**The Candle of Hope**

Dear friends and members of South Wisconsin:

If you were in church this past week, you saw the first Advent candle being lit. It is known as the “candle of hope” or the “candle of prophecy.” Prophecies are promises. Christmas has always been about promises. Mankind has only celebrated Christmas for some 2000 years. Before that, all sinful man had are promises that someday there would be Christmas. It began with God’s promise to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Just after they sinned, God said to the serpent, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” After that comes promise after promise that God would send a Savior. Promises like the one in Isaiah 7:14, “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” Promises in which God describes the nature and the work of the Savior. Promises that even tell us where Jesus will be born, and where he will grow up.

All in all there are some 300 promises about the birth, life and death of our Lord Jesus on the pages of Old Testament Scripture. All in all, God makes us some 3000 promises in Holy Scripture.

 But promises are only as good, promises are only dependable as the person making them. We know that because we live with broken promises every day. We all know the disappointment that comes from broken promises. Broken promises make us skeptical. Broken promises cause us to be suspicious. That’s what makes Christmas such a special time of the year.

Christmas is about the promises which God keeps. In fact, God keeps all of his promises. Several times St. Paul reminds the Corinthians that “God *is* faithful.” Talking about the promise of eternal life, St. Paul tells his friend, Titus, “God, who does not lie, promised.” God keeps everyone of the promises he makes. And that is especially comforting for us as we prepare to celebrate another Christmas. The Prophet Isaiah is so convinced that God is going to keep his word that he talks about it as if it is already a reality. Some 700 years before Jesus is born Isaiah writes in his 9th chapter, “Unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given.”

 God’s promises are more than merely words. God’s promises are about his love for us sinners. God’s promises are founded in his desire to be our God. That’s important because promises spark dreams. Promises give birth to hope. We can see that as we look at Abraham in Genesis 12. Reading through the history of Abraham’s life, it is obvious that Abraham has dreams of having a son. The problem being, the older he and Sarah get, the more unlikely that dream will be realized. Abraham passes the age of 60, 70, 80, and 90; but he and Sarah still have no son. All they have is the promise of a son. Several times God comes to Abraham as he does here and says, “I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.” A bit later God takes Abraham outside and says, “Look up at the heavens and count the stars--if indeed you can count them…So shall your offspring be.” Sometime later God comes to Abraham with the promise, “In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.”

 The son of promise was born, first to Abraham and Sarah. They were blessed with Isaac. The Son of promise was born also to the Virgin Mary. God kept His promise. He gave us His Son, “born of a virgin, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.” (Galatians 4:4-5)

 In a world where we have once again felt the sting of broken promises, we have a God who keeps His every promise.

May our Lord bless your Christmas celebration!!

Rev. Dr. John. C. Wille

SWD president