Wow, can you believe that Thanksgiving is over? Know what that means don’t you? Christmas is now in full swing! Trees on the top of cars, lights in people’s yards, towns are hanging their bells and snowflakes on the telephone poles, Christmas music is playing in every store, holiday planning, Christmas parties at work, haircuts appointments, shopping lists, the list of things to do goes on and on and on.

We have been getting geared up here at Bethel too - Advent Community
1. “Gatherings” - great response
2. “Giving” - sold about 25 Walmart gift cards & plenty of food bags last week (after svc today)
3. “Going” - how many of you are planning to “Go’ with us on Christmas morning?

Watching online? You can do this too – spread the hope, love, joy, peace of Jesus right where you are!

This time of year, many churches take the 4 Sundays leading up to Christmas to Celebrate Advent!

**Advent:** The period beginning four Sundays before Christmas and observed by some Christians as a celebration of the coming of Jesus.

**Advent Community** focus – we thought it’d be good for us to take the next 4 Sundays leading up to Christmas to focus on the Hope, Love, Joy, & Peace that came with the birth of Jesus!

**Ever seen the movie, “It’s A Wonderful Life?”**

Already this year?
A movie about a man named George Bailey who had big plans for his life & it seemed as if everything in the world was working against those plans. His life was a mess, he felt stuck, and perhaps the hardest of all, …..he began to think that everyone else’s lives would have been so much better if he’d never been born.

There was one scene in the movie, just before he went to the bridge to take his life – where George was done with it all, he slowly raised his head and pleaded, “God…God…dear Father in heaven, I’m not a praying man, but if you’re up there and you can hear me, show me the way. I’m at the end of my rope, show me the way, God…show me the way.”

Jimmy Stewart (who played George Bailey) said that something happened to him while filming this movie that had never happened to him b4. He said, “As I spoke those words, I felt loneliness, the hopelessness of people everywhere who had nowhere to turn and my eyes filled with tears. I broke down sobbing. It was something that wasn’t planned at all, but the power of that prayer, the realization that our Father in heaven is there to help the hopeless, had reduced me to tears.”
Proverbs 13:12 NLT - Hope deferred makes the heart sick.
or in other words: Unrelenting disappointment leaves you heartsick.

HOPE
Chuck Swindoll said it this way:
“Hope is as important to us as water is to a fish
As vital as electricity to a light bulb
As essential as air is to a jumbo jet
Hope is basic to life
Without it, we are doomed to a dark, grim existence
Hope is a vital necessity of life.

- I hope the Bills beat the Chiefs today!
- I hope it doesn’t rain tomorrow!
- I hope I get a dog, or an ipod, or a ps4, or a new car for Christmas!

The problem with ‘hope’ as we use it today = it isn’t much more than wishful thinking / unsure optimism:
● I hope the Bills win today - and they might, but there’s a good chance that they won’t
● I hope it doesn’t rain tomorrow – Chances are it won’t, but don’t make outside plans without a backup plan or check the weather forcast
● I hope I get a dog for Christmas – IF you get one, you better HOPE you get an automatic pooper scooper

We can hope all we want for something. And all indications may be that it will come true, but life is pretty unpredictable & you never really know what will happen!

In Scripture however, the Hebrew and Greek words used for “hope” speak of it as something that will “certainly happen.” When hope was used, a strong and confident expectation existed! Not a wishy washy maybe.

This was the kind of hope that motivated the Magi / Wise Men of the Nativity Story in Matthew 2:1 & 2 to embark on a dangerous 1,000 mile journey. that propelled them to give of their treasures, that prompted them to risk their own safety on roads that were littered with dangerous people. I don’t know about you, but I wouldn’t have done any of that on a “Hunch” that the Messiah was coming.

But it wasn’t a hunch – it was so much more!
There’s plenty that we do not know for certain about these “wise men.”
● But it is very likely that they were from ancient Babylon.
● They could’ve been Jews that remained in Babylon after the exile
● They likely had and studied copies of the Old Testament
● May have had a special message or a dream from God regarding Jesus’ birth
● They no doubt were indirectly influenced generation after generation by Daniel and his Jewish friends. (they were Magi as well and Daniel was actually a Chief Magi)

One thing is for certain, The Magi were alert & looking forward to the coming of the King of the Jews because God had promised that He was coming.
Daniel 9 spoke of the timing of the birth of Jesus

Micah 5:2-4 spoke of the location

> But you, O Bethlehem, are only a small village among all the people of Judah.
> Yet a ruler of Israel, whose origins are in the distant past, will come from you on my behalf.

> The people of Israel will be abandoned to their enemies, until the woman in labor gives birth.
> Then at last his fellow countrymen will return from exile to their own land.

> And he will stand to lead his flock with the LORD’s strength, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. Then his people will live there undisturbed, for he will be highly honored around the world.

These 2 passages revealed the timing and the place of the Messiah’s birth.

The Wise men most definitely had access to the writings, and no doubt, the Religious Leaders who were living in Israel did as well - Yet they did not act on it!

**Same Information – Different Result**

Why? Because it is the condition of the heart that matters!

The Savior of the world was born right under the noses of the Religious Leaders & they didn’t even know it – while there were Wise Men who lived 1,000 miles away who were packing their bags for a very long, dangerous, and expensive trip with full anticipation of seeing their Messiah face to face!

This morning, some of you will leave with renewed hope for what you are going through. Others will “write off” the hope that you need as soon as you cross the threshold of the door, perhaps even making fun of what you have heard.

**Biblical Hope finds soil in a seeking heart!!
(People usually find what they are looking for!)**

**Plenty of Others in the Bible Who Found Their Hope in God:**

Didn’t usually happen overnight, Wasn’t always easy to hold on, But in the end – God came through!!

King David, the great worshipping warrior of Israel experienced hope deferred during the time when he was being falsely accused of disloyalty and he fled for his life and living in caves. Hope deferred had imprisoned his soul. 3 Times in Psalms 42 & 43 he had to command his soul to hope.

The woman with the issue of blood? (Mark 5:25-27)

- For 12 years struggled with this issue
- Spent all she had going to many doctors and only got worse
- Social stigma as well / outcast
- Refused to give up hope!
- Didn’t matter how weak she was, what law she was going to have to break, who or how many she would have to push out of her way – she scratched and clawed and determined that she was going to touch Jesus and get her healing.

Abraham and Sarah had an extreme case of “hope deferred.”
● Had been waiting for God to come through for them for 24 years.
● God comes to them one last time, promising a son to them.
● Genesis 17:17-18 Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said in his heart, will a child be born to a man 100 years old? And will Sarah who is 90 bear a child?
● Genesis 18 Sarah laughed to herself as well.

Sometimes you fight for something so long that you have to decide to do what Romans 4:18 says: To hope, against all hope! *In the face of absolute hopelessness, Abraham hoped anyway!

The Butterfly Circus
(Video Clip - https://youtu.be/0le7yCOy2P0?t=10m18s)
At the height of the Great Depression, the showman of a renowned circus leads his troupe through the devastated American landscape, lifting the spirits of audiences along the way. During their travels they discover Will (Nick Vujicic), a man without limbs at a carnival sideshow, but after an intriguing encounter with the showman, he becomes driven to hope against everything he has ever believed.

Sometimes Life Isn’t Fair, NOR is it Necessarily Easy!!
Life can be very challenging & difficult, especially at this time of year!
● Maybe you’ve lost a loved one
● Had a marriage that has failed – or you’re tired of waiting for one to happen
● A business that went under
● A bad doctor’s visit
● A family member that still hasn’t accepted Christ as Savior
● A stressed relationship between parent and child
● The inability to have a child
● In a financial mess
● The list goes on and on _______________

Jesus came to give hope to the world!

Psalm 147:3 - He heals the brokenhearted and bandages their wounds

Philippians 1:6 - And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.

Romans 8:37 - No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Isaiah 40:31 - Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles, they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not faint.

Hebrews 6:18-19 - These two things cannot change: God cannot lie when he says something, and he cannot lie when he makes an oath. So these two things are a great help to us who have come to God for safety. They encourage us to hold on to the hope that is ours. This hope is like an anchor for us. It is strong and sure and keeps us safe.

Conclusion
As we celebrate Advent – the coming of Jesus at his birth – we also look forward to his 2nd Coming!

In the meantime, let’s let the Lord use each of us to share his HOPE with others as we “gather, give, go” this Christmas Season.
The Butterfly Circus

Music / Kids saying “Wow”

Ladies and gentlemen, girls and boys
What this world needs is a little wonder

Splendid, is it not?
The way they move
Full of strength, color, and grace
They’re astounding

But you, cursed from birth
A man – if you can call him that
Who God Himself has turned His back on him

Stop it! Why would you say that?

Because you believe it!
But if you could only see the beauty that can come from ashes.

Ha ha ha, I’ll mow you down, I swear I will!

It’s your problem now, you’re no good to me so get out!

You’re good enough for me doll face, here you go!

But they’re different from me.
Yes, you do have an advantage – the greater the struggle, the more glorious the triumph!