**The Promise**

Luke 2:6-14

Our whole message is summarized in these familiar verses in Luke 2:

“And the angel said to them, ‘Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.’” Luke 2:10-11

**The long-awaited Messiah of Israel** was born in Bethlehem, the city of David. The arrival of the Christ was the good news of great joy for all the people of God. In the person of baby Jesus ***God Himself was visiting the world*** He had made to fulfill His promises to Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah and all the other prophets. We will see three specific and wonderful promises fulfilled in Christ:

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| **God Promised His People:** |
| Redemption | “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” Luke 2:11 |
| Relationship | “Glory to God in the highest…” Luke 2:14a |
| Righteousness | “And on earth peace among those…” Luke 2:14b |

God promised to bless Abraham and through his offspring to bless the whole world. God promised ***to save and redeem His people*** as He delivered the Israelites from their bondage in Egypt. From the very beginning God’s desire was ***relationship with His children***. His central command through Moses was that His people would love Him with all their heart, soul, mind and strength. It was to be a holy relationship or awe, worship and devotion. And the life God expected of His people was one of righteousness, justice and peace - both within their nation and as an example to all nations.

Let’s turn back to **Luke chapter 1 for Zechariah’s prophecy** where we will see these promises in more detail than we get in Luke 2. First, God promised Redemption.

**God Promised His People:**

1. **Redemption**

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people.” Luke 1:68

***Zechariah was a priest***, serving in the temple area, and one day he was chosen by lot to go into the holy place to burn incense. While there, an angel appeared to him and told him that his wife would give birth to a son even though they were both old and had never been able to have children. Zechariah expressed doubt about this promised miracle, and was struck mute for the entire pregnancy as a consequence. Being unable to speak would be a hardship for anyone, but for a priest especially I’m sure it was a humbling and difficult nine months. Maybe his wife felt very blessed by the quiet…

Anyway, God was faithful and **Elizabeth did give birth to a son** and they obeyed the angel’s direction and named him John. As an added bonus, Elizabeth was able to encourage young Mary who was pregnant at the same time and came to stay with them for several months.

This prophecy was the first Zechariah had spoken in nine months. It confirmed the words the angel had spoken to him in the temple. And it connects with promises from throughout Israel’s history. Notice this is stated in the **past tense as a completed prophecy** - God HAS visited and HAS redeemed His people. It goes on in v. 69.

**God Promised His People:**

1. **Redemption**

“And has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David.” Luke 1:69

God HAS raised up a horn of salvation for us through David’s offspring. **A ram’s horn** was a common Old Testament symbol of power and military victory. Almost always in the Bible when a horn is referenced it is a ram’s horn, not a silver trumpet. You’ll remember Daniel’s prophecies of the rise and fall of kingdoms in the form of various huge, scary beasts. And the individual rulers were symbolized in those prophecies as HORNS.

Here we see one horn of salvation from David’s line.

**God Promised His People:**

1. **Redemption**

“As he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we should be saved from our enemies.” Luke 1:70-71

The ancient prophets of Israel foretold judgment and a time of punishment for Israel because of their sin and rebellion against God. But ***they also promised restoration***, redemption, ingathering and healing, as in Isaiah 40 when God speaks words of comfort to His struggling, fearful people. ***God had accomplished this restoration already*** through Cyrus the Persian, who allowed the Jews to come back to their land and rebuild their temple. That’s why there was a temple for Zechariah to serve in.

But if you asked the everyday Jew, like Zechariah, if that redemption was complete, they would certainly have said “No,” because **Rome was still in charge**. There was not a Jewish King reigning on David’s throne in Jerusalem.

**God Promised His People:**

1. **Redemption**

“To show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant… he swore to our father Abraham.” Luke 1:72-73

Yes, there were promises to David of a king from his line who would reign on his throne FOREVER. But there were older promises to Abraham about ***BLESSING in the covenant***. And they knew it was a covenant of MERCY. The only hope of God’s people was in the ***unconditional promises to Abraham***, not the conditional promises of blessing to Moses that depended on the people’s obedience to the law of God. Based on that covenant, the people deserved only death and curses, not life and blessing.

But in the promises to Abraham we see the central, foundational **covenant God made** 4,000 years ago and still offers today in Christ: the promise of forgiveness and freedom from SIN.

**God Promised His People:**

1. **Redemption** - forgiveness and freedom from sin

“To give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins.” Luke 1:77

This was the specific assignment of Zechariah and Elizabeth’s son, **John the Baptist** - to go before the Lord and prepare the way for Him. To give knowledge of salvation in the central covenant promise - forgiveness of SIN. All the enemies of Israel - Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Rome - were symbolic of our greatest enemies: ***sin and death***.

Just as God delivered His people from the most powerful empires on earth, so He had ***promised to deliver them from their most dangerous enemy*** - the one INSIDE of them called sin. This is the good news of great joy the angel announced. This is the true and lasting peace Jesus brought to earth. In the person of Jesus God not only visited us, but also redeemed us - setting us free from the penalty and power of sin.

This promise remains true today for all who will put their faith in Jesus. He is the long awaited offspring of Abraham through whom God offers all of His blessings. **Jesus is our great Savior and Redeemer**, our Hero and Conquering King. He faced our greatest enemies - sin and death - and defeated them through his own death and resurrection. He laid down his life in order to take it up again, victorious.

***Have you experienced the mercy of God in Christ?*** Have you found in the Lord Jesus the fulfillment not only of every promise of God but of every desire of your heart?

May this be your experience this Christmas: that you know the mercy of God and feel His love and power ***to forgive ALL your sins*** and break their power over you forever. You were a slave to your sin - in bondage you could not escape. But Jesus paid the price to set you free. That’s what he came to do, in fulfillment of so many prophecies. First, God promised Redemption. Second:

**God Promised His People:**

1. **Relationship** - security in service to the Lord

“That we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear.” Luke 1:74

Over and over in the Bible you hear the heart of God, ***inviting people into relationship with Him*** - “You will be my people, and I will be your God.” At the heart of the law of Moses was the great command to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.” That’s what Jesus pointed to as the first and greatest commandment in the Law.

Here in Zechariah’s song, we hear **echoes of this invitation into relationship and of the Exodus**. God delivered His people from slavery in Egypt so they could WORSHIP and SERVE Him. That’s what Moses told Pharaoh as he told the Egyptian ruler to let God’s people go - let us go so we can worship the Lord our God. If you don’t there will be consequences, so just let us go!

Moses knew **the only place of security for God’s people was in SERVICE to the Lord**. They needed to be free from Egypt in order to worship the Lord fully and freely. The same thing was true for EGYPT! They were not living in freedom by worshiping their pantheon of gods, they were slaves to those idols, like anyone who serves anyone or anything but God.

Do you remember what happened when the Israelites reached Mount Sinai and God appeared to His people? ***They were utterly TERRIFIED!*** The presence of God in a storm cloud, thunder and lightning; the voice of God Himself speaking from the clouds - it was all too much for the Israelites and they begged Moses to speak to God on their behalf and then come and pass along the messages.

They wanted **a MEDIATOR** - a go between. That’s what Moses became. But the world didn’t have a true and permanent mediator until JESUS. Even with Moses speaking for God the Jews could not escape their fears. Only in Jesus does the perfect love of God drive out fear. Only in Jesus do we feel the reality of verse 78.

**God Promised His People:**

1. **Relationship** - security in service to the Lord

“Because of the tender mercy of our God whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high.” Luke 1:78

***The light of the world broke through that first Christmas night.*** With the angelic announcement the silence of the prophets was broken after 400 years, and the Word of God was once again coming to the people of God. Zechariah was silent for Elizabeth’s entire pregnancy - another sign of that time when God’s Word was not coming to Israel. But when John was born, Zechariah’s mouth was opened, and God gave him these words that we are studying today.

This visitation, this arrival of the Son of God was **BECAUSE of the tender mercy of our God**. It was because God loved the world so much that He sent His only Son. This is why God promised redemption and followed through in Christ - to reconcile sinners like you and me into relationship with Him so that our sin was no longer an obstacle between us.

Because **sin always separates**. It always creates a blockage to relationships.

***If you lie or cheat or steal*** - whoever you harmed with that sin will not be able to trust you - there will be an obstacle in your relationship until you do something about it. If it’s your boss or a co-worker, they might ignore it for a while and just keep you at arm’s length. But eventually you will trip over that blockage, eventually it will become a problem for you.

And if the person you harm is your husband or wife or child or grandchild - you will run into that obstacle much quicker. Trust is the foundation of relationship. Sin demolishes trust.

Apply that to **your relationship with God**. He has the immense challenge of knowing everything including the thoughts and intentions of our hearts. So, God can’t help but know when we lie, cheat, or steal or covet (which is when we WANT to lie, cheat or steal). This means that every single sin is another obstacle to our relationship. Before long, the rocks are piled up high between us and God.

***This is why Jesus had to come in the flesh.*** He couldn’t deal with the problem of sin from a distance. He had to come as a fully human man so He could offer Himself as the price of our redemption. And through that single offering Jesus demolished the dividing wall of hostility that kept us out of the holy presence of God. All the rocks of your sin and mine piled up on Jesus there on the cross. He suffocated under the weight of our sin.

But on the third day when Jesus rose from the dead, ***that sin was gone*** - it was paid for, dealt with, resolved. So now nothing stands between you and God. There is nothing in the way. The REDEMPTION of Jesus opened the way into RELATIONSHIP. This is the tender mercy of our God who promised a Savior and sent Him. One more promise we see in Luke 1.

**God Promised His People:**

1. **Righteousness**

“Whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.” Luke 1:78-79

The shadow of death… a reminder there of **Psalm 23** and the fact that we all walk through the valley of the shadow of death. But those who know God - who are secure in their relationship with Him - need not fear any evil because God is with us. We know Him as our Good Shepherd. He brings light into the darkness of our fear, the darkness of our brokenness. Even death itself is illumined by King Jesus!

The darkest moment in the Lord of the Rings story is ***the battle of Helms Deep*** as the heroes battle with the Riders of Rohan, fighting against the disgusting orcs of Saruman who pound away at their mountain fortress. It looks like they won’t make it through the night but as Aragorn goes to King Theoden, he summons the King’s courage for one last calvary charge, together. They arrange their few remaining mounted soldiers and throw open the gates, charging down right into the massive and unbeatable armies of Saruman. It’s a noble charge but they all know it won’t be nearly enough.

Except. It turns out to be exactly **at the moment of SUNRISE**. And Gandalf the Wizard had told them to look for his arrival at dawn on the fifth day. He was out rounding up stragglers and gathering together more soldiers from the region. And right at dawn Aragorn and the group around Theoden King look up and see Gandalf, conveniently silhouetted in the light of the rising sun, rearing back on his white horse, Shadowfax (who I’m sure was black in the books).

Tolkien insisted his books were not allegories, so that moment was not the “return of Christ,” but it was a hugely significant turning point in the battle for Middle Earth. And it turned at SUNRISE.

***Sunrise for the nation of Israel was the arrival of John the Baptist.*** Luke brings us behind the curtain to see how the birth of John the Baptist came about. It was a preview of that sunrise. A new day was dawning in the unfolding story of God. The people were coming out of a time of great darkness and fear. But now light was breaking in!

And look what the light will do!

**God Promised His People:**

1. **Righteousness** - purity and purpose in Christ

“To give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” Luke 1:78-79

What is the way of PEACE? Jesus led his followers into the old ways of Moses made new in Him. In Acts the Christians were called followers of “the way.” That’s another reference to Isaiah, btw. ***God promised a HIGHWAY in the wilderness*** - a massive road that would connect Egypt in the south with Assyria in the North - the connecting highway being ISRAEL.

Of course we know from John 14 that **JESUS Himself was that way** - which is no surprise because He was the true Israel, the faithful Son. And He leads all of His followers in His way, which is THE WAY.

The best single word to describe the way of Jesus is ***the way of PEACE - of shalom***. It conveys love, wholeness, health, unity, redemption and restoration. It is the way of purity and purpose.

Light conveys holiness and purity. Light exposes darkness, impurity and evil. The light of God’s glorious presence always symbolized holiness. Listen to Isaiah 35:

**God Promised His People:**

1. **Righteousness** - purity and purpose in Christ

“And a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it…” Isaiah 35:8

***In the WILDERNESS*** - in the desert - the place of Israel’s failure and judgment, springs of water would gush forth and create a HIGHWAY of holiness. What a beautiful vision of restoration - like the end of the Lion King when the wasteland Scar had created was transformed back into the beautiful, fruitful river valley by Simba.

In the Biblical vision, the fruitfulness and bounty and blessing symbolized holiness and relationship with God, but it also symbolized JUSTICE and righteousness. The “way of peace” Zechariah foretold and the way of peace that Jesus preached was the pathway to Kingdom righteousness. Come back next week for more from Isaiah 61. Here is a glimpse. Jesus quoted this prophecy in Luke 4 saying “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me…”

**God Promised His People:**

1. **Righteousness** - purity and purpose in Christ

“He has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor… liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind.” Luke 4:18 (Isaiah 61:1)

Jesus came to announce the year of the Lord’s favor - the day of Jubilee. It was a celebration of redemption, **of debts being released**, of rejoicing in God’s infinite love and grace to His people. Read Isaiah 61 as your homework for this week. It’s what Jesus read in the synagogue in Nazareth that day and announced it fulfilled right then. He was starting a new world order - a new age in God’s great story.

By washing away sins and giving us the gift of PURITY God brought us into relationship with Himself and connected us with HIS PURPOSE - to restore shalom in this world. Look at verse 10:

**God Promised His People:**

1. **Righteousness** - purity and purpose in Christ

“He has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness.” Isaiah 61:10

This is the whole point of our series - to see that the gospel is not just one-dimensional forgiveness of our sins and justification in Christ. Yes, we are “dressed in the righteousness of Christ alone, faultless to stand before His throne” but because of that internal change of heart there should be a corresponding change of LIFESTYLE that increasingly looks like the kingdom, looks like peace, like justice, like restoration, like SALT AND LIGHT.

Here is our summary for today:

**God Promised His People:**

1. **Redemption** - forgiveness and freedom from sin
2. **Relationship** - security in service to the Lord
3. **Righteousness** - purity and purpose in Christ

In Zechariah’s song in Luke 1 we hear the promises of the prophets - of redemption, relationship and righteousness. We are not saved BY our good works, but we are saved FOR good works that “God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” This is what Christmas is really about - peace on earth, good will to men. The light of Shalom breaking into this dark and dying world.

After we pray we will close, as we always do at Christmastime, with the great hymn, JOY TO THE WORLD. We don’t always sing this particular verse but we will today:

**Joy to the World**

 “No more let sins and sorrows grow

Nor thorns infest the ground;

He comes to make His blessings flow

Far as the curse is found…”

Right now, ***sin and sorrows grow, don’t they?*** Thorns do infest the ground. Why? We know the story. Because of Adam and Eve - because sin entered the world, bringing death and destruction with it. But Ephesians 1 tells us that God’s eternal plan was always to RESTORE all things in Christ - to unite what is divided, to heal what is broken. How? Through His redeeming work on the cross that would transform the hearts of an ever growing group of people who themselves- as His BODY - would become agents of reconciliation and TRANSFORMATION.

And so we stand together, laboring side by side in this harvest field of Tampa Bay saying “NO MORE will we let sins and sorrows grow in us and the people around us.” We literally have the cure to sin and death, and we will share that gospel cure with everyone who will listen.

Nor will we just let the thorns and thistles of this broken world flourish and grow in our city. ***We will pray for and work for the PEACE and blessing of our city*** - working against child abuse and neglect, taking in the orphan, fighting slavery, bringing healing to the oppressed and freedom to addicts. FAR AS THE CURSE IS FOUND. That’s everywhere guys. The curse affects everything and everyone. So our work to bring shalom is extensive and comprehensive.

And it begins with prayer. Let’s pause for a minute to pray for ourselves and our city, then we will stand and sing together.

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| **Joy to the World**“He rules the world with truth and graceAnd makes the nations proveThe glories of His righteousnessAnd wonders of His love.” | “And the angel said to them, ‘Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.’” Luke 2:10-11 |

This is why we have peace and confidence in our kingdom labor - ***because JESUS REIGNS***. He rules over all things - and His righteousness, justice, peace, and love are spreading to the four corners of the globe. This is the good news of great joy the angel announced in the arrival of the King, the Savior, Christ the Lord.

Let’s pray.