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Sermon Series: *Advent's Adverbs, No. 5*

**Finally**

December 25, 2022

**Matthew 1:18-25 (NIV)**

*This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup> Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.*

*<sup>20</sup> But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."*

*<sup>22</sup> All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: <sup>23</sup> "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").*

*<sup>24</sup> When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. <sup>25</sup> But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.*

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Matthew 1 is our text today. If you have a Bible or can find one in the seats, you're welcome to turn there. Matthew, Chapter One.

Through the weeks of Advent, we studied people who waited for Jesus' arrival: ***Patiently, Humbly, Angrily and Silently.***

Today He's arrived!  
***Finally! Finally!***

"You mean it's here? It's come? Well, finally!"

I can't even count the number of times I used that expression as a kid – ha, as an adult!

You wait and wait and wait for something you're expecting, something that just can't happen soon enough. It seems to take forever, but ***finally***, it comes.

My 4<sup>th</sup> birthday, when I wanted that little green pedal tractor.

My 12<sup>th</sup> birthday, which made me old enough to go fishing in Canada with the men in my family.

It seems it took ***forever*** for my grandparents to come and pick me up anytime I was going to their house to stay overnight.

It took forever for my first car to come back from the shop where it was being painted, and it took even longer for my 16<sup>th</sup> birthday to arrive, so I could legally drive that car.

I graduated from school, and I remember thinking, "Finally! Now I'll never have to write another paper," you know, such as pastors have to do at least once every week.

***Finally!***

How often I thought that word, and said it, when as a kid I waited for someone to get out of the shower, since we only had one shower growing up.

Or for someone to get off the phone, since we only had one of those too.

How often I think, and sometimes say that word out loud today, like when the guy in the car in front of me at the stoplight realizes the light's been green for a while now and so puts his phone down and gets moving.

***Finally!***

Finally – the test results came back.

Finally – the stuff we ordered months ago has arrived.

Finally – the car has warmed up. (That was just this morning.)

We wait for things like these and others, and when they arrive or happen, isn't that how we respond?

***Finally!***

I'd imagine that Mary, like most moms, thought that at the end of her nine months of expectation.

As this strangely conceived child was being born, surely Mary thought, "Finally, I get to see what you look like! After all these weeks, I finally get to see Immanuel – God with us."

Mary had waited a long time, but you know, it was not nearly as long as others had waited for Jesus to arrive.

Nearly 750 years before that first Christmas, Judah's King Ahaz refused to trust the Lord to protect his nation.

We read about that: about how God wanted Ahaz to trust Him to do that, to the extent that God sent the prophet Isaiah to urge Ahaz to ask for a sign that would prove God's promise.

But Ahaz wouldn't ask.

So, Isaiah said, "Well, whether you want one or not, God will give this sign that He will deliver His people: a virgin will conceive and give birth to a son."

That blew right by King Ahaz. He wasn't interested, but many of God's people were, and so they waited. For 750 years they waited for Isaiah's sign to be fulfilled.

Now that's a long labor! So long, in fact, that some, and maybe even most of God's people forgot about the coming Savior's arrival. If they didn't forget about it entirely, they at least forgot the details about how the Savior's arrival would happen.

But God's will doesn't depend on human memory. On that first Christmas, at the moment Jesus was born, Isaiah's prediction was fulfilled, just as Matthew says here in verse 23.

And after centuries of waiting, in that moment of Jesus' arrival, it was as though the whole creation exclaimed, "Ah, *finally!*"

*"Finally!"*

Suffering as it was in the sickness and brokenness of sin dating back to Adam and Eve in Eden, creation was just like Lewis described in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*: "always winter but never Christmas."

But, at Jesus' birth all creation – from the animals to the trees, the bugs and the flowers, even the dirt and rocks, in their own way – followed the Heavenly host there in that night sky and proclaimed with a shout, "Finally! Finally, the Savior, the One God promised, the One who'll restore and repair us: *finally, He has come!*"

Don't doubt it. The significance of what happened in that Bethlehem manger was evident to all creation except – and this is the ironic thing: it was evident to all except – humans.

It is remarkable, remarkably sad, that humans (the pinnacle of God's creation, His own image-bearers) were so absent in that first Christmas chorus of praise.

Even after all those years between Ahaz and Jesus and the centuries of waiting before that, on that first Christmas night, there were still far more people on Earth like Ahaz than there were people like Isaiah.

There were far more people who *did not* realize the significance of Jesus than there were people who, along with the rest of creation, exclaimed, "Finally! Finally, the Savior we've waited for has come!"

Most of us know the phrase, "Good things come to those who wait."

And most of us know that phrase because someone, most likely a parent or grandparent, recited it to us at some point in our lives when we were being impatient – when we were trying to rush something along.

In that moment, it was very likely annoying, but there is truth to it, and especially so with regard to Jesus.

From God's perspective, the timing of Jesus' arrival was perfect.

From our perspective, though, it was a long, long wait, which is precisely why it's OK to say on this Christmas day, with praise and thanks and joy and relief:

"Finally! God has kept His promise!

"Finally! God has sent His savior!

"Finally! God has begun the process of saving His world."

Just the same though, as we all know very well, that process is not yet done.

God's salvation is finished in Jesus, but it is not yet complete. There are still parts of our world, parts of our experience, parts of our lives, and many of the ones we love, that still need God's saving work.

And so, you and I have prayed for things – truly good things, Scriptural things, even – that have not yet come to be.

In one way or another, we've all asked God for some sort of salvation – some sort of deliverance, either for ourselves or for someone we love – that has not yet come to pass.

And because of that, at times we've wondered, "Why hasn't God done anything? Why hasn't He delivered? Why hasn't He come and saved? I thought He was Immanuel, God with us. But I don't see Him here and now."

If that's you today – if you've prayed and waited and prayed and waited, but seeing nothing, you are tempted to forget God's promise to save, as so many had in Jesus' day – may I say to you: *please don't give in to that.*

Let this day, Christmas – the very day of Jesus' birth – be a reminder (a sign even) to you that God does, absolutely, keep His promises.

God does what He says He will do.

It may take a while. It may well take longer than we'd prefer. And because of that, we're so easily tempted to think God has forgotten us or His promise or His word.

But nothing could be further from the truth.

That's why the apostle Peter wrote to the Church even in the first century, *Friends, I write to remind you of the words spoken by the prophets and even by Jesus. In the last days scoffers will come and say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised?" ... But don't forget: with the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like a day. He is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. Rather He is patient, not wanting anyone to perish, but all to come to repentance* (2 Peter 3:1-9, paraphrase).

You see, when God *acts*, He acts for our *good*. And, just the same, when God *waits*, He waits for our *good*.

But just as the day of Jesus' birth finally came, so will that day of salvation come that we've been praying for, and we'll see the blessing in God's timing.

Whatever it is that you are waiting for and praying for today, rest assured that God will prove Himself faithful and true, and one day we'll all be able to say with joy and praise – and with *relief* – just as we say on this Christmas day, "Finally! Finally, salvation has come."

If you ever wonder – if you ever doubt, let Christmas remind you: God keeps His promises.

Prayer: Father, truly our life, our hope and our salvation are all found in You. You *are* the God who keeps your promises – and you'll keep every one, sooner or later, but this one is the greatest: a Savior, Your one and only Son, has come to save our souls. We thank You and exalt You today, Father, Son and Spirit. Amen.

Closing Song: *Allelujah, Sing to Jesus*

Benediction:

May the Lord give you, give us all, a joyful and peaceful Christmas.