

ADVENT VISION: The Seven Golden Lampstands

Revelation 1:9-20

Pastor Wayne Puls, Senior Pastor at Hope Lutheran Church

Close your eyes for a moment, and form a picture in your mind of Jesus Christ. Everybody have a picture of Jesus? Now open your eyes. What visual image did you conjure up? Jesus on the cross? Jesus the Good Shepherd? Jesus walking on the water?

How many of you pictured Jesus as I did? At this time of year, I love the visual image of Jesus as a newborn baby. Jesus in the manger -- what a beautiful, comforting picture that is! The Son of God, born in human flesh, bringing God's grace and love to earth, to us. He's sweet, he's loving, and not the least bit intimidating.

Now contrast that picture of Jesus with the picture that John describes in our Revelation reading. John tells us, in chapter 1, that one Sunday while he was praying or worshipping he hears a loud voice, like a trumpet. John turns around to see who's talking. What does he see? "... Seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man" (1:13). John sees the exalted Christ. He gets a real good look at Jesus in all his heavenly glory. This picture of Jesus is nothing like my mental picture of sweet baby Jesus.

John gives a detailed description. The Lord Christ is clothed in a long flowing robe, with a golden sash around his chest – symbolic of the high priestly role of Jesus before the heavenly Father. His hair is white, like snow – symbolizing his divine wisdom. The eyes of the Son of Man, in John's vision, are like a flame of fire – representing authority to destroy evil and purify his people. His feet are like fiery burnished bronze, signifying Christ's divine strength that conquers all enemies. In his right hand he has seven stars, and we'll talk in just a moment about what they represent. From Christ's mouth

comes a double-edged sword, indicating that Christ will execute God's judgment. And his face was as bright as the sun itself, showing that Christ is the person through whom the glory and the life-giving light of God are now present.

What an incredible picture of Jesus John give us! John sees this super-charged Jesus, and he falls down, knocked out, completely overwhelmed. John can no more stand before the heavenly Christ than he could approach the solar sun and touch it.

But then Jesus gives him permission. "Fear not," he tells John. And the almighty Lord commissions John. "Write down what you have seen, and what I will show you next." And then Jesus says, "As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands," he says, "are the seven churches" (1:20)

I think that we could do a whole sermon series just on this awesome visual image of the exalted Christ, from Revelation 1. But let's focus, for a few minutes more, on those seven golden lampstands. John sees Jesus, up in heaven, standing in the middle of seven golden lampstands.

Now, John's readers, back in the day, if they knew their Bible, knew all about golden lampstands. During the Israelites' 40-year journey from Egypt's slavery to the Promised Land, God gave them detailed instructions for building and furnishing their worship sanctuary, the portable Tabernacle. In Exodus 25, using precise words, the Lord tells his people to place a lampstand of pure gold, with seven branches, and seven lights atop it. The lampstand was to be tended by the priests so that its light never went out. Day and night this one lampstand gave forth light to their holy place.

Then centuries later, Jesus Christ proclaims one day, “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12). Jesus declares, “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (John 9:5). He’s not calling himself a lampstand; but, just like the one golden lampstand in the Tabernacle, Jesus is saying that he is the one light – the only light -- that shows us the way.

Christ alone gives us the light of life, doesn’t he? Only Jesus can brighten the darkness of sin. Only Jesus, by his death and resurrection, can bring you and me to the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Only Jesus! So he is very much like the one golden lampstand in that ancient Tabernacle.

Why, then, do we read in Revelation about multiple golden lampstands? John sees the heavenly, all-powerful Jesus standing in the middle of seven lampstands. Why so many? Why not just one, representing Jesus?

Because Revelation, remember, is reassurance. John is told to send his book to seven churches that need encouragement and comfort. This vision of the seven golden lampstands is a strong note of reassurance that those seven churches are, indeed, part of God’s eternal plan. Back then, those seven churches were full of scared, worried, troubled Christians – just like ours is tonight. But God is telling those churches, through this part of the vision, that they are important. They are valuable. Their work, their ministry, their stewardship, their outreach, their fellowship are all crucial in the plan of God.

“The seven lampstands,” Christ tells John, “are the seven churches.”

You see, Christ had come to earth, completed his mission, and returned to heaven. The churches – not just those seven, but all churches where Christ’s disciples gather – the churches are now the ones bringing God’s light to this world of

sin. Each local church is a lampstand, just as Christ is. Our church is to be a reproduction of Christ, the world's one light.

It's dark outside right now, but the people of Wake Forest are supposed to see a light up on this hill. Not just a building, with electric lamps. But you and I, the people of God here at Hope Lutheran Church! We are given the glorious task of shining forth the divine light of God's Word, God's grace, God's burning desire to save sinners through faith in Jesus and bring them to heaven.

In these days between the first coming of Christ and his second coming, we are the light of the world. You and me. Our church. Our work, our ministry, our stewardship, our outreach, our fellowship are all crucial in the plan of God. What a privilege, to be God's lampstand!

Let's pray.