

Text: Luke 1:26-38

Exegetical Big Idea: God demonstrated his faithfulness to his people and his covenants by revealing to Mary his plan for the salvation of the world.

Homiletical Big Idea: **Christmas reminds us that our God is a promise keeping God.**

Fallen Condition Focus: The question of “after 400 years of silence, did God forget or abandon his promises?” had to be on the minds of the Israelites in the days of the first Christmas. It has now been 2000 years since Christ ascended into heaven leaving with his people the promise to return. It is easy to wonder ourselves if God has forgotten his promises to us.

Background:

It had been four hundred years since God had last spoken through one of his prophets. Malachi may only be a page away from Mathew, but the span between those two books is huge. Of the four gospels, Mathew and Luke are the two that give us a detailed account of the event surrounding the birth of Jesus. Today we’re going to look at a portion in Luke’s Gospel. Luke actually backs up a bit and first tells of the events surrounding the birth of John the Baptist. God sent an angel named Gabriel to a priest named Zechariah who was serving in the temple. The angel told him that he was going to have a son. Now Zechariah doubted this because both he and his wife were very old. As a result Zechariah became mute for the duration of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, and sure enough the baby was born and named John.

We pick up the story six months later.

Intro:

What are some of your favorite Christmas songs? One of my favorites is “O Come all ye Faithful”. I like it because it’s a great song to sing to and with other Christians at Christmastime. As we sing it we are calling each other to come and worship and adore the newborn King. Alana’s favorite is “Hark the Herald Angels Sing”. Written by Charles Wesley, and I have to admit it is probably one of the most theologically deepest Christmas songs I know.

One of the songs that I have grown in appreciation for over the years is a song I hadn’t heard until coming here. It’s the song “Come thou Long Expected Jesus”. It’s only two verses, and again written by Charles Wesley, but it has some great lyrics.

1. Come, Thou long-expected Jesus,
Born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us,
Let us find our rest in Thee.
Israel’s Strength and Consolation,
Hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear Desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart.
2. Born Thy people to deliver,
Born a child and yet a King,
Born to reign in us forever,
Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.

By Thine own eternal Spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone;
By Thine all-sufficient merit,
Raise us to Thy glorious throne.

It's a song that begins with a longing for Jesus to come. There's an expecting of Jesus, and this expecting of him has been a reality for a long time. I love how this song reminds us that the coming of Christ at Christmas was not an afterthought! God didn't just decide one day that people would enjoy the story of a baby born in a manger with sheep and kings and something called frankincense. God wasn't scrambling to figure out a way to save us and this was all he could come up with.

Songs like this remind us that Christ's coming at Christmastime was always the plan. God promised in Genesis 3 that he would send an offspring of Eve to fix the sin problem. Jesus was indeed long expected.

And this is the Christian life now isn't it? The manger started the journey to the cross, where Jesus once and for all paid the price to save his people, and now we too sing "come thou long expected Jesus", not for his first coming anymore, but his second.

It's songs like this, and passages like this one today, that remind us that our God is a promise keeping God. And if he has kept his promises in the past, we can have assurance that he will keep doing it.

We can understand from the passage today that

Christmas reminds us that our God is a promise keeping God

Vv. 26-30 – God does not forget his people or his promises.

In the previous chapter God sent his angel Gabriel to Zechariah, a priest. He had received the honorable duty, by lot, to enter into the holy portion of the temple and offer incense. This was a huge privilege! And Jewish tradition, as one scholar points out, was that you could only be chosen to do this once in your lifetime.

So as we start this chapter we are again introduced to this same angel named Gabriel. He is sent from God. Now we would expect Gabriel to be sent to another person equally prominent and as important as Zechariah. But that's not what we read next.

Gabriel is instead sent to a young virgin woman who is legally committed in marriage to a young man named Joseph. That's pretty obscure isn't it?

Now we would also expect that the angel would be sent to a prominent and important city like Jerusalem where the temple stood and where he had appeared to Zechariah. But again, that's not what we read. Gabriel is sent to a small town in Galilee called Nazareth.

Now unlike Jerusalem, Nazareth was not an important city. In fact, do you know in which Old Testament book we hear about the town of Nazareth? Trick question. It's not there! In all the events of the Old Testament, Nazareth is not important enough to be mentioned. You might remember reading in John's gospel when Philip first starts following Jesus and runs to tell Nathaniel that the Messiah has come and that he has come out of Nazareth, do you remember Nathaniel's response? "Nazareth? Can anything

good come out of Nazareth?” So clearly it was not an important town as we would consider something important.

And of course Mary and Joseph were not of importance either. They were not a well off couple, because we are told in the next chapter in Luke that instead of the normal sacrifice of a lamb after the birth of a child they bring the sacrifice that Levitical law allows for those who cannot afford a lamb, that is, two doves.

So why this obscurity? Why to a young couple who aren't important, to a town that doesn't seem to have any importance? I think it's to remind us that God does not forget his promises, or his people.

First of all, who are God's people? Well look at the greeting of the angel in verse 28. Mary is favored, and the Lord is with her. Why is she favored? Because she's an important priest like Zechariah? Nope, because God is with her. God's people are all who have been shown the gracious favor of God and who belong to him. God's people are those who humble themselves before God and worship him.

Mary's writes a song in this same chapter and she writes in verses 48 and 50 "...He (that's is God) has looked on the humble estate of his servant." And "...His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation."

God has not forgotten his people. But he has also not forgotten his promises!

Look back at verse 27. Why are we given the information that Joseph is from the line of David? Because it reminds us of God's promise made to David back in 2 Samuel 7. That promise was one day, from David's line, would come a King who would reign over God's people. And this King's reign would be an eternal reign.

Yes, Rome was in charge and Israel was not a nation. Yes, 400 years had passes since Israel last heard the Word of the Lord. But God had not forgotten his promises.

[My wife and I have a Christmas tradition where one night before Christmas we will get the gifts out that we have for the kids and all the wrapping stuff. We'll put on the Christmas episodes of Little House on the Prairie and together we'll wrap the kids presents. In fact we just did that last week. Well I can't tell you how many times on Christmas morning one of the kids will pick up a present that I had just wrapped a few days before and I'll think to myself "I have no idea what's inside".]

We are forgetful people! We forget all the time! God is not like that. God wrapped up the promise of the first Christmas way back in Genesis 3 right after Adam and Eve sinned, and he never once forgot about it.

For many people, Christmas is a time of joy to get together with friends and family with food and presents. But for many Christians even it's a hard time. It's often a reminder of loved ones lost or people that you can't visit, or a great many other reasons.

When I read these verses, it's such a powerful reminder that God has not forgotten you. Look at Mary's response to the greeting of the angel in verse 29. She was troubled and tried to discern what kind of greeting this might be. I think she's bewildered at why God would chose to send an angel to her. "Why me?" What's so special about Mary? The answer is in what the angel says next. He tells her not to be afraid, and then "you have found favor with God".

She's been given grace! She didn't earn this favor from God, it was given to her as she trusted in her God.

I don't know what Christmas time is like for you, but if you trust in your God, you have favor with God and he has not forgotten you. If you have placed your hope in Jesus for the forgiveness for your sins, then you have the promise from God of everlasting life with him. Christmas may be difficult, but may you be reminded today that God has not forgotten his people or his promises, and he has given is all things in Christ Jesus.

Christmas reminds us that our God is a promise keeping God

Vv. 31-33 –Christ is the answer to all God's promises.

Yes, God is a promise keeping God. But what exactly *are* the promises of God. These verses clearly show us that Jesus is the answer all the promises of God. He's promised a lot of things in the Scriptures, and all of those promises come to fruition in the person of Jesus.

Take a look at verse 31. Gabriel tells Mary that she will conceive and give birth to a Son. But then he tells Mary the name that is to be given to the boy. That's not an accident. We tend to pick name more or less in our culture based on what sounds nice, or maybe it's after a family member or something like that. But the name given to the baby boy is truly significant. The name Jesus is the Greek version of the Hebrew name "Joshua". The name Joshua has a meaning. Joshua in Hebrew means "YHWH saves"

In Mathew's gospel when Gabriel visits Joseph, he is told to name the baby Jesus because "he will save his people from their sins".

This is the One! This is the present that was wrapped back in Genesis 3 and is not being opened by the world. This is the offspring of Eve who will crush the head of the serpent Satan who deceived Adam and Eve into rebelling against God and casting us out of the presence of God because of our sin.

Christ is the answer to God's first promise to humanity! Every promise since then finds its fulfilment in Jesus. But the angel continues. In verse 32 we read that Jesus will be great and called the Son of the Most High.

Well that statement that Jesus will be great really starts to become amazing when we hear that his title will be "Son of the Most High". Now that does *not* mean that God had an offspring. It's a divine title. It's pointing to the fact that Jesus not like any other human being. He *is* human to be sure, but he's not only human. He's God himself. Jesus will be great, because never before and never again will there be anyone like Jesus who is both truly and fully human and truly and fully God.

If you think about it, in this one statement is the fact that God himself took on humanity to become a sacrifice for the sins of the world. The eternal immortal God of the universe humbled himself to death on a cross to save us from our sins.

Yeah, I'd say he's great!

But it gets better, verse 32 continues that God the Father will give him the throne of his father David, and that he will reign over God's people forever and ever. Jesus is the one who is the fulfilment of the promise to David back in 2 Samuel 7. And how is it that Jesus is able to reign forever? Every other king of

Judah died and was replaced. But King Jesus after his death on the cross to pay for our sins was resurrected to life! His victory over sin and death means that he reigns now and will reign forevermore. And who will he reign over? The house of Jacob, which is a way of saying "God's people". And think of this: How can an eternal king reign over his people for all of eternity? It must mean that his people will also have eternal life.

So yeah, I'd say Jesus will be great! He's the fulfilment of all God's promises.

[Who here likes Christmas cookies? I love Christmas baking. At our house we make all kinds of cookies and desserts. How many kids here like Christmas cookies? Think about this for a minute. Let's say that your parents bake all kinds of awesome Christmas treats. Let's say they make all your favorites, and all the baking is laid out on plates and platters and displayed for everyone to see. So far that's seems amazing right? Now let's say after everything is baked and decorated and laid out, your parents walk in with a big garbage bag and toss all those treats into the garbage bag, how would you feel? That would be horrible! Why? Because the point of Christmas baking is not just to bake the cookies. It's not just to decorate the cookies. It's not just to display the cookies. It's to eat the cookies!]

The point of Christmas cookies is to eat them. Just like the point of all God's promises is Jesus!

That's why at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord.

And just in case there was any doubt in this, six times in these verses we read "will". Not maybe, not probably, but "will". God is a promise making God, and a promise keeping God.

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Vv. 34-37- God himself accomplishes his promises.

Those are some great promises that God makes to Mary! There's just one small problem, and Mary points it out in verse 34. She asks the angel "how will this be, since I am a virgin?" Fair question!

Let's look at that question for a minute. Mary is not doubting what the angel is saying. Let's compare it to Zechariah's response when Gabriel told him that his wife was going to have a baby. His response was "how can I know this?" His is a response of doubt. He's doubting *if* God is going to do this.

But that's not Mary's response. If Zechariah's response was "I don't believe it", Mary's response is "I believe it, but I don't know *how* God is going to do it".

The angel's answer? You don't need to understand how God will do it, what you do need to know however is that God himself will do it.

Look at verse 35. It's the Holy Spirit who will accomplish this. It's the power of the Most High will overshadow her. Therefore, the baby will be called holy, the Son of God.

Does God explain the mystery of the incarnation to Mary? Nope. Does he give Mary insight as to how the baby born is both God and Man? Nope.

Isn't that how God often works with us? Afterall, his ways are not our ways and his thoughts far beyond and above our thoughts and comprehensions. We're not often called to understand why God works in

the ways he does or how God goes about doing the things that he does. But one thing is clear, God will accomplish all that he sets out to do. He does not need our help, nor could we give it if he wanted it.

[For a few years now it's been a tradition for our kids to spend some time with their nana and papa while Alana and I have some days at home to rest and get some stuff done. This usually happens in November. While the kids are there, nana and papa take them to the store to buy presents for mom and dad. Then they'll wrap them and send them home with the kids and they are under our tree until Christmas morning. Now, how do you think the kids get to the store? Nana and papa. How do you think the kids get the money to buy the presents? Nana and Papa. How do you think the kids take the items to the cash and count out the amount of money to give to the clerk? Nana and Papa. How do the kids get back home from the store afterwards? You guessed it, Nana and papa. Now do the kids need to understand how a vehicle works and the traffic laws obeyed in order to get to the store? Do they need to understand how employment and taxes work to receive money from nana and papa to buy the items? We could go on and on but I think you understand. They don't need to understand any of that. All they need to know is that nana and papa are going to make it happen.]

Is Mary going to carry this child? Yes. Will he be called holy and the Son of God? Yes. Does Mary need to understand exactly how that will all work? Nope. The only thing she needs to know is that God is going to make it happen.

But oh how God is gentle and gracious to us in our finiteness and weakness. Look at verse 36. Why does God share this information with Mary? He doesn't have to. I'm sure Mary would have found out in time.

God often allows us to see his handiwork doesn't he? It's our reminder that God himself is accomplishing all his promises, and that it's not difficult for him.

Verse 37 says "for nothing will be impossible with God".

What a glorious reminder that the same things is true when it comes to our salvation. We contribute nothing to our salvation! We don't earn it, buy it, or anything else to accomplish it. Our salvation is accomplished by God alone. And this is good news, because if I didn't earn it, I can't take it away.

God has promised his people eternal life with him, and...

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V 38 – The right response to God's promises is faith and surrender.

We come to the end of this passage. Mary, a young virgin from the unimportant town of Nazareth has been given amazing promises from God that she will miraculously bear a Son who is God himself and that this divine child will save his people from their sins.

Mary does not understand how this will all take place. How could she? And yet look at her response!

"Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" in verse 38.

She is going to have to face Joseph with this news. For all she knows she might lose her marriage to Joseph. And she almost did! God waited until after Mary told Joseph to send Gabriel to him to say don't be afraid to take her as your wife, the baby is from the Holy Spirit.

She is going to have to face her family and friends. What kind of shame a ridicule will she receive from them? She's going to have to face her society. To her people it would look like she was unfaithful. According to Levitical law she could face stoning.

And yet, though she has to face all of that, Mary response with faith and surrender.

"I am the servant of the Lord". What a statement of humble surrender to the will of God. She is not the master, she is the servant. God made the promises. God has the plan. Her job is to surrender her will to the Lord's.

And in order to be able to surrender her will to the Lord's she has to have faith that her master is a good Master! And responding in faith is exactly what she does. She says "let it be to me according to your word". The angel here is of course speaking on behalf of the Lord. So when Mary trusts in the word of the angel she is really trusting in the Word of the Lord.

Now I admire her faith and surrender here, but the real question is, *why* does she respond to God in the way she does?

The answer is, because God has a pretty good track record.

Yes, it's been four hundred years since God has spoken to his people, but never had God let a single promise of his fall to the ground. Even when the people of Israel were rebellious and sinful God still remained faithful to them. They deserved to have God revoke his covenantal promises to them, but he never did.

Mary has every reason to believe that God will do as he said he will do. That's why she puts her faith into action in the very next verse. Look what she does in verses 39 and 40. She gets up, and goes with haste to visit Elizabeth her relative. Not to see if it's true that she's going to have a baby, but because Mar *knows* it's true.

[Is there a present that you get every year at Christmas? Since Alana and I have been married, my mother-in-law has given me a box filled with a bunch of her canning of salsas and jams and pickles and that kind of thing. She's already hinted that I'll be receiving more canning again this year. Just to be clear, I love it. I have a strong suspicion that tomorrow morning one of the presents that I'll be opening is a jar of her zucchini salsa. Why do I think that? Because she's got a pretty good track record!]

How much more so is God's track record to humanity? He has made his handiwork plain for all to see. Especially at Christmas. How will you respond? Will you let the manger point you to the cross this Christmas? Will you believe God's promises and turn to him in faith and surrender? If you have not done that, let this Christmas be the Christmas you turn to God in trust and faith.

For those of us that have, may we be reminded this Christmas that,

Our God is a promise keeping God.