

GENESIS 3:8

FEAR OR PEACE AT ADVENT?

And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

People come and go each day. If it's someone ordinary, you don't pay much attention, do you? If it is someone special, you take notice. The "notice" might be concern/fright, or joy/pleasure. During Advent we are awaiting the celebration of the arrival of God's Son on earth the first time, at the manger in Bethlehem. At the same time we await His arrival on earth at the end of time. The Bible records various occasions where God came to / appeared to people. Today's text is the first such incident recorded in the Bible where God came to talk with man.

You are surely familiar with the backstory behind Genesis 3. In Genesis 1, the Bible tells how God created everything in the heavens and the earth in six days; all was "very good." In Genesis 2, we see a close-up look at the creation of Adam and Eve—whose creation was already listed in Genesis 1. In Genesis 3 (today's text), we read how Adam and Eve listened to the devil's lies and disobeyed. God arrived to deal with it and them. They were afraid to face God's arrival. They hid. If God had come to visit them before, they had not reason to hide. This time was different. The devil had gotten involved. He knew all about their happiness, oneness, and peace with the Father. He hated it and plotted to ruin it. He convinced Eve that God was not concerned about their best interest, and coaxed her to disobey and eat the forbidden fruit. Adam followed.

During Christmas season the devil is aware of the good thing we have going with God's Son, your Savior, who came to rescue the entire human race from sin and its due punishment. He daily plots to ruin it for you as well. He challenges every good thing about Christmas, about "Christ the Savior is born." He comes to us with the same approach as he used with Eve. "Yea hath God?" "Has God said that you cannot add all sorts of details of your own liking and pleasure to Christmas?" If you argue with him and hold your ground, he says, "God didn't even say that you must celebrate Christmas, and He didn't even tell you the actual date of His Son's birth on earth at Bethlehem, so what's the big deal? Do your own thing."

The devil likes to deal in half-truths. He told Eve she would be wise, knowing good and evil, if she ate of the fruit. It was partly true. She hadn't yet known evil, only good. The devil didn't tell her that knowing good and evil would be a hurtful thing—death and punishment. He said she wouldn't die—lie! lie! lie!—and called God a liar. When the devil gives you the "green light" to do with Christmas, and to do at Christmas, whatever you want because it's only a man-made festival; he only gives you half the truth. He doesn't tell you that making a holiday to the praise of God's Son your Savior, and then proceeding to count Jesus out in as many aspects as you can, because there is no rule, is folly of the highest kind. It dishonors the Savior. It's as if on your wife's or husband's birthday you said, "OK Becky / OK Jake, this day is for you." And then you proceed to do everything that you wish to do, trying to make Becky or Jake believe it's for her or him. Celebrating Christmas without much or any "Christ" in it, dishonors Christ and the Father. "*All men should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him (John 5:23).*" It's like the case of an individual who is a Christian in name only. Jesus says, *These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips; but their heart is far from Me (Matthew 15:8).* The devil wants your Christmas to be in name only.

It's no wonder Adam and Eve hid when God came into the Garden. Like a child about to get caught with his/her hand in Dad's money jar, hiding under Dad and Mom's bed! If Jesus shows up at noon on Christmas Day would you fear because you would be caught very much celebrating Christmas without Christ?

In the Garden of Eden the devil had yet another game going. The follow-the-leader game. Eve believed Satan, and Adam believed Eve. Adam was intended to be the leader! Eve ate from the fruit of the forbidden tree, so Adam ate from the fruit of the forbidden tree. It's so easy to follow what another does and seems to get away with. When my sisters and I were children and wanted to do some undesirable things that the rest of the kids were doing, my Mom would say, "If they all go jump off the cliff, are you going to jump off the cliff?" Does that happen to you

at Christmas, to the detriment of honoring your Savior's arrival on earth? Because neighbors, relatives, or friends, have, get, or do, do you also jump headlong into the same extravaganza regardless of cost, time, or layers burying the Savior far below? Jesus said, *He who despises Me despises Him who sent Me (John 10:16)*. The word used for "despise" in this verse means "set aside, deny, refuse." Do you set Christ aside for your own, or for the world's, or for your friend's celebration of Christmas?

It's interesting that back in Europe western Christianity set apart December 25th as the day to celebrate the birth of the Savior. Thus we would say in the early hours of the 25th (after midnight), Jesus was born and the angels appeared to the shepherds. How does it happen, then, that now there is so much fanfare and celebrating on Christmas Eve? Why should Christmas Eve overshadow or outshine Christmas Day? Why is church so full on Christmas Eve but so empty on Christmas Day? Do you think maybe it's a subtle way of getting people to downplaying the day set aside to celebrate the Savior's birth? Let's highly honor the Savior's birth on the day we call Christmas. Gathering for worship on the 25th is appropriate, is it not?

At first, Adam and Eve were afraid and filled with regrets when God came into the Garden that day. But the Father's mercy, compassion, and love brought Light to shine into the hearts of lowly sinners. God put Satan in his place! God told Satan that the Seed of the Woman would bruise his head. Jesus, God's Son, took our flesh and blood being born of the virgin Mary. He out-manuevered Satan. Satan could not get Jesus to sin, but Jesus, in apparent helplessness, surrendered to him, and in apparent defeat, died on the cross—only to rise again! Because of His suffering and death for us, He reconciled us, made peace for us in full, with the Father! Jesus crushed Satan's "victory"—bruised Satan's head. Jesus rose from the grave with new life for Himself and for you.

God's arrival/advent at the Garden of Eden that day also brought Adam and Eve sure hope and joy! Even though pain and death awaited them, they heard the words of defeat against Satan. They heard the power, joy, and beauty of what God had just said. They "got it." Life in the promised Seed! When God had finished speaking, Adam named his wife "Eve"—Eve, "the mother of all living!" Life—new life—restored eternal life—to come through her Seed and Offspring, Jesus the Son of God and the Son of Man. In Jesus, the Resurrection awaits for forgiven sinners. In Christ, you nor we fear the Lord's arrival ever again. He did not and does not come to harm, but to help. God even assured them of His help in their physical days on earth. It's true, He forbid them to stay in the Garden of Eden and directed them out. Yet He cared for them. He made them garments of skins for modesty and protection. During your years on earth, the Lord cares for you. He sends, through His Word, Jesus the Spiritual Bread of Life, the Bread for your soul. Trust Him! And He cares for your body each day. He generously providing physical bread and protection for the body each day.

This Advent and Christmas, do not celebrate in such a way that you would have to hide at His unexpected arrival. Rather, honor the Lord God who provided you with a Brother, who was born, lived without sin, suffered and died in your place for your sin. He has forgiveness for you and has secured your place in heaven. When He returns at His Second Advent, fear not! Be filled with the joy and the peace that passes all understanding this Christmas and at the End!

Amen! So be it!

Pastor Kanzenbach---