

## Crossroads Community Church

This Sunday on the first day of the Advent season, Alan and Kathleen Mills lit the first candle of Hope in the birth of Jesus at Christmas.

It was a blistery snowy morning but our hearts were full of joy as we entered God's presence. Pastor Don shared announcements and prayed over the service, we pray for those suffering of unseen chronic illnesses such as brain trauma, fibromyalgia, migraines, depression, anxiety, digestive issues and autoimmune disorders, although these have no visible outward scars they are very debilitating conditions, we pray for the Lord's protection and sustenance until complete healing takes place and ask that people's hearts would have compassion for those suffering. The worship was festive and joyful, and the first Advent candle was lit by Kathleen and Al; Isaiah 9:2, Galatians 44:4 were shared. Bob read Isaiah 40:3.

This morning Pastor Don gave a lesson on the observance of Advent. Advent is preparation time for the arrival of an important person, a King. As we celebrate the Advent season we use a wreath of evergreen symbolizing the eternity of God, (Revelation 1:8) The color green is Hope everlasting. The wreath is garnished of 5 Candles, 3 purple, 1 pink and 1 white. The purple are for Hope, Faith, Love and the pink is for Joy, the white one placed in the center stands higher than the others reminding us to place our focus on Christ. So why do we follow Advent? It is to remember the anticipation the Hebrews had for a Savior and now it is ours anticipating Jesus' return. Advent is part of our spiritual journey; it affirms that Jesus came and will come again. Each day until Christmas we will be reminded that something new and exciting is coming, it will remind us to center our thoughts on Jesus, the reason for the season, the first candle is Hope founded on God's promises of new life through a Savior.

The Book of Luke tells us the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth, he was a priest in God's temple and was eagerly praying for a son. In their advanced age they were losing hope, ? In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old,? Luke 1:5-10. However one day it was Zechariah's turn of duty in the temple and he received a promise that would not only change his life but restore his hope, (Luke 1:8-10). Hope is always linked to God for he is a God of Hope and we are his blessed recipients, and it connects us to our faith in Jesus, (Romans 15:13, 2 Thessalonians 2:16).

When Zechariah was in the temple he had a vision, God had given him a promise, the promise of a son who would be set apart for God's special purpose, (Luke 1:11-18).

I am sure we have all at one time or another hoped for something incredible, some have been fulfilled quickly, others were delayed and there are still some yet to be fulfilled, but it is in God's time that prayers are answered. (Psalm 121:1-2).

Zechariah's priestly duties included daily prayer, we can assume those prayers were also about his desire to have a son and for the coming Messiah, and that day in the temple God sent the angel Gabriel to give him hope , he told him of the son he would have, but Zechariah doubted, (Luke 1:18-20). Hence his doubt caused him to be silent until the baby's birth, meanwhile those waiting for him to come out wondered what was delaying him, when he came out they realized he had seen a vision (Luke 1:21-25). When Zechariah completed his time of service he returned home and his wife Elizabeth soon became pregnant thus fulfilling the prophecy of ?the one? preparing the way of the Messiah which also fulfills the one about His coming,(Malachi 4:5,6).

Beloved memories may connect us to the past but Hope connects us to our future, and God promises to be with us throughout our lives and He will never abandon us,( Matthew 28:20 ,Hebrews 13:5). We may face challenging times but history shows that we can trust God if we place our hope in Him for He is faithful to His promises and He fulfills them in His timing. As we anticipate the return of His Son, let us rejoice this Christmas in this everlasting hope, Have a blessed week, Asherey Shalom!

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