

## “The Mission Never Changes!”

“*The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ,  
the Son of God!*” (Mark 1:1)

Dear Friends in Christ,

The Second Sunday in Advent is always an important milestone in the life and history of Hope Lutheran Church. It was 24 years ago on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Advent, December 8, 1996 that our first worship service was held in the Stone Chapel on South Main Street, marking our **beginning** as a new mission congregation. It was a wonderful location from which to begin, launching a new church and preschool in this community, situated smack dab on one of busiest corners in Wake Forest at that time.

Ten years ago, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Advent, December 5, 2010, we gathered in this beautiful church building to dedicate to the glory of God our new sanctuary and expanded facilities. We were committed from the very *beginning* of that construction project to **Building Hope for Years to Come**, sitting smack dab on a hill overlooking what is now one the busiest roads in Wake Forest! This too has been a wonderful location, well suited for the people of Hope to be the 2020 Advent voice of God, committed to our on-going mission to “*proclaim and live the Word and love of Christ!*”

Our God, you see, always knows the right time and the right places to break into His world anew, hearts and lives changed by “*The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God!*” (Mark 1:1) Mark records those words as fulfillment of God’s Old Testament promises to Israel about forgiveness and new life through the Messiah. The Advent voice of John is “*crying in the wilderness*” to “*all of the [people] of the country of Judea and all Jerusalem who were going out to him: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight!*” (Mark 1:2-3) It is the essence of this year’s Advent theme, that “*When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem,*” to invite and call people to travel with Him from

Bethlehem's manger to Calvary's Cross and Easter's Empty Tomb!  
(Galatians 4:4)

So take note today of "*The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God!*" It is a reminder on this Advent/ anniversary/dedication Sunday that the **mission of the Church never changes**, inviting and challenging us to follow the Prophet Isaiah's command:

*Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news;  
lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news;  
lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah,  
"Behold your God!"* (Isaiah 40:9)

Say it to the towns and cities and people of Wake Forest, Raleigh, Youngsville, Wake County, Franklin County, Neighbors, Family, Friends, Coworkers and Classmates: "*Behold your God!*" We are the "*heralds of good news*" in this place and in the **fullness of this time**...a time that yet so desperately needs to hear the life-changing, hope-giving "*gospel of Jesus Christ!*" In fact, Jesus Himself, when beginning His ministry, alerted the people, "*The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel!*" (Mark 1:14-15)

The Gospel, my friends, is the good news of God's message of "*forgiveness, hope and life*" through faith and trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. It is the only reason why this mission was planted in 1996 and facilities expanded in 2003 and 2010 - so that we would be an impactful church in this community where "*the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God*" is proclaimed and lived until He comes again! It is a **mission which never changes** and indeed a message ever so needed in hearts and lives...in our world today!

But, let's be honest and real, it's not easy being the church of Jesus Christ in these days and times, any more than it was when John was God's messenger (*he was beheaded by the way!*) or when Jesus walked this earth, (*He was crucified by the way!*) In fact, as one pastor writes in his blog, which I've "*Prestonized*" a little, being the **church today is hard**:

➤ **Church is hard** for the person walking through the doors, or watching online, broken and battered by challenging circumstances of

life; fearing the church isn't a safe place for them to be vulnerable;

- Church is hard for the person battling COVID and culture; routines upended, Zoomed out from meetings and on-line classes; yearning for relationship, family, friendship and support, yet feeling alone, isolated and unsure of who to be with and where to go;
- Church is hard for the person who looks like they have it all together but doesn't; bearing burdens heavier than the heart can handle, losses that rip at the soul, yet masking the pain with a tear or a frown on their face;
- Church is hard for the one who has to come alone, if they come at all; for the parent with an estranged child; for the single parent trying to make it day by day; for the heart that is overwhelmed by the weight of the lyrics in a song.
- Church is hard for the teenager, young adult or crotchety old man ashamed of their mistakes or hiding their doubts.
- Church is hard for pastors, DCE's, staff and leaders trying to steer and comfort a congregation through pandemic times; preachers becoming video technicians, wearing face masks and shields when our heart is calling on us to console, connect and care about the "sheep" in the Good Shepherd's flock;
- Church is hard for sinners, adulterers, liars, cheats, and slanderers; caught up in a culture that says "whatever." Church is hard sometimes for me...for you.

But, that pastor also writes, here is **the beauty of church:**

- Church is a group of sinners, saved by grace through faith, where we all stand as equals on Holy Ground, looking to the Cross on Calvary's Hill, forgiveness assured; heaven opened by the open doors of a tomb.
- Church is a refuge for broken hearts and a training ground for mighty warriors.
- Church is a converging of confrontation and invitation, sin and

brokenness confronted, hearts invited by the Holy Spirit to seek new life in Christ through Word and Sacrament.

- Church is a lesson in faith and trust, a bearer of burdens and a giver of hope, peace which passes all understanding.
- Church is a place where Lord is present and *“the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God is proclaimed and lived!”* HERE, behold your God!\*

So, let’s re-affirm our mission on this 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Advent 2020. **In the fullness of this time**, we are the Church, even though the facilities aren’t as open and accessible as we would like; even though pews are roped off; participation limited; ministries stifled and tempered by a history altering pandemic. *“The church,”* as an old folk song from the 70’s reminds us, *“The church is not a building, the church is not a steeple, the church is not a resting place, the church is a people!”*\* Our mission is clear from **beginning to end**: *“The people of Hope Lutheran Church proclaim and live”* as John did *“the Gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God!* It’s a **mission which never changes** until He comes again in all glory, power, and might; Savior, Lord and King!

Happy Anniversary/Dedication Sunday People of Hope!  
*“To God be the glory, great things He has done!”*  
**AMEN.**

- Rev. Preston E. Wagner, Pastor *Emeritus*  
Hope Lutheran Church, Wake Forest, NC

\* Adapted from <https://kevincarson.com/2019/09/01/church-is-hard/> and other sources

\* *“We Are the Church,”* Author: Richard K. Avery (1972); Author: Donald S. Marsh (1972) Tune: PORT JERVIS