

The hit movie 2012 predicts the end of the world. The movie, I am told, is based on the Mayan calendar which ends in the Mayan year 3000 or as some have calculated, 2012. For some this is more than just a movie for entertainment, it is a dire prediction of the end of the world. Just do a quick web search.

When we moved to New Hampshire in 1988 there were signs, posters and billboards all over the region with the question, “**Are you ready?**” in bold print. The signs went on to announce that Christ would return on October 31, 1988. On this day Christ would return and the world would end. When we left New Hampshire for the Philippines in 1998 there were still some portions of these posters visible (especially those that had been stuck to back of stop signs). It was interesting that the posters had lasted longer than the predictions and again the Church was made to look foolish in the eyes of the world.

Is he coming?

The Word had been silent for over 400 years. There had been no prophet or Word from the Lord in the land. What happens when there is 400+ years of silence? Some people begin to wonder if the words of the prophets, the promises of God were ever true. Some begin to call into question the whole issue of faith and belief. Believers seem like Linus waiting in the pumpkin patch for the coming of the Great Pumpkin. They are tolerated but certainly not listened to or believed. There have been too many years of silence. There is no excitement in the land, no hope of God. There are those who remind that the prophets said, “Those who remain faithful.” But, where is the world of the Lord?

Advent is a reminder to us of God breaking the silence. The Branch in Jeremiah’s prophecy is on his way. However, God is surprising the world. The message is being packaged in a way the world did not expect. The Branch is coming as a child.

God breaks the silence and only a few are listening. An aged priest enters the Temple to serve before God. As he serves an angel appears to him and announces that he and his wife, who is beyond any hope of child bearing, will have a son. They will name him, John. He will be a fore runner to the coming of the Messiah. His unbelief will cause him to be silent before the people; he will lose his voice until after John is born. God is breaking the silence.

A young maiden is approached by an angel; God is calling her to a unique role in history. She is called to faith. The fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecy will be through her. God is breaking the silence.

Angels sing to shepherds on a lonely hillside. They have a message that God has come to the world. Not in the palace of a king but in a stable in Bethlehem. Not to the King but to a humble carpenter and his wife of the lineage of David. Jeremiah’s promise is being fulfilled, the silence is broken.

Is he coming?

We live in a day when many are still caught up in trying to determine the date and time that Christ will return. They spend hours, days and years reading the “tea leaves” of the world for the answer, for the date and time. Every generation has those who believe they will be the last. Things cannot get any worse. Peter and Paul expected Christ to return before they died. They began to understand and prepare us for the delay in his coming. What will happen before he comes? So we try to determine the signs they predicted, but we keep getting it wrong. We do not seem to learn. We still look for dates and times.

We were in the Philippines when 1999 turned into 2000. Do you remember all the dire predictions about what was going to happen when computers had to deal with the changing of the millennium? Computers would crash. Our banking system would be in disarray. Power grids would fail. We would be thrown back to the dark ages. A little after midnight I was on my lap

top emailing friends back in the States (You realize that you here in the Northwest were one of the last areas of the world to enter the year 2000! We in the Philippines entered it about 15 hours ahead of you!). The world had survived. Computers still worked. Our lights were still on and the crowd outside was still celebrating. The predictions were wrong!

Is he coming?

Our calendar is not God's calendar. We waste time and energy in trying to push God into our time frames. You know the saying, "They are so heavenly minded that they are of no earthly good." Want to make God laugh – set the date!

Our God is full of surprises. No one expected a babe being born in a stable in Bethlehem would be the promise, God. It was not what they had ever imagined. The silence of God was broken in most unexpected ways. Why should God change now?

The Rev. Dr. Gene Bartlett tells of an encounter with a young man in a Seminary class he was teaching. The young man raised his hand and asked Dr. Bartlett, "Dr. Bartlett what would you do if you knew Christ was returning one year from today?" Gene said he replied something to the effect that he would live his life as he was, proclaiming and preaching the Good News of the Gospel.

His response did not seem to impress the young man and he pressed on, "Dr. Bartlett what would you do if you knew Christ was returning in six months?" Gene said he gave basically the same answers, "I would continue to live my life proclaiming and preaching the Good News of the Gospel."

Again the young man was not happy with Gene's response and pressed again, "Dr. Bartlett what would you do if you knew Christ was returning in one month?" Gene said again he gave basically the same response, "I would continue to live my life proclaiming and preaching the Good News of the Gospel."

At this response the young man became quite agitated and shouted, "Dr. Bartlett what would you do if you knew Christ was returning tomorrow?" Gene said he calmly responded, "I would continue to live my life proclaiming and preaching the Good News of the Gospel."

Dr. Bartlett was right. We must live our lives in the assurance of God keeping the promises given. It should not matter when Christ returns but only that when Christ does return we are found being faithful to our call in Christ. We should be found faithful.

Advent is our reminder that God does keep the promises made—even after years of "silence". It is also a reminder that our God is full of surprises. The promises of Jeremiah were fulfilled in a stable in Bethlehem and on a hill called Calvary. Promises fulfilled in a way the world did not expect nor ever imagine. How God surprises the world again is only for God to know. Regardless of how God surprises or when God surprises should not matter – our lives should be lived faithful to God's call on them.

Is he coming? Yes! Are you ready?

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quoted is from NRSV, NCCC/USA 1989
NIV, New International Bible Society, Zondervan, 1989