

The Promise Is Given

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Advent

INI - SDG

Luke 1:26-30 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.

Mary was blessed and full of grace because God chose to bless her and fill her with his grace. She was chosen because God had a promise to fulfill and chose her by his grace. God's promise is fulfilled through people whom God has chosen by his grace.

Throughout history God has chosen unworthy and "fragile vessels" to fulfill his plans to accomplish his promise. Noah found favor with God. Abraham was chosen when he was still worshiping false gods on the other side of the river. God appeared to Moses not when he was a prince in the house of Pharaoh but when he was an old shepherd in the land of Midian. Matthew was called when he was sitting in a tax booth. A blind man spent his life in darkness so that through him the glory of God could be revealed. Saul the murderer of the church, was chosen as God's vessel to preach the gospel to Europe.

All these people including Mary were chosen by God for his purpose. They were favored by God.

Abraham's whole life is an essay from God to prove that God's promise is given by him and not of our doing. When Abraham tried to help God, he made such a mess of things that the descendants of Ishmael and Isaac are still fighting to this day.

Mary herself cannot understand this greeting. What possible reason can the angel have to call her "highly favored" and "blessed among women."

The promise comes out of nowhere. It is not a thing that Mary sought or worked for. It is simply given by grace, that is it is freely given to those who have not earned it. Mary was given favor and grace from God, to receive the promise and so are we.

Luke 1:31-33 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 did you get your loved ones for Christmas this year? Did you tell them ahead of time what you got them? God announced to us long ago his Christmas gift to us.

His gift is Jesus. That is Jehovah saves, for he shall save his people from their sins.

This gift is announced to Mary, but he is given to all. As the prophet Isaiah foretold:
"To **us** a son is given, to **us** a child is born."

We do our best to make Christmas special but sometimes all the wrappings only distract from the one thing that really makes Christmas great.

I have a friend who planned out a special place and time to propose to his girlfriend, but he was too excited and nervous to wait. He ended up proposing in the parking lot next to the car.

The wrapping isn't what matters but the gift.

This is God's gift: A savior who will die to save his people from their sins. A king who will be a shepherd to his people forever. As David foretold:

"The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want."

Luke 1:34-37 34 Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" 35 And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. 36 "Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. 37 "For with God nothing will be impossible."

No matter how impossible God will fulfill his promises. However, God understands our weakness and gives strength to those who doubt. In his mercy he gives signs to strengthen our faith in his promises.

The angel sends Mary to Elizabeth. If God can cause one as old as Elizabeth to be with child, he can also cause the virgin Mary to conceive. He sends the angel to Joseph, to reassure him that Mary was not lying about how she became pregnant. The shepherds are given the sign of a baby lying in a manger wrapped in swaddling cloths. Zachariah was made dumb, so that he could not speak, this was partially a punishment but it was also a sign that God would fulfill his promises.

God opened the red sea. He sent manna from heaven. He killed Goliath with a stone. He preserved the three men in the fiery furnace. All these things are evidence for us that "with God nothing will be impossible," so that we might have confidence and faith in His promises.

Romans 15:4 4 For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

John 20:31 these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

Remember what Jesus did when the pharisees doubted his power to forgive sins? He healed the lame man and caused him to rise and walk. He did that not for the lame man's sake, but for the sake of the

Pharisees and for us, in order that we might know that what he says has come to pass, that our sins are forgiven.

The promise is fulfilled, and the evidence is given.

Luke 1:38 38 Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

Having received the promise Mary responds with obedience to the promise.

Earlier we talked about Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Paul. Men who were chosen by God to fulfill his promise. Men who received the promise. All of these received the promise and became obedient to the promise. Noah built the ark. Abraham left his home and all that he knew to journey to a far distant land. Moses for forty years dealt patiently with the complaining and whining of the people of Israel. The blind man was cast out of from his people. Paul spent the remainder of his life traveling from village to village to preach Christ to the gentiles.

None of these men ever regretted the cost of the promise they had received, but by faith were obedient to the promise.

Philippians 3:12-14 I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. 13 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, 14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

The promise is given without price, yet that grace fills the life till there is no room left for anything else.

Once I told the kids they could take a handful of candy from the bag. One kid reached in with both hands and filled not only his hands but even partly his arms with the candy till it was spilling over. God's grace pours upon us like the spring rain. We ought to reach in with both hands. If we do there is no room for anything else.

Mary also is obedient to the promise she has received.

"Let it be to me according to your word."

What danger, what trouble, what cost would come to Mary on account of this promise? Joseph was going to "put her away quietly." How many of her relatives whispered about her behind her back? Simeon prophesied that a sword would pierce Mary's own heart, and indeed years later we see Mary weeping at the foot of the cross.

Was Mary already thinking about the possible costs? It seems likely that she may have already been concerned about what others would think and say. Regardless she certainly doesn't know the full price the promise will demand of her. Yet by faith she confesses herself ready and willing to accept whatever may come for the sake of the promise that she has received.

In the same way our hearts respond to the gift of God, letting go of all else, and plunging our hands and arms deep into God's grace that we too like Mary might be "blessed and full of grace." Such is the promise of God. In such a way it is given and received. Amen