

ADVENT 1
ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
LOGANVILLE, GA
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**THIS IS MY BELOVED SON:
CAIN, THE FIRST MURDERER
(Genesis 4:1-16)**

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from Christ Jesus, our Savior. Amen.

As we take our first steps into Advent 2023, our hearts resonate with the echoes of expectation. The season of Advent invites us to anticipate, first of all, the celebration of Jesus' birth to be our Savior, and then, secondly, to anticipate with equally joyful hearts the day He returns to call us to Himself in heaven. In this, we stand in solidarity with the believers of ages past, tracing our hopeful expectation back to the very dawn of humanity, Adam and Eve included.

The arrival of any child ushers in a whole range of expectations. Parents tend to envision greatness for their offspring. Yet, the reality sets in swiftly – that our children inherit the same sin that tarnishes our thoughts, words, and actions, permeating every aspect of our existence. In this arena of unmet expectations, Jesus, the Son of God, stands as the unique exception. God, in His perfect righteousness, could declare unequivocally: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."

Throughout the four Sundays of this Advent season, our focus will touch on the profound disappointments

experienced by the parents of three sons – Cain, Ishmael, and Absalom. However, this series of meditations is not intended solely to underscore their sins or even their parents' failures; rather, it aims to fortify our faith in Jesus, who is the embodiment of all of our expectations for a better future. Under the theme, "This is My Beloved Son," we begin this Advent series considering the first child ever born, Cain, as conveyed in Genesis 4:1-16.

(ESV) Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD." (2) And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. (3) In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, (4) and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, (5) but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. (6) The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? (7) If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it." (8) Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. (9) Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" (10) And the LORD said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. (11) And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. (12) When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a

wanderer on the earth." (13) Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. (14) Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me." (15) Then the LORD said to him, "Not so! If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." And the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him. (16) Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

When prospective parents receive the news of an impending addition to their family, a cascade of aspirations and dreams accompanies the news. Envisioning the yet unborn child, they begin speculating and contemplating the future achievements and character this little human that is still developing within his mother's womb. In these moments, the yearning for the optimal outcome becomes almost palpable, though it is truly only a figment of their imagination. Every parent harbors the fervent desire to proudly point to their offspring at any stage of life and declare with admiration, "This is my son" or "This is my daughter," yet, an inevitable companion shadows these parental aspirations – disappointment. The meticulously placed baseball or football in the infant son's crib often finds itself ignored as the child grows. The conscientious efforts that go into the upbringing of a child often comes with unforeseen detours culminating in a phone call detailing some misstep and misdeed.

A life with children seldom adheres to our crafted plans or fervent hopes. This narrative is ancient, echoing, or rather

originating, even in the lives of the first parents – Adam and Eve, who held lofty expectations for the very first child ever born, Cain. Their high expectations were not only embedded in his given name but also echoed in the words of his mother, Eve. In the translation we have before us, she exclaims, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD." However, a more precise translation, suggested by Hebrew scholars such as Martin Luther, renders her words, "I have gotten the man (promised by) the LORD."

In contemplating Eve's perspective, there is a profound inference – an intriguing conjecture on her part that Cain was the promised Seed foretold in Genesis 3:15, destined to crush the serpent's head and redeem Adam and Eve from the shackles of sin and death – restoring his parents to Eden where all was peaceful. Martin Luther paraphrases Eve: I recall the losses incurred through sin, yet let our hope and discourse be singularly focused on regaining and securing this redemption. For I have acquired the man of God, who shall restore that former glory."

Such towering expectations stand in stark contrast to the reception afforded to Cain's brother, Abel. His name, meaning "vapor" or "empty," bears the weight of a somber realization. By the time of Abel's arrival, the harsh reality of sin, passed on from both parents, seems to have settled in. Adam and Eve, unwittingly, had set themselves on a course destined for disappointment. Cain, alas, was not the anticipated redeemer!

Instead of the envisioned role as a savior, envy and wrath claimed dominion over Cain's heart and mind. Like a

predatory beast lying in wait, he succumbed to the allure of sin. Despite God's admonition and call to repentance, Cain, consumed by wicked thoughts, launched a savage assault on his unsuspecting brother, thereby etching his name into history as the first murderer.

Consider the sharp anguish that must have seized Adam and Eve's hearts upon discovering the heinous deed perpetrated by Cain. Through the years, amid the various trials and tribulations that accompany parenthood, they had weathered moments of grief and disappointment, certainly. Yet, the revelation that their own son had become a murderer would have brought so much more pain from disappointment. At once, they had to go through the pain of losing one child to violence while suffering the pain of their first born being the lone suspect of the crime. The very child they had hoped would be the life-restorer had tragically revealed himself to be a life-taker.

Moreover, the weight of their own transgressions bore fruit in the curse inherited from them by Cain, leading to this dismal state of affairs. This legacy continued to persist through subsequent generations, extending its sinister consequences to all of their grandchildren and great-grandchildren, through every generation, including our own.

"By one man's disobedience, the many were made sinners," the Apostle Paul simply puts this painful reality. We, also sons of Adam, have inherited the same corruption of sin that lurked in Cain's heart. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches us that every descendant of Adam

shares in the culpability of murder inasmuch as to hate one's brother is morally and spiritually equivalent to murder. They both invite the same divine judgement, eternal separation from God.

Our own record in obeying God's commandments reveals that we have all been colossal disappointments in that we have not lived as God created us to live. Our offerings to the Divine, like Cain's, have not consistently flowed from hearts brimming with faith and joy; instead, they have at times been tainted by begrudging compulsion on the one hand and self-congratulatory pride on the other. So, too, anger and envy have cast their dark shadows upon our hearts, directed towards those who possess blessings distinct from our own. In the illusion of forsaking our role as our brother's keeper, we have fostered an ethos of self-centeredness, neglecting the responsibility for the well-being of others. As children of Adam, with his blood coursing through our veins and his sin coursing through our souls, we have woefully fallen short of the divine expectations set forth when mankind was crafted in the image of God.

This is why the writer of Psalm 146 instructs us: "Put not your trust in princes, nor in a son of man in whom there is no salvation. When his breath departs, he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish." Adam and Eve were wrong about Cain being the promised Savior, but God's plan of restoration was still intact. The Savior would still come – a descendant of Adam, yet still the Seed of the woman. He would be the true Man promised by God, untainted by the sin-wrought nature of Adam, for Joseph

did not know his wife until she brought forth her first-born Son, conceived by the Holy Spirit.

In the midst of a world marred by animosity and bloodshed, our God of love and life entered the scene. From the earliest days of Jesus' human existence, the physical descendants of Adam and spiritual descendants of Cain harbored malevolent intentions, seeking to extinguish His life. Jesus, in contrast to it all, lived a life of unparalleled devotion to God, which was a large part of why the world hated Him so. Ultimately, they were allowed to succeed in their wicked intentions of murdering yet another of their brothers, spilling His innocent and holy blood.

In sharp contrast, Abel's blood, as the hymn says, for vengeance pleaded to the skies, while the blood of Jesus speaks a different narrative. Hebrews 12, in explaining the difference between Jesus and every other son of Adam, says, "You have come... to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel" (Hebrews 12:22a, 24). Jesus willingly assumed the role of murdered brother that He might rescue us from the eternal death of sin that had enslaved us all.

In the Gospel's narrative, Jesus emerges as the authentic Son of Eve, offering His shed blood and broken body as the flawless sacrifice. This sacrifice, embraced by God the Father, possesses the transformative power to cleanse our hearts tainted by murderous inclinations, ushering us into the fatherly embrace as children of God. The truth of

Romans 5:17 echoes, "For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man (Adam), much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ."

Consider Cain, eternally marked as the inaugural perpetrator of murder. Contemplate the agonizing sorrow that enveloped Adam and Eve, not only mourning the loss of their son, Abel, to death but also confronting the devastating reality that his own brother, their son, stood as the instrument of his demise. As sons and daughters in the lineage of Adam and Eve, a shared inheritance binds us – a legacy stained by words and thoughts steeped in the shadow of hatred and murder. Reflect on the divine pain felt by God the Father as His children rebel against Him. Yet, out of profound love, He sends forth His Son, the Prince of Life, to be offered in sacrifice. Through Jesus, the true Son of Eve, the gift of life is restored to us.

In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, our perfect brother, your heavenly Father harbors no disappointment in you. Through the sacrament of Baptism, His gaze upon you is one of approval and love, as He proudly declares, "This is My beloved son, This is my beloved daughter, with whom I am well pleased." Amen!