they can listen to and not be consumed in fire:

*“The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—just as you desired of the Lord your*

*God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.' And the Lord said to me, 'They are right in what they have spoken. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. (Deut 18:15-18)*

God promises!

Man anticipates!

Just as the children of Israel are a stiff-necked people in the wilderness, they remain a stiff-necked people in the promised land before and after the divine judgment of God against the northern kingdom by Assyria and against the southern kingdom by Babylon. Even though Israel is a rebellious people, God continues to make promises.

There are a ton of promises about God's Messiah. If I list them all, we would be here a long time! I'll focus on two promises from our Lord.

The first promise is to King David who is the most beloved King in the Old Testament:

*I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish His kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of His kingdom forever. I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son. (2 Samuel 7:12b–14a)*

God will raise up a Son from the lineage of King David and establish for Him a kingdom. And unlike King David's kingdom, this new kingdom will last forever.

The second promise comes from the pen of King David himself:

*The Lord said to Me, "You are my Son;  
today I have begotten You.  
Ask of Me, and I will make the nations Your heritage,  
and the ends of the earth Your possession.*

*You shall break them with a rod of iron  
and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.”  
(Psalm 2:7b-9)*

God promises that the Messiah will be His own Son! God Himself! The new kingdom is not founded on the frailty of man but on the inexplicable union of God and Man! God's new kingdom will certainly be an everlasting kingdom!

God sent many prophets to proclaim and remind His people of the promises He made to His people. One of the most beloved, if not the most beloved, is Elijah. He is taken up to heaven without passing through death (2 Kings 2:1-12). He is certainly special like Enoch before him.

Before God closes out the Old Testament, He promises that Elijah will come again:

*“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.” (Malachi 4:5)*

Before God sends His Messiah and Prophet, He will send Elijah to warn His people that salvation is near!

As the New Testament opens up, the people of God are anticipating Elijah, the Prophet, and the Messiah.

God promises!  
Man anticipates!

As the New Testament opens, John the Baptist is stirring up the Judean countryside with his preaching and baptizing. The religious leaders want to know who he is! Could he possibly be Elijah come again or the Prophet or the Messiah?

Could it possibly be the time for the kingdom of God?

John claims to be none of these things. He merely states that:

*“I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord’ as the prophet Isaiah said.” (v. 23)*

We find out later from Jesus that John is indeed the spirit of Elijah who was to come. While John does not admit to be the Elijah to come, he does the job of Elijah to come and points directly at Jesus:

*“Behold the Lamb of God who take away the sin of the world.” (Jn 1:29)*

God promises and man anticipates!

Jesus is the Prophet and the Messiah.

He speaks the Words of His Father to us:

*“The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in Me does His works.” (Jn. 14:10b)*

The work of the Father is this: to speak His Word to us which the Prophet Jesus does and rescue His people which the Messiah Jesus does on the cross. The Israelites may or may not have been expecting one or two people as the Prophet and the Messiah, but Jesus is both in the same person. He gives to us His Father’s Words and He does the Father’s will and pays for your sin and my sin on the cross.

God promises and we anticipate.

God applies His promises to you in Holy Baptism.

Unless I am mistaken, none of you are children of Abraham by birth. But, thanks be to God, your salvation does not depend on your lineage:

*“And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.” (Mt. 3:9)*

It might be better to say to you:

And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Luther as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Luther.

The promises of God applied to anyone else don't really matter to you. It's the promises of God that are applied to you personally that matter.

The promises of God are a mighty thing. He promises that He is your dear Father and not your stern Judge (Lk 11:1-13). He promises that no matter what bad that happens to you, He will make it work for your good (Rom 8:28). He promises that His justice will prevail against the schemes and wiles of the devil (Rev 21:4).

These are the promises applied to you that you await with great anticipation in this veil of tears.

The guarantee of the promises is only as good as the guarantor. I know it's getting close to Christmas, but it's not Jesus in the trough that is a guarantee of God's promise, but it is His glorious resurrection and ascension that are your guarantee.

Jesus' resurrection from the dead is the guarantee that our sins are paid for.

Jesus' resurrection from the dead is the guarantee that we will have life and have it more abundantly both now and hereafter. Forever.

Jesus' resurrection from the dead is the guarantee that His kingdom is both righteous and everlasting.

Your baptism is your guarantee that God is your dear Father and that you are His dear child.

God promises.

You anticipate.

And just as a child excitedly anticipates the glories under the Christmas tree, you excitedly anticipate the culmination of your Lord's promises.

And just as our Lord is raised from the dead, He will surely fulfill His promises.

In Jesus' name.

Amen.