

“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.”

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

There is a commercial by a cellular phone service provider that shows the ways in which communication has changed over the years. They show carrier pigeons, telegraphs and morse code, even boys with 2 tin cans on a long string. Phones have changed from the big, bulky boxes hanging on a wall that had to be cranked to the small little devices that we carry in our pockets. Communication itself has changed. Today we don't talk to people on the phone; we email or text or tweet. We post comments on social media. We don't even think of radio and television the same way; now there are streaming services for our music and entertainment.

Our text tells us that over the centuries, God has used many forms of communication to get His message to people. He spoke by the prophets. Scripture also tells us that there were times when he used dreams and visions. Today, in the miracle that we celebrate as Christmas, God speaks to us in a new and wonderful way. God has some glorious news for us about the peace, the hope and the love He wants us to have. But He doesn't advertise this message on radio or tv. He does not post it on the internet or on signs and billboards. He doesn't use a telemarketing service. He does not thunder it from the heavens as He can do. He does not even use a messenger as He has done so often in the past. God speaks to us in the voice of a Child—not just any child, but the Child who is Emmanuel, God with us, lying in a manger in Bethlehem.

In the movie, *Oh God*, God chooses a bumbling grocery store manager as his messenger, who is simply to tell people that God loves them and wants them to love each other. In truth, God has a far deeper message to proclaim. It is a two part message, and you need to hear and know both parts. First, God speaks to us of our sinfulness and the judgment that this sin brings to all mankind. Paul says it so simply: *“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”* (Romans 3:23, ESV) He also tells us the consequences of that sin: *“For the wages of sin is death.”* (Romans 6:23, ESV) Thankfully, God has so much more to say to us. God declares His love; that forgiving love which destroys the power that sin, death and hell have over all of us. Our loving God wants us to know that sin causes the hurt, the misery, and the pains of this world. He wants us to be aware that sin leads to death, including eternal death in hell. But, joy of joys! He also wants us to know and believe in the hope and life that He gives to sinners like you and me.

In the past, God spoke in many and various ways to communicate this message. God spoke to Moses out of a burning bush—or, more precisely, from a bush that was on fire, but that wasn't being consumed by the fire. Sometimes God used visions, like He did with Isaiah, who saw the throne room of God in a vision. As Isaiah saw the glory of God, he recognized how sinful he was and how unworthy of God's revelation. Sometimes God sent angels to speak His message, as He did in sending the angel Gabriel to the virgin Mary. Sometimes He spoke through dreams, as He did to Joseph, Mary's betrothed, to assure him that Mary's child is not illegitimate, but a miracle of God's grace and plan. At Mount Sinai God spoke with the sound of thunder that shook the mountain, and which terrified the people so that they asked Moses: *“You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.”* (Exodus 20:19, ESV)

The wonder of Christmas is that now God speaks to us in the cooing of the Child lying in the manger. The Lord God, whose voice can shake the very foundations of the earth; the Lord God, who has every reason to raise His voice against us because we, in the sinful conceit of our hearts, have not listened to His Word now chooses to speak to us—not in whirlwinds and thunder; not in dreams and visions that might possibly be misunderstood. No, He has chosen to speak to us in His Son. No other means; no other messenger is good enough for the message that God wants to tell us. God wants us to know, to believe, and to trust in His love for us. He wants us to know what He has done, is doing and will do for us that we might have life with Him in His wonderful home of heaven. He wants us to know the power of His forgiveness, so that we may trust in Him and be saved. And in the wonder of Christmas, God becomes a child, cooing as only babies can; whispering words of love, of comfort, of peace.

All around us we are surrounded by voices—voices that tell us what to believe, voices that tell us how to vote, voices that tell us what to buy. There are loud, boorish voices that annoy us; there are threatening voices that instill fear in us or which want

to control us. There are friendly voices that encourage us, and loving voices that warm us. Sometimes it is hard to know which is which. Sometimes the voices that speak love one moment can be filled with anger the next. Sometimes it is hard to hear the right voices over the noise and bellowing of other voices.

In the midst of this world's cacophony of voices, isn't it strange that God would speak to us in the voice of an infant? Why doesn't God speak with that voice that would ring louder than a thousand nuclear bombs? Why doesn't He speak in the sound of thunder, like He did at Sinai? He may speak in the cooing of the Baby in the manger, but this is still the voice of authority, power and might. It is the voice of the One through whom the universe is created. It is the voice of Emmanuel—of God with us in human flesh. It is the voice that declares to lost and dying sinners like you and me that God has come to us to save us. And why speak to us in the cooing of a baby? To hear that voice, we have to quiet down. We have to close our mouths and listen, not speak. We have to get down on our knees beside His cradle, putting aside our ego and our own self-righteousness to hear Him. And when we listen, what beautiful things we hear! We hear God loves us and wants us to be with Him forever. We hear that God has come to forgive us for the many sins we have committed—and still commit—against His holy will. We hear the assurance of help, strength, peace and joy that can and will fill each day for those who trust in God, who believe in His promises given to us through the Child in the manger.

The child in the manger would grow to speak wonderful words to those who hear His voice. He would look at hurting, troubled hearts and say: ***“Your sins are forgiven.”*** (Luke 7:48, ESV) He says to those who are afraid and alone: ***“Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*** (Matthew 28:20, ESV) To Martha and Mary, grieving at the tomb of their brother, Jesus says: ***“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”*** (John 11:25–26, ESV) And then, to show the power and authority of His words, He declares: ***“Lazarus, come out”*** (John 11:43, ESV), and Lazarus had to obey.

The Baby who coos as He lies in the manger is the same Lord who would cry in triumph on the cross: ***“It is finished,” and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.*** (John 19:30, ESV) With that voice of triumph, He declares that all that was necessary for our forgiveness and life has been accomplished.

The almighty Lord of heaven and earth speaks to you in the cooing of the Child. But do you hear that voice? Jesus said: ***“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.”*** (John 10:27–28, ESV) If you stop and listen, you will hear God calling you to leave behind this world of sin and death and to follow Him to eternal life. We need to hear that voice, and not only at Christmas, but each and every day of our lives. Sadly, we tend to listen only occasionally to God's voice. When we do, we are more like teenagers listening to their parents than we are the captive audience we should be. We hear what we want to hear, and we turn a deaf ear to everything else. In George Bernard Shaw's play *Saint Joan*, Joan of Arc is always hearing voices from God, and the king is angered by this. He complains to her, “Oh, your voices! Your voices! Why don't your voices come to me? I'm the king, not you.” “They do come,” she replied. “But you do not hear them. You've not sat in the field in the evening listening for them. When the Angelus rings, you cross yourself and have done with it. But if you prayed from your heart and listened to the trilling of the bells in the air after they stopped ringing, you would hear the voices as well as I do.”

The voice of God speaks this day in the voice of a baby lying in the manger of Bethlehem. That baby comes for you and for me. He comes to set us free from sin, death and hell, for He comes to give His life in place of ours as He dies for us on the cross. He rises to life again and lives to lead us into life in its fulness. His birth is your assurance of all this. Listen, for He speaks of God's love for you. Open your ears and your hearts to His voice. But don't just listen this morning. Keep on listening, and you will see how sweet His words truly are, and how much peace and hope they bring to our lives. He is no longer the baby, but He still speaks to us. As Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote:

To the dead he sayeth: Arise!

To the living: Follow me!

And that voice still soundeth on

From the centuries that are gone,

To the centuries that shall be!

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882)