

Christ Community Covenant Church

**What do you love about Christmas? I love the look of anticipation in a child's eyes!
The Promise of Christmas - Pastor Dave Scherrer – December 2, 2012**

Discussion: What do you love about Christmas?

I love the look of anticipation in a child's eyes. A child understands that this event is special. Of course it is wrapped up in the gift giving so to speak. Children can't help it, they love to unwrap things and they love surprises and they love to get things – of course Christmas morning is magical.

[Package – an implied promise]

How many promises have you ever made in your life? Ever made a really big promise? For some, perhaps the greatest promise or covenant we can ever make is our marriage covenant with our spouse.

Illustration:

In an article in Time Magazine dated 24th December 1956, it reads:

"The old legend that there are 30,000 promises in the Bible is a bit off, according to schoolteacher Everek R. Storms of Kitchener, Ontario. A member of Canada's United Missionary Church, Storms slowed down enough on his 27th reading of the Bible to tally up the promises, which took him a year and a half. He came up with 7,487 promises by God to man, two by God the Father to God the Son, 991 by one man to another, 290 by man to God. Twenty-eight promises were made by angels, one by man to an angel, and two were made by an evil spirit to the Lord. Satan made nine. Grand total of promises: 8,810."

85% of promises in the Bible are by God to man. Here's a good one for the season:

Isaiah 7:14, 9:6 "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

There is another promise I want us to look at this morning as it will stir the look of anticipation in your eyes if you read it as a child. And it will remind you again what you really love about Christmas. Luke, being one of the 4 gospels, marks the beginning of a new phase in Jewish history, and a new phase in Human history for that matter. In Jewish history, it marks the breaking of a 400-year silence between God and man. Between the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi, and the accounts of Jesus' life on earth called the Gospels of the New Testament, there is what is known as the *inter-testamental period*, a time where God's voice is almost never heard, and there are no records of God revealing Himself to His people or prophets. But even more important, the Gospels, and this story in particular marks the beginning of the Kingdom of God breaking through into our lives. Everything changes with the telling of this story:

Luke 1:26-38 ²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."
³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"
³⁵ And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. ³⁶ And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸ And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

There are three promises in this text that should bring the twinkle of anticipation to your eyes this morning. The Christmas Twinkle! The first is the promise of God's abiding presence:

The Promise of God's Abiding Presence v26-28

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you."

The context of today's passage is set in the small Jewish town of Nazareth in the city of Galilee, a small insignificant community of a population of about 2,000. Mary is a young girl, probably 13 or 14, engaged to be married to Joseph, a carpenter. As both a woman and a young person not yet married, Mary had virtually no social status. But then look how the angel Gabriel speaks.

In verse 28 the title "You who are highly favored" and the promise "The Lord is with you" was not traditional in greeting and was normally reserved for royalty. Yet isn't it the same for us today, that God, in His great love and grace, chose to invite us into a loving relationship with Him. The promise of Christmas begins with God promising Himself, not what He can do, but a relationship that is personal and intimate. The incarnation is the promise made good of God's redemptive plan and is captured in the name Immanuel – "God with us."

Jesus said:

John 15:5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

Matthew 28:20 . . . teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

And before Jesus ascended he promised to make good on his commitment to never leave us by agreeing with the Father to send the Holy Spirit to live with and in us:

John 14:16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever.

There is a second promise we should see in this little story; God's promise of power.

The Promise of God's Eternal Power (v 29-33)

²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

Mary's reaction is that she is greatly troubled, full of wonder and afraid. The Angel reassures her, calls her by name and repeats the promise of the grace of God and repeats Isaiah's prophecy that we read a few moments ago:

The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

Gabriel affirmed both the deity and the humanity of Jesus. As Mary's son, He would be human and as Son of the Most High, He would be the Son of God. Who could have guessed? Mary is going to discover what Paul wants the entire world to never second guess:

Colossians 2:9 For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.

The gift we have before us, a gift that should make us dizzy with joy is HOPE: victory has been won! Jesus has overcome sin and death through obedience on the cross.

Colossians 2:15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Finally there is the promise of the sovereign purposes of God;

The Promise of God's Sovereign Purpose (v 34-38)

And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

³⁵ And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.

³⁶ And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸ And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

Mary's question in verse 34 is so packed with emotion. "How can this be?" This is a miracle of unheard of proportions. The Angel's response: The answer to Mary's question about "how can this happen?" is "God will do it!"

There are three statements about who God is in this Christmas narrative: God is good, God is in control and God will bring it to pass. God is, and because He is, and because He is good, that which is impossible to us, that which is beyond our control, beyond our abilities or beyond our imagination is God's pleasure to perform.

Jeremiah 29:10-14 "For thus says the LORD: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. ¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. ¹² Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. ¹³ You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. ¹⁴ I will be found by you, declares the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

Mary's response? "I am the Lord's servant, may it be to me as you have said." The New American makes an interesting clarification:

Behold, the bond slave of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word.

Mary experienced the *grace of God*, believed the *word of God*, and therefore could be used by the Spirit to accomplish the *will of God*.

Hear what the Angel said to the shepherds in the field and believe for yourself:

Luke 2:11 "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

This Christmas, God promises His peace through His abiding presence, God promises His hope through His eternal power, and God promises His love through His sovereign purpose.

Communion