

ADVENT MIDWEEK 3 Saints of Advent (St. Daniel) Dec. 17
December 14, 2011
Text: Daniel 6:16-28
Theme: "Life in the Lion's Den"

So I ask, why is Daniel's saint day during Advent? His day is actually Saturday but still, what about Daniel says Advent? He was a prophet of God in the Old Testament who is known for two particular events, surviving the lion's den and surviving the fiery furnace. But if we look a little deeper into the book of Daniel, we see the following prophecy.

⁴⁴ "And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, ⁴⁵ just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure."

Nebuchadnezzar had a dream and sent for Daniel to interpret it for him. Part of Daniel's interpretation was a stone cut from a mountain by no human hand and of course, you and I know that that was the capstone that the builder's rejected, Jesus Christ himself. Hence why Daniel shows up in Advent.

Later on, as you recall from Sunday School, Nebuchadnezzar's advisors convinced him to throw Daniel into the lion's den because he worshipped the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Daniel understood that God is greater and more capable than what we

imagine. Although he could not have known exactly how this rock not hewn by human hands would come into being, he had total confidence in God. Who in the world would stand calmly in a den full of hungry lions? Understand that this was not a nice zoo exhibit where the lions are mostly tame and well fed. The Babylonians loved creative execution so they captured wild lions and starved them. Then they threw living human beings into their midst and watched the hungry lions devour the victim. Daniel stood in the midst of lions completely confident in God's will. If he lived, it was by the grace of God. If he died, he was received into paradise – win-win for Daniel.

It is no easy thing to have confidence in God, especially when you think of him as a snowbird. You know what a snowbird is? Snowbirds are people who live in our little corner of paradise and fly off to the south when it gets a little uncomfortable around here. Ya big sissies! I lived in Arizona for a number of years. The church swelled to overflowing October through April when all the Lutherans from the Midwest ran from the winter and then languished from May through September. Pastor's have to learn new ways of doing ministry because the snowbirds are great while they are there but you can't count on them because most of them keep their real

allegiance to their home churches in Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota or wherever.

Many Christians think of religion the same way. Church is nice and all but your real allegiance is to people and places in the world. Daniel placed his full allegiance in God and God was always right there with him. It is so easy to forget that we are citizens of heaven not earth. We are aliens here so don't spend a great deal of time being concerned about this place. This is a desert we are crossing to get to paradise and God walks with us.

Daniel faced both curses and blessings during his exile to Babylon but he was always confident in His God and never treated him as though he were a visitor that popped in for a while. Likewise, we know that there will be curses and blessing in this life but we endure because we know where our home is and we know that we are on our way home.

When my kids turned 13, I took them on a trip with just me. Noah chose to go to New York City and one of our stops was Ellis Island. We were amazed at the tremendous hardship endured by immigrants both on the journey to the new world and even once they had arrived. Many of them left pretty stable lives in Europe. It might not have been perfect but it was better than what they faced here. Why did they do it?

First, they came here because they believed with all their hearts that the New World held something better for them. Second, they came here because they really had nothing to lose. Their lives in Europe were predictable and in some cases safe, but still, there was little hope or room for betterment. We Christians are pretty similar. First, we believe that a life with God holds something infinitely better for us. We even talk about streets paved with gold, no more tears, and holy perfection. Second, we really have nothing to lose. Like Daniel, even the happiest and most successful among us daily stands in a lion's den. We all know that everything is transitory and on a downward trajectory. The world can turn on us like starving lions at any moment. So either way is really okay with us. While God protects us from the lions, we are great with that and we know we must have more work to do here. When the lions devour us, that's okay too because then we get to be free of this world and have our lives with God. Like Daniel, it's a win-win for us too.