



# *Watch for the Lord*

## *First Sunday of Advent - Hope*

*Mark 13:24-37*

*But in those days, following that distress, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'*

*November 30, 2014*

## **Thought For The Week**

Scripture Reference: Micah 5: 2

In the 19th century the whole world was watching the campaigns of Napoleon with great concern. There was talk everywhere of marches, invasions, battles and bloodshed as the French dictator pushed his way through Europe. Babies were born at that time, but who had time to think about babies or to care about cradles or nurseries when the international scene was filled with such turmoil? Between Trafalgar and Waterloo there stole into the world a host of heroes whose lives were destined to shape history. But who had time to think of babies while Napoleon was on the move?

Take the year 1809. All eyes were on Austria because that is where the blood was flowing freely. In one campaign after another, Napoleon swept through that nation. Nobody cared about babies in 1809, but when you check history, you realize that some special people were born that year. Take for example William Gladstone, destined to become one of England's finest statesmen, and Alfred (Lord) Tennyson, who would one day make a profound mark on the literary world. Oliver Wendell Holmes was born in Cambridge, and not far away in Boston; Edgar Allen Poe began his eventful albeit tragic life. It was also 1809 that a physician named Darwin named his baby Charles Robert. And in that same year, the cries of a newborn infant could be heard in Hardin County, Kentucky, where Abraham Lincoln was born.

If we could turn back time and read the headlines from 1809, they would say something about how the destiny of the world was being changed on the battlefield of Austria. But was it? It's funny, but only a handful of history buffs could probably name only two or three of those Austrian campaigns today. Looking back, history was not being shaped on the battlefields of Austria. It was being changed in the nurseries of England and America.

In 4 B.C., no one in the Roman Empire could have cared less about babies either, especially the birth of Jewish ones in small towns like Bethlehem. Rome ruled the world and history was being made. But was it? About 7 centuries before Christ was born, a prophet named Micah predicted to Israel that their future hope lie in the coming of the Messiah.

As they surveyed the devastation of the nation, Micah gave words of assurance that God did have a plan for their redemption and restoration. His prophecy seemed strange to some, for he announced that the greatest would come from the least. The Messiah was to be born in the humble town of Bethlehem.

Bethlehem means, "house of bread." In history it was the setting for the book of Ruth—the famous love story. Later it would be the birthplace and childhood home of a boy who would become Israel's greatest King—King David. Other than that, Bethlehem was known for two other things. It was a place where sheep were raised. Most of Bethlehem's labor force was involved in breeding and raising sheep. It was also known as a place of shelter. Only 5 miles from Jerusalem, it was a popular overnight stop for weary travelers. Bethlehem was a town of no significance. But when Jesus came to town, it became transformed into a place of greatness. Today the town has worldwide fame. That's a wonderful analogy of the transformation that Jesus brings. Christ takes the ordinary and transforms it into something significant, valuable and meaningful.

## *Our Prayer of Thanksgiving*

*We gather together to ask the Lord's blessing;  
He chastens and hastens His will to make known.  
The wicked oppressing now cease from distressing.  
Sing praises to His Name; He forgets not His own.*

*Beside us to guide us, our God with us joining,  
Ordaining, maintaining His kingdom divine;  
So from the beginning the fight we were winning;  
Thou, Lord, were at our side, all glory be Thine!*

*We all do extol Thee, Thou Leader triumphant,  
And pray that Thou still our Defender will be.  
Let Thy congregation escape tribulation;  
Thy Name be ever praised! O Lord, make us free!*

## Prayer For The Week

We thank you, God, for the blessings of life. We are amazed by the gifts and beauty in all creation. Help us respond as generous disciples and as wise stewards of all earth's blessings.

In your compassion you forgive us when we fall short of doing all that we could. May we find the joy of being recipients of the fullness of your grace.

We uphold the people of Barbados and seek for them your blessing of peace. Bless all who work for justice and promote peace in all nations.

Guide and bless all faith communities—both leaders and members, and all who passionately engage in compassionate mission and ministry for the sake of worldwide peace.

In the name Jesus Christ we pray, amen.

## Stewardship Thought For The Week

### From & For

Jesus has come to redeem our broken lives from sin. But He did not come just to save us from something. Redemption also involves a purpose...a saving **for**, if you will. Zechariah concludes his prophetic hymn of praise for Christ with these words, "He has given us the privilege, since we have been rescued from the enemies' clutches, to serve Him without fear in holiness and righteousness in His presence all our days" (Luke 1:73-75, HCSB).

We should be thankful to have been redeemed by Jesus **from** the clutches of the enemy. But even more, we should be thankful that we have been redeemed **for** a purpose. Check out the four purposes redemption provides for us:

1. To live without fear of our enemies, chiefly; sin, death, and the grave.
2. To live in holiness, meaning that relationally we belong to God. Holy is not a behavioral concept, it's a relational concept—we are set apart to God, by God, and for God!
3. To live in righteousness, meaning that we are empowered to live as Jesus lived and would have us live.
4. To live in His presence all our days. After all, the only way we can stand in the presence of God is because we have been redeemed.

*This Advent season I'd like to encourage you to think about Jesus our Redeemer.  
He has not just redeemed us **from** something; He has redeemed us **for** something;  
and the "for" makes our lives purposeful and meaningful.*