

It is the first Sunday of Advent, a time of waiting, a time of anticipation, a time to remember miracles happen. But do they? For many, it seems that miracles are a thing of the past. Why is that? Because the way we may think about miracles leads us to believe that they are not real anymore. Unless something extraordinary happens, like parting a sea in two or curing diseases at will, many people don't believe miracles are real anymore.

Have you experienced miracles in your life? What if you have missed them because you did not recognize them? Jesus said that God is always working and he is with him, which means God has a lot going on in the background of your life, even if you don't feel it or see it. So, even if you are not aware of miracles, it does not mean they have not happened to you or in your life. This is particularly relevant when we ponder why some people experience miraculous events while others, equally deserving, do not. With this, my proposition to you today is that miracles do happen and have happened to us, but our challenge is that we miss God's doing, the miracles, because we don't know how to identify them.

To talk about this, the journey of Advent lends us a powerful story to understand the nature and experiences of miracles. We are going back in time to the ancient words of the prophets, to the first whispers of a promise that would miraculously change the course of history. This is the reading of Isaiah 9:1-7,

But there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
on them light has shined.
You have multiplied the nation,
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.
For the yoke of their burden,
and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.
For all the boots of the tramping warriors
and all the garments rolled in blood
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.
For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
His authority shall grow continually,

and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.
He will establish and uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time onward and forevermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

This text of Isaiah 9:1-7 is a prophecy of the coming Messiah, Jesus the Christ. When Isaiah prophesied these words, only darkness, gloom, and despair appeared to lay in store for the nation of Israel. Darkness as black as night prevailed upon the land through the sin of the people. Jeremiah describes this darkness in Jeremiah 7:5-7,

For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your ancestors forever and ever.

Jeremiah explains that the people of Israel had forsaken their faith and their heritage as God's people and had behaved in dark ways against each other and the weak and vulnerable in their midst. This led them to suffering and devastation. They were conquered by other nations and taken apart and away from their family and land. This is what we understand as the captivity of Israel. It appeared that the nation of Israel was quickly coming to an end for what they had brought upon themselves. However, God wouldn't let his people forsaken, and God promised to bring them from gloom to glory.

For this, Isaiah tells of a time to come when a great light will come and shine throughout the land that was then draped in darkness. This prophecy was fulfilled about seven centuries later by Jesus of Nazareth, our Messiah, and Redeemer, as proclaimed by Isaiah, "For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). In these words, there is a profound hope, a promise of a leader unlike any other, a king who would bring peace, not through might and power, but through justice and righteousness.

These ancient prophecies create the expectation of a miracle. They speak of a longing, a deep-seated yearning for redemption and restoration. It was in this world of expectation that Jesus was born. The miraculous nature of his birth was not just in the virgin birth, nor in the angels that sang in the skies, but in the fulfillment of centuries of longing. Many people lived and died, longing for it. Still, they remained hopeful, passing on their faith and hope to their children. Though, for generations, people did not see the miracle, the miracle was coming, and it arrived.

Isn't that a miracle in itself? Perseverance against uncertainty and opposition is a miracle in itself. And because of that, the children of their children and so on centuries later became witnesses of the fulfillment of God's promise, of the miracle.

However, many of them lost sight of God's promise and missed the miracle when it was among them, as explained by John,

He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who

were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. John 1:11-13

John is telling us that when Jesus came as a man, many people did not consider him the Son of God. Many believed him, but many others rejected him or did not give him attention. Though the miracle was before them, they missed it because they were looking for something else.

In hindsight, most people would say, “How did they miss Jesus? I would not have!” Are we sure about that? If Jesus were to come through those doors the way he did back then when he entered the temple, would we listen to him? Let me put it this way: Are we listening to him right now? Are we faithfully keeping his teachings and living a life that mirrors his? Are we disciples who follow his examples of kindness, compassion, justice, and truth-telling?

My friends, that is a miracle: to believe and follow. To keep the faith and pass it on to our children. Just as the Israelites yearned for the coming Messiah, our own sense of longing and expectation, of yearning for peace, hope, and blessings, is a miracle in itself. As Peter explains in 1 Peter 1:8-9,

Although you have not seen him, you love him, and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

What does this mean, then? The promise of Advent is not just a remembrance of what has been; it is a promise of what has already happened and is yet to come, of what is working on our behalf even as we speak. For this, we need to understand and think of Jesus’s birth not just as a historical event but as a present reality that continues to transform lives.

At the beginning of the sermon, I mentioned that we miss miracles because we don’t recognize them. But let me tell you, the most important miracle in your life is already here; you already have it: it is Jesus and your faith in him. The hope born in a manger over two thousand years ago is still alive today. It is a hope that brings light into our darkness, peace into our turmoil, and joy into our sorrow. No matter where we are or what is happening to us, the miracle of hope and life is always there.

This means that the miracle of Christmas is not just that a child was born, but a God that is with us in our joys and struggles, in our certainties and doubts. When we are broken, isolated, grieving, fearful, or hurt, Jesus is there, holding our hands and embracing us to give us strength and hope. Even when we are lost, he is there, not passively waiting for us to come back but actively reaching out to us to be found, for his name is Emmanuel, God with us.

My friends, we already have the greatest and most life-transforming miracle in our lives: Jesus. This miracle has already come, is here, as John also said,

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth... From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. John 1:14, 16

Jesus with us today means he is not confined to the pages of history. It reaches into our lives, offering grace, forgiveness, redemption, and the promise of eternal life. It is personal, yet universal, a testament to God's unending love for us and all of humanity.

So, as we step into this Advent season, let us do so with hearts open to the miraculous. Let us embrace the hope that Christ brings, let us live in the light of his love, and let us share that love with a world in need.

You may be waiting for something "miraculous" to happen to you without realizing it already has. Don't miss the miracle of the new life Jesus is giving you right now. For unto us, a child is born, unto us, a son is given, and the promise of that first Advent is still unfolding in our lives today.