

From the Pulpit of Keith Miller
Meadowbrooke Church
July 21, 2019

The Dawn of Redemption

Luke 1:26-35

Introduction

Peace, Justice, renewal, reconciliation and redemption is what we all long for in life. This has been the hope of every generation from the beginning. We all want Eden, but it feels like we are wandering in the wilderness. The promise of God through His word is that we are not only made for Eden, but we are made for a better Eden than the first.

After Solomon's death and the kingdom of his father David torn in two, the Hebrew people were forced to live in a land that was not their own; shortly before the exiles of the Northern and Southern kingdoms of Israel and during the exiles, God raised up prophets who spoke in His name to warn, remind, and encourage His people of the covenant their forefathers entered into with Him. While under the oppressive heel of the Assyrian, then Babylonian, and then Persian Empires the Hebrew people held onto what must have seemed like a hope as slender as a thread in the form of a handful of promises:

"The LORD God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.'" (Genesis 3:14–15, ESV)

"Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'" (Genesis 12:1–3, ESV)

"Judah is a lion's cub; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down; he crouched as a lion and as a lioness; who dares rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples." (Genesis 49:9–10, ESV)

"He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me."

Your throne shall be established forever.’ ” In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.” (2 Samuel 7:13–17, ESV)

“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” (Isaiah 7:14, ESV)

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.” (Isaiah 9:6–7, ESV)

“But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.” (Micah 5:2, ESV)

“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.” (Malachi 4:1–3, ESV)

After the last prophetic word spoken to Israel by God’s prophets, there were four hundred years of silence. During this time, Alexander the Great Hellenized the known world and forced everyone to learn and speak Greek as the universal language. Eventually the Roman Empire evolved through Greece to become the greatest, most powerful government in human history and with it came the most advanced system of roads for its time.

Sometime around 30 BC, Herod the Great was granted the title of “King of Judah” by the Roman Senate. During his 34 years as vassal king over Judah under the Roman Empire, he was known for two things: his absolute paranoia that everyone around him wanted his title as “King of Judah,” and the rebuilding project of the Temple that he started in 19 BC and was not completed until 63 AD. Herod was responsible for the death of several of his own family members, the extreme taxation of the Hebrew people to pay for his building projects, and the deaths of all the male children in Bethlehem who were two years old or under after he learned that wise men from the east were looking for the promised Christ who was to be born in Bethlehem.

God Uses Ordinary People to Accomplish His Extraordinary Purposes

Mary was somewhere between the ages of fourteen and sixteen; there is very little we are told about Joseph other than that he was a carpenter. Neither Mary nor Joseph were people to which anyone really paid attention. Unlike Eve, Noah and his family, Abraham and Sarah, Lot’s oldest daughter, Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba, who were all blessed to be included in

Jesus' family tree, Mary was "favored" by God to be the mother of the One promised to every generation who proceeded her.

Joseph was just some unknown carpenter, but was a descendant of the Judean line of kings. However, Joseph was a simple man who was faithful with what little God has blessed him with. After he found out that Mary was pregnant, he could not believe that her pregnancy was through the Holy Spirit. As a fiancé who had every reason to believe Mary was sleeping around, Joseph planned to end their relationship quietly so that no harm or shame would come upon her (see Matthew 1:18-19).

After Joseph was convinced that Mary's story was indeed true, he moved when God told him to move and he stayed when God told him to stay. When Herod sought to have Jesus killed by ordering the massacre of every Hebrew boy two years and younger, God told Joseph to get his wife and her child to Egypt where it was safe. After Herod died, God told Joseph through a dream to return to Israel. In Luke 2:41-52, we can assume with good reason that Joseph served his family by leading them in their pilgrimage to Jerusalem every Passover. Joseph was a pious and godly man, and if there was ever a person suitable to serve as the step-father to the Son of God... Joseph was the right man.

Think about the fact that a legitimate prophet had not been heard from in over 400 years when Mary received the news that she was pregnant with the promised messiah. The promise of a redeemer was so far removed from the Hebrew people that it was most likely considered to be the stuff of fairy tales and legends. Mary's first question to the angel after receiving the news of her pregnancy was simple: "**How will this be, since I am a virgin?**" Joseph's immediate reaction was disbelief. Yet, both embraced the news that they would raise this child born to Mary as their own until He stepped into his role as the promised Messiah.

God's Promise is for His Glory and Our Good

What about the promise made to Mary; what exactly did the angel promise Jesus to be? There are five things Gabriel says about Mary's child that warrants our attention:

His name will be Jesus (v. 31).

In Hebrew Jesus is translated as Joshua, which means both savior and deliverer. So the first thing that Gabriel tells Mary is that her child will be a Savior and Deliverer. Before Gabriel tells Mary how her child will be great, how He will be King, and how He will reign forever, Gabriel tells Mary that He will exercise His kingship, power, and sovereignty as Savior.

The other thing Gabriel says about Mary's child is that...

Jesus will be great (v. 32).

We learn in the Bible that Jesus is great in that He is the heir of all things, He is the agent of creation, He is the sustainer of the universe, He is the image of the invisible God, He is perfect sacrifice for mankind, and He has conquered death by rising three days after He was killed. I don't think Mary ever really fully grasped these things about her Son until He rose from the dead, listen to some passages,

Colossians 1:15-20. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities- all things were created through him and for him.¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

Hebrews 1:1-4. Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets,² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,⁴ having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

There is nothing that Jesus cannot do, for He is God. He was always God, he was never created; Jesus existed in the fellowship of the Trinity, participated in Creation, active in human history, voluntarily zipped Himself up in human flesh, lived among us for 30 years or so, died a vicious death on a Roman Cross for you sins and mine, rose on the third day. Jesus is Great! Words fail at capturing the essence of Jesus' greatness, so Gabriel simply states, "He will be great."

Jesus will be called Son of the Most High (v. 32b).

What does Gabriel mean by calling Jesus, "Son of the Most High?" Gabriel does not mean that Jesus was somehow created by God the Father, and he doesn't mean that Jesus is a son of God like the angels are called sons of God; no, what Gabriel means is that Jesus is a uniquely God's Son in that He is the divine Word and image of God, begotten from all eternity.

The demons understood this very well, look at Luke 8:28, "***What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High? I beseech you, do not torment me.***" The demons understood that Jesus, as Son of the Most High, has the right and power to torment the forces of Satan.

Jesus will inherit the throne of David (v. 32c).

It is only fitting that Jesus who is Savior, who is great, and who is Son of the Most High be the One who sits on the throne of David, especially since Mary and Joseph are direct descendants of David himself. Jesus will not only sit on the throne of David and will rule over Israel, but He will rule the world as King; listen to Isaiah 11:10, "***In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.***"

When a man by the name of Simeon saw baby Jesus for the first time after Jesus was dedicated in the temple, he took Jesus in his arms and blessed God and said, "***Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.***" Simeon then looked at Mary, as both Mary and Joseph marveled at

what Simeon said, *“Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”*

Basically, what Simeon told Mary was that this child will not be any ordinary child, for His ministry on this earth and the fierce rejection He will face will cause her to feel a mother’s pain unparalleled to most mothers; her heart would be pierced with grief and sorrow for her son, especially at the Cross.

Jesus will reign over the house of Jacob forever (v. 33)

Finally Gabriel told Mary that Jesus would not only sit on the throne of David, but that He would reign over Israel forever. Jesus would become the final King to reign in Israel and His kingdom would endure forever. But Jesus’ Kingdom would not be limited to the twelve tribes of Israel, for it would grow like a mustard seed into a global phenomenon. It would be to Jesus that all the nations would pay tribute as the King of kings and Lord of lords just as the Scriptures testify: **“Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”** (Phil. 2:9-11).

Application

To be clear, Mary and Joseph were not sinless human beings. Nor do I believe that Mary and Joseph were perfect parents. I am sure that they got it wrong, as we do, on many occasions with the way they parented Jesus and the way they parented their other children.¹ It seems that Joseph didn’t have the opportunity to see Jesus grow to be a man, but the time that he did have, we have every reason to believe that it did not go to waste.

Mary and Joseph were recipients of the Good News that salvation has come in the person and work of a child growing in Mary’s womb. I wonder that as Jesus’ little hands and feet could be felt by Mary and admired by Joseph, if they ever marveled at the reality that Mary’s baby was the one spoken of by the prophet Ezekiel:

My servant David shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall walk in my rules and be careful to obey my statutes. They shall dwell in the land that I gave to my servant Jacob, where your fathers lived. They and their children and their children’s children shall dwell there forever, and David my servant shall be their prince forever. I will make a covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will set them in their land and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in their midst forevermore. My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when my sanctuary is in their midst forevermore.
(Ezekiel 37:24–28)

When I consider the faith of Mary and Joseph and their very important role in nurturing, protecting, and providing for the One promised to every generation preceding them, I am

¹ Mary and Joseph had children together, which means that Jesus had siblings (see Matt. 13:55-56; Mark 6:3; Gal. 1:19; 1 Cor. 9:5).

reminded that theirs is a faith we have much to learn from. Permit me to give you four observations I made as I reflected on Mary and Joseph's parental role over Jesus:

1. The news of Jesus' birth moved them to action. As soon as they received the news that they would literally receive the Good News in the person of a miracle baby, they not only believed it, but embraced their responsibility as stewards of the Gospel by caring for Jesus.
2. Mary and Joseph guarded the Good News they received. When Jesus' life was threatened, they trusted God for protection and saw to it that no harm was brought upon Him.
3. They treasured the Good News. What little we learn from Joseph, we discover a man who embraced his role as a father figure over Jesus, and his actions demonstrated that he cherished, cared, and deeply loved his stepson. All throughout the gospels, we discover that Mary shared a bond with Jesus that no one else on planet earth experienced. Even as Jesus was dying on the cross, His concern for Mary was that of a son when he entrusted her into the care of the apostle John (see John 19:25-27).
4. Mary and Joseph were good stewards of news they received through their care of Jesus and their willingness to back off and let Him be who they knew He was (see Luke 2:42-52; John 2:1-12).

As Christians who have received the gospel, we, like Mary and Joseph, have also been entrusted with the gospel. The question that the story of Mary and Joseph should force us to reflect upon is simply this: "What will we do with the Good News we have received?" Will it move us to action as it did for Mary and Joseph? Will we guard it as precious and give it away by telling others about it? Will we treasure it as the greatest news we have ever heard? Will we be good stewards of it by giving it away as ambassadors of the King of kings and Lord of lords to our family, friends, neighbors, and strangers?