

THE PROMISE OF CHRISTMAS

Luke 1:26-38

Introduction:

Imagine waking up one day in a perfect world. You stretch in bed without feeling the ache in your back.

You reach for your eyeglasses on the nightstand but realize, with your hand in midair, that you can see perfectly. Dumbfounded, you turn to wake your spouse. As he yawns and rubs his eyes, you know suddenly that you love him more deeply than you ever have before.

The morning news has never been so refreshingly dull. No overseas conflicts, no acts of terrorism, no political scandals. When your phone rings, you expect an update from your friend about her chemotherapy sessions. Instead your prodigal son asks how you are and whether it would be okay if he came home.

You've been under a curse, and now you're free.

It's a nice idea, but we all know a perfect world doesn't exist. But what if the idea resonates so deeply because it was once true and will be again?

Adam and Eve were flawless people in a flawless world who had flawless relationships with their Creator God and each other. When we look at them, we see what we were created to be, what God had in mind for each of us.

But in this couple we also see what humanity chose to become. God asked one thing of Adam and Eve. In the midst of a lush garden created just for them, he asked them not to eat fruit from one tree. Their choice must not have seemed like much at the moment—just a bite from a piece of fruit. But the choice had serious consequences. Their choice resulted in a curse.

First, Eve and Adam were separated from God. All of us since then have been distanced from God. The most important of all relationships, the one with our Creator, was broken.

Second, Adam and Eve were separated relationally from each other. The struggles we have today in trying to relate perfectly to the people we love show us how devastating this part of the curse is. Our relationships are seldom all we want them to be.

Third, the couple was separated from nature's proper functioning. We battle weeds in our gardens and pain in our bodies. Our toil is endless, and we struggle to accommodate ourselves to a world that is not always kind to us. Eventually our bodies fail us entirely.

All of this came about because one beautiful morning, Adam and Eve did the one thing God asked them not to do. Can you imagine their anguish? They knew life in a perfect world as no one since has known it. They knew exactly what they had lost with the curse.

But God did not leave them without hope. God buried a promise in the curse. At some future time, a Redeemer would rise up and crush evil, even though the embodiment of evil, Satan, would first strike the Redeemer's heel.

"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." (GENESIS 3:15).

Thousands and thousands of years passed after the promise was given. Women and men struggled with alienation from God, from each other, and from the physical world around them. It must have seemed that God would never fulfill his promise. Had he forgotten? Had he changed his mind? Who would break the curse?

(taken from Discovery Series booklet, God With Us)

Waiting for the Promise

About 2500 years went by, until God called out a couple named Abram and Sarai. He renamed them Abraham and Sarah and gave Abraham a list of promises regarding his descendants. In Gen. 12 we read—*read Gen. 12:1-7*). God promised Abraham:

- A land
- A great posterity
- A blessing on him and his descendants

- A blessing for those who blessed him
- A blessing to the whole world through him.

In that last promise was the promise of the Redeemer, the One who would break the curse of sin and restore the broken relationship between God and man. And the promise was that He would come through the family of Abraham.

Many more years went by, as God began to build the nation that He had promised Abraham. It started slowly at first, as more than 20 years went by. Finally, Isaac, the child of promise, was born when Abraham was 100 years old. Isaac had no children until he was 60 years of age, when Esau and Jacob were born.

God chose only one of those two boys to be the father of this great nation of people he had promised. He changed Jacob's name to Israel, and promised that it was through him and his descendants that the promises would be fulfilled.

From that point on, the nation grew rapidly. Seventy people, Jacob and his family moved into Egypt and 400 years later, when they left Egypt there were over 600,000 men over the age of 20, capable of battle. More years went by. They settled in the land God had promised. Still they waited for the Messiah, the Promised One.

As you read through the OT prophets, much of it is almost depressing as you read God's promise of judgment and punishment on His people for their rebellion and disobedience. But buried in the messages of judgment is always the promise of the Coming One, the Anointed one—the Messiah. Passages like Isaiah 9 and 11 speak of the coming of a king who will rule in righteousness and justice. Jeremiah 31 tells of God's promise to turn mourning into joy and to establish a new covenant with his people. Zechariah speaks much about the coming king who will save his people. And in the final verses of the OT, we read in Malachi 4,

“For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go

out leaping like calves from the stall. And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the LORD of hosts. Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”

And so they waited, looking for the coming of the Messiah, the One who would redeem Israel. After Malachi's prophecy, there were 400 years of silence. It seemed that God had forgotten them. There was no more word from heaven. Had the promise been forgotten? Had they been abandoned?

No, not at all. One of the important truths about God that shows through on every page of Scripture is that God never forgets, and He always keeps His promises.

The Promise Fulfilled

Then one day an angel appeared to a young woman in the village of Nazareth, a small place in Galilee, not considered of much value. No one of any importance had ever come out of Nazareth. But in Nazareth there lived a young virgin maiden named Mariam, or Mary in English. She was pledged to be married to a carpenter named Joseph.

The angel, Gabriel, had a most amazing message for this girl. Now, I don't know what went through people's minds at that time regarding the coming of the Messiah. Some people have speculated that, as desire for the arrival of the long-awaited Messiah grew, young women throughout Israel dreamed of being the one who would bear the precious child. That may or may not have been the case.

The prophecy did say that the one who would crush Satan would be born of a woman. And the prophet Isaiah had told the people that a virgin would conceive and bring forth a Savior. Whether such fanciful thoughts ever went through Mary's mind, I cannot say. But we do know that she was startled by the appearance of the angel and astonished by his message.

Imagine Mary's shock and wonder. As Alice Matthews of Our Daily Bread Ministries points out, *"For thousands of years the Jews had talked about God's promised Redeemer. They had the words of the prophets and knew that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, south of Jerusalem. They knew he would be born to a woman who was a virgin. They knew he would be born to a descendant of the great King David. Someday he would come. But now? And through a simple peasant girl who lived several day's journey north of Bethlehem in a Galilean town called Nazareth?"*

It must have seemed preposterous to Mary. Even though she probably knew the prophecies, just as most Jews knew them, yet the message left her flustered and questioning. She needed some reassurance and the words of comfort that came from the mouth of the angel.

Go through the message of the angel (vv. 30-35) briefly. As an added reassurance and further evidence that God was able to do what seemed impossible to Mary, the angel told her of the miracle that had happened to her cousin Elizabeth, who was also expecting a child, though she was long past child-bearing age.

At this point Mary was faced with a choice. How would she deal with this unexpected announcement? She could have said, "But this will be so upsetting to Joseph. We are to be married soon. It will be so inconvenient and people will talk. I'm not sure I want the trouble that is going to come with this child. Can't you find someone else?"

But she didn't say any of that. We see her response in verse 38 – *read it.* That ended the discussion right there. The angel left.

Conclusion

There are a couple of lessons that come to mind...

1. Waiting on God. Sometimes God keeps us waiting much longer than we would like... And then when he does come with the answer, sometimes it comes in the most unexpected way and time.
2. When God reveals his plans to us and shows us what he desires from us and for us, how do we respond? Are like Moses, who questioned and argued and suggested God find someone else ... or Mary,

who willingly offered herself to be used by God to fulfil his plan and keep his promise to send the Redeemer who would deal with the sin problem created by Adam and Eve?

There is, however, one more thing I want to mention as we wrap this up. I started with the reading that asked what it would be like to wake up in a perfect world. That is how everything started and that is the ultimate promise of God.

Just as the people waiting expectantly for thousands of years for the coming of the Messiah, we too are to be waiting. For there is to be another coming, the second coming of Messiah. One day, He will burst through the clouds, to take his people home to glory.

In Matthew 25, as Jesus talked about his coming in glory, he told a parable – the ten virgins. *Relate the story briefly.*

The real promise of Christmas is not just that he came as a baby. That is only the beginning. He grew up to offer his life on a Roman cross in payment for our sins. Then he returned to heaven with the promise that He would return.

Jesus said at the conclusion of that parable, "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour." The question we must ask is this: Are we waiting and watching? And are you ready to meet Him when He comes?