

Scripture Reading: John 1:

“1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. 4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. 6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. 8 He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. 9 That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. 11 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: 13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. 14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

“The Promises of Christmas”

It is a blessing to be gathered here as the local church on this Christmas morning with the Christ Candle lit! I wanted to take the opportunity to remember on this special day how the Apostle John approaches the Advent of Jesus in his account of the Good News, the Gospel. In the opening paragraph of his Gospel account we read those glorious and very familiar words,

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

- **Jesus the Light of the World has come into the world and all of history will be changed!**

Pastor Randy Booth reflected on this on his blog post earlier this week:

“We must know where we have come from if we are to have any hope of knowing where we are going. This is why our doctrine of origins is so vitally important. I’m not simply speaking of the origins of the Advent and Christmas holiday season, but more importantly of what lies behind it. What is the origin of the advent of Jesus Christ? How important is the advent? It is not simply an isolated story alongside many other stories. In fact, it is the central story around which all else revolves. To miss it is to miss everything. ... It’s a story that embraces all of human history; for we were “chosen in Him before the foundation of the world.” Human history is the history (or the story) of redemption. Moreover, it’s a story that’s still being told. This is the good news—the Gospel—God delivering on His promise. To understand this story is to understand where we came from, where we have been, where we are, and where we are going.”

So this morning I want to review the various messages of hope brought to us in the Christmas accounts to understand how God has kept His promises!

- **The fall of man brought sin & enmity into God’s creation and the Gospel brings forgiveness & peace!**

That Gospel of peace is the fulfilment of all those promises that God made and we have that great peace we should have because Jesus has come...

- **A peace for us and for the world!**

Now in Genesis we started with creation where God creates for six days and rests on the seventh... Something confirmed in the 4th Commandment of the Law:

Something that establishes the seven-day week that all the world uses, despite it having no solar or lunar or other historical significance...

- **Something that should haunt the skeptics, just as hearing ‘the year of our Lord 2017 probably does!**

Seven is seen as significant in the Scriptures and we often find things in sevens: We have the seven branches on the Temple candle stick or the seven letters to seven churches in Revelation! So as we review the various messages about God’s promises that we find in the Christmas accounts and it should come as no surprise that we have seven of them! These passages and messages and truths are perhaps so familiar that sometimes we almost take them for granted or forget the importance of meditating on them during the Christmas season & beyond!

- **These important messages of hope reveal the events which give us, our families, our Church and the world true peace as God fulfills His promises!**

Our first Christmas message of hope comes from the Angel Gabriel as he appears to Zacharias in Luke chapter 1: “11 Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. 12 And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. 13 But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. *[mention the dual nature of this ‘answer’]* 14 And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. 15 For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. 16 And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. 17 He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

- **This reminds us of the great truth given by John in his first epistle...**
- **Truly we love God because He first loved us!**

Six months later we see the same Angel Gabriel appearing to Mary with our second message of hope:

Luke 1: “26 Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by 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. The virgin's name was Mary. 28 And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" 29 But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. 30 Then 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 bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. 32 He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give 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."

- **What a great message of hope!**
- **And sadly much of this great message of hope has been lost in many quarters of Christendom today!**

Please notice that there are no conditions on this proclamation, just as we saw with God’s covenant with Abraham...

Mary WILL conceive

She WILL name her son Jesus

He WILL be great!

He WILL be called Son of the Highest

He WILL be given the Throne of David

He WILL reign over the house of Jacob

His Kingdom WILL have no end. *[yes, another list of seven!]*

The simple reason that we have SO much pessimism in the Church today is that we accept that Mary did conceive and name the child Jesus who is certainly a great man and Son of the Highest.

- ALL orthodox Christian churches believe all of these truths.

But unfortunately many have now come to think that Jesus receiving the Throne of David and Jesus reigning over the house of Jacob and Jesus establishing an everlasting Kingdom have somehow been put off for a few thousand years. There was a good reason that the angel brought this message of hope to Mary and that the Holy Spirit preserved it for us in Luke's account...

- That is what happened when Jesus came to earth!
- And these truths brings great hope and even greater peace!

The angel Gabriel continues to explain what is going to happen to Mary and she responds in obedience: And so even with something as important as the coming of Jesus, God uses means... Like this humble & lowly couple!

Thus we have the next angel appearing to Mary's husband-to-be, Joseph:

Matthew 1: "18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. 19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. 20 But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. 21 And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." 22 So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: 23 "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us."

The angel gives Joseph great insight into what HAS happened to Mary and again tells us of things that WILL happen...

- She WILL have a son, something Joseph could not have known at the time!
- Joseph WILL name Him Jesus.
- Jesus WILL save His people from their sins!

This is the fulfilment of all the promises we have been studying in Genesis and the rest of the OT: It is what the Apostle John proclaimed in the opening of his Gospel Account which we read as our text.

- Jesus is THE Seed of the woman
- Jesus is THE Seed of Abraham...
- Jesus is the Lamb of God who will take away the sin of the world!

The next appearance from an angel is to the Shepherds on the very night that this child was born...

Luke 2: "8 Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. 10 Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. 11 For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."

- These shepherds are given present realities they can see and touch, like finding a babe in the manger, combined with realities that would be almost impossible to believe:

The Baby IS Christ the Lord and He will bring great joy to all people: This is why we sing Joy to the World...

- The coming of Jesus changes everything!

This is confirmed by our fifth message of hope brought by a heavenly host which then appears to the shepherds: Luke 2: "13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: 14 "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

The host are seeing God's grand plan of salvation being carried out and they know it brings God much glory...

- Glory to God in the highest!

But the impact is seen in the here & now: -- Peace on Earth, goodwill toward men!

Again this is difficult for many to believe today, even within the Church! We see prophesy conferences and Internet videos, to say nothing of the evening news, showing how awful things are today hoping & praying Jesus will come back soon to make things better...

- At bottom, those who think like this simply do not believe that the heavenly host were telling the truth!

The angels did NOT say there would be peace on earth or goodwill toward men after at least two thousand years of suffering when Jesus returned...

They saw and proclaimed the Incarnation for what it was:

- God Himself entering history as the baby Jesus: The Word made Flesh & that changed everything!

When you think about it, we have spent almost two thousand years growing in our understanding of all that this Incarnation meant and watching its impact on history... These angels had seen it from the heavenly perspective and yes they knew how great the impact would be in all of the creation & all of history! However, unlike my bad habits that I learned in the government schools, these angels did not want to skip to the end of the book to see what happens...

- They knew, and we should know as well, that God's grand plan would continue to be worked out in history! *[Remember, that is the story of the book of Acts that we spent years studying!]*
- And they understood that God's plan would still bring rough spots in this fallen world, both in the life of this child and the rest of history!

In fact, the next message coming from an angel lets us know about one of those rough parts of the story...

Shortly after the birth of Jesus an Angel speaks to Joseph in a dream:

Matthew 2: "13 Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him."

- Jesus has come to save His people from their sins & as the Apostle John proclaimed He came to His own and they received Him not!

The fall of Adam and all mankind was not a little 'oopsie' that could be made right with a simple apology! The sin of man had cast the entire creation into death and chaos as we have studied in the Book of Beginnings where we saw the sinfulness of sin before the flood in the days of Noah. Now right here in the Christmas story we are reminded of it again... Even with God's people whom He had chosen as His very own... King Herod in his pride and lust for power was willing to kill ALL the newborn infants in the region of Bethlehem just to get at Jesus.

- Of course, he fails, because this angel also brings a message of hope so Jesus can escape and be kept safe to complete His work!

But there are real results from Herod's sin and much weeping from those mothers...

- **This part of the story is not represented in most manger scenes that I have observed: But perhaps adding a few of Herod's soldiers would stimulate some great conversations!**

So we have six messages of hope from the Angels and the 7th is from God Himself, which is very appropriate! The Holy Spirit speaks to Simeon...

Luke 2: "25 And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26 And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ."

- **Notice that Simeon was waiting and praying for the same thing as Zacharias and the other priests!**

27 "So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, 28 he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said: 29 "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, According to Your word; 30 For my eyes have seen Your salvation 31 Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, 32 A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel."

- **I will expand on the faith of Simeon and this incredible scene in a couple of weeks...**

But for this morning let's just focus on the fact that he is saying the same thing that the Angels proclaimed to the Shepherds, there will be peace on earth and good will toward men, both Jew and Gentile! *[which was an incredible thing for him to declare at the Temple]*

So with all those messages of hope ringing in our ears, let me return to our text quickly.

- **Jesus, the Word, has come as the light of the world!**
- **The light that Simeon said would bring revelation [hope] to the Gentiles!**

Faith is what we see in response to the seven messages of hope in the Christmas story because each of these characters believed that God was a faithful God who fulfils His promises and thus they were willing to obey!

- **Zacharias, despite his doubts names his son John and praises God!**
- **Mary becomes the mother of God.**
- **Joseph takes her as his wife and calls his name Jesus.**
- **The shepherds come to see the baby in the manger.**
- **The shepherds tell all who will hear about the coming of peace & goodwill!**
- **Joseph flees the wickedness of King Herod & goes to Egypt to keep Jesus safe.**

Finally, Simeon takes the baby Jesus in his arms and proclaims to Mary... "Behold , this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against 35 (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

- **Simeon understood the work that Jesus had come to do and knew it would come at a great cost!**

I began with a Christmas meditation by Pastor Booth and will end with some thoughts that Adam McIntosh shared in a Kuparian Commentary this week which reminds us about the wholeness of God's promises:

“One night in Nazareth, God became man in the virgin womb of Mary, a young lady betrothed to Joseph. Three trimesters later, Jesus was born on Christmas day. He was wrapped in swaddling clothes. Gentile worshipers brought him gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The infant’s life was threatened by an evil king, but he escaped death. Thirty-three years later, Jesus had his life threatened again by evil rulers. Instead of escaping, he volunteered to die. At his death in Jerusalem, Israelite worshipers prepared spices and oils for him. He was wrapped in fine linens and buried in a virgin tomb, a tomb owned by Joseph of Arimathea . Three days later, he was reborn on Easter Sunday.

As we celebrate the nativity of our Lord, let us recall the glorious providence of God. Let us remember that not only does Christ’s first coming look forward to his second coming, but that his birth out of the womb foreshadows his birth out of the tomb. King Jesus conquered death and now sits on heaven’s throne.”

- **Yes, Jesus is the Word Who come to establish His Kingdom just as those angels and the Apostle John proclaimed.**
- **AND Jesus is the one that we worship now as King of Kings and Lord of Lords!**

Singing with that heavenly host,

“Glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace goodwill toward men!

Communion Meditation: Jeremiah 31

“31 “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah— 32 not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them,[a] says the Lord. 33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 34 No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.””