

HANGING OF THE GREENS SERVICE

Nov. 30, 2008, Advent 1, Tryon FBC

Welcome and Theme Interpretation:

I have enjoyed listening to a crazy radio program lately as I travel down to Tryon, one that you may also have heard. It is called, "Wait, wait, don't tell me!" The funniest and very brightest participants are challenged to guess the factual origins and data about some of the most bizarre and obscure but current news.

At least it is entertaining. At most you might learn some fascinating facts that you didn't know you needed to know! As we come to this well rehearsed season of Christmas and the birth of Jesus is to be celebrated across the land, there is this obscure display of evergreen branches to be paraded into sanctuaries everywhere! And people who see it inside the church as well as outside the circle of church folks are saying something like this, "Wait, wait, don't tell me! Let me guess what this ancient tradition means to this season! Let's see! Is it religious? Is it some ritual of celebrating the earth? Is it just for decorations? Or could it be a way that the church is incorporating all that winter warmth and sentimental feelings of home?

"But, Wait, wait, don't tell me! I want to figure it out!"

As I think about all of this, I realize that the last thing we want is to create some kind of mystery around the season, or make mysterious anything about our faith. Though this first candle we light is called the light of HOPE, Isaiah announced that, "the people who lived in darkness have seen a great light!" The hopes and dreams of all the years was born in flesh that day-for all to see and experience for themselves!

So let's remove the mystery and any shadow of doubt about what we are doing here! We are bringing in 2 things today as part of the excitement of the season!

First we bring in winter's lovely coat of evergreens, God's sign of everlasting life! The church should be virtually shouting with the news and the HOPE of God's great promise fulfilled..... Eternity's doors are opened by Jesus, the perfect Lamb of God, our Savior, slain from the foundations of the earth..... The blood gift is offered on atonement's altar, his life given for our sin and redemption!..... We are filled with Hope of what is to come in that final day of the Lord! All fear of death is removed! Heaven is ours..... God's presence is "ever-green;" His promises are true; His love is unending. His Son has come to earth to give us reason to believe and to live victoriously, confidently for Him!

We bring what all creation has been telling for all generations..... that God is real and the evergreen branches can remind us even in the darkness of winter's cold silence!

The second thing we bring into our lovely sanctuary of worship is the unfolding of the mystery kept for all the ages. As the Apostle proclaimed in Colossians 1:26-27, *"The mystery kept hidden for all the ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints.... To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."*

To this we can add with the Apostle Paul..... *"We proclaim Him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all His energy, which so powerfully works in me!"*

Today may look like just decorations and maybe it is to the naked eye. If that is the way we want to tell it, then let us say this, the God has decorated this world with His perfect son, our Savior, born to a virgin at Christmas day! And we stand in awe that we, to, are made beautiful and complete by this unspeakable gift! Even Jesus our Lord!...LET'S GREEN THE CHURCH!{END,671wds}

READY OR NOT, HERE I COME!

Final Meditation; ADVENT #1, **HOPE**, John 1:1-17

When you played hide and seek in childhood, the cry went up as a warning, one that started the great adventure! "Ready or not! Here I come!" It never came as a surprise...unless you were not ready, and that always brought about a scrambling for cover, quick! But after all, the countdown had begun, and we knew all along that the one who was IT was coming!

1.The same was true with the coming of Christ into the world.

Everyone should have been ready, for God had been telling them through His prophets for a long time.

A. **The Hebrew Law** had established the righteousness and holiness of God. New Testament writers looked back and realized the Law had been like a schoolmaster preparing them for the Messiah. Preparation was built into the worship and sacrifices in temple services. Every altar that burned with sacrificial offerings, smoking with its victim, foretold of the Lamb to die on Calvary. Even its aroma was to help in preparing the hearts of the people to hear the message of the gospel..."Behold the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world!"

Every chant of the Levite choirs was an echo of the everlasting song of the heavenly hosts, the redeemed. Even the persecutions and scattering of the Jews, when the temple was destroyed, prepared the way of the Lord! For the synagogues which were planted all over the Roman Empire were the first pulpits for the apostles.

B.God wanted the people to be prepared for the arrival of their Savior that they would be ready to receive him and give him room in their hearts and homes. God's great act of redemption was the great **HOPE** of all Israel, was on every tongue and

beating in every heart that was called by that holy name,
YAHWEH!, Lord God of all creation, who made heaven and earth!

"Prepare ye the way of the Lord!" cried Isaiah 700 years before Him. *"Prepare ye the way of the Lord!"* came the voice of one crying in the wilderness, John the Baptist. Peter said to the Roman centurion, *"To him bear all the prophets witness."*
If the people were not ready, it was not God's fault!

II. *"When the fullness of time was come,"* St. Paul reflected in Galatians, "God sent forth His Son, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." As far as world history was concerned, the fullness of time had come. Materially and culturally, the world was ready! The signs were all in place.

III. But some were not ready.....

A. **Herod** was not ready. A nominal Jew who subscribed to the Jewish faith, all he was interested in was power for himself. How could anyone who ruled so ruthlessly with such an exalted opinion of himself have any room for another ruler, named Jesus? No heavenly King would share Herod's rule or threaten his rule of egotistical methods.

B. **The innkeeper** was not ready. He had made elaborate preparations for the census to be taken in his home arena. It would be bustling with seasonal crowds of worshippers coming to be counted. What a feast for the businessmen! When Joseph and Mary would come knocking at his door, he would have no room!

C. What about **His own people**? John spoke to that, saying, *"He came to His own, and His own received Him not!"* People just don't seem not to delve into the deeper matters nor make it their business to pry. Others stayed in the darkness of their own over

cluttered lives, stuffed full of business, making a buck, practical matters, taking care of their own affairs, who knows.

There is, of course, SIN. St. Augustine acknowledged his own long delay due to the excuse of, "*not now-maybe later.*" We have all had innocent pursuits that have kept us from finding The Savior.

IV. There will always be people who miss God's greatest gifts, but always people whose hearts are not ready.

A. **Mary and Elizabeth** were ready! The Angel of the Lord had their ear because He had their hearts! The **shepherds** and the **Persian Astrologers** whom we call the Magi were more than ready..as was the aged man **Simeon** and the **Prophetess Anna**, both waiting daily in the wings of the Temple! They saw Him and knew immediately! Years of waiting in HOPE paid off for these two who held him in their arms as they welcomed Mary that day! Simeon had narrowed down his prayers to one, that he might live to see the promised one before he died. "*Now take Thou Thy servant home!*" he cried with delight.

B. How will it be in your home this Christmas of 2008? Will it be bedlam from the mad rush of HOLIDAY? Or will it be a magnificent day of gratitude as you rejoice in Christ your Savior, whose birth fulfilled the HOPES of all the years.

HOPE has proven true.

. Heaven's doors are now open to us.

. Will our hearts be open to Him?

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