

## Luke 1:26-38

<sup>26</sup>In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee named Nazareth, <sup>27</sup>to a virgin pledged in marriage to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup>The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women."

<sup>29</sup>But she was greatly troubled by the statement and was wondering what kind of greeting this could be. <sup>30</sup>The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, because you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup>Listen, you will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus. <sup>32</sup>He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. <sup>33</sup>He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will never end."

<sup>34</sup>Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

<sup>35</sup>The angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. <sup>36</sup>Listen, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age even though she was called barren, and this is her sixth month. <sup>37</sup>For nothing will be impossible for God."

<sup>38</sup>Then Mary said, "See, I am the Lord's servant. May it happen to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

## God Promised

### I.

Faithlessness seems to be the hallmark of the human race. Broken promise after broken promise after broken promise litter the landscape.

Adam and Eve had only one Commandment to follow — "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; <sup>17</sup> but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die" (Genesis 2:16-17, NIV84). But when Satan enticed them with the idea of becoming just like God, they found that they couldn't keep their promise. They took the bait; they ate the fruit.

Ever since then the promises made by the human race have been iffy, at best. Some promises are kept. Many are broken.

"I know I promised to be at your game today, but something came up at work and I just couldn't make it." "I know I promised 'to be faithful, to love, to honor, to cherish, to support, to help in sickness and in health, as long as we both shall live,' but I just don't love you anymore."

When there is a lot of money or a lot of property involved, we draw up complicated documents full of legalese to make sure that neither side of the contract can easily violate the terms of the agreement. So many promises are broken that when there is a lot on the line it's prudent to not just take the other person's word as bond, but to have that legal contract to make the promise iron-clad.

Human beings just don't keep all their promises very well. Even when we have the most honorable intentions we sometimes find ourselves unable to live up to our promises.

Isn't it interesting that when we find ourselves at the worst possible moments, that's when God gives us the promises of his Word? When Adam failed to reach out a staying hand to Eve and let her take a bite out of the fruit, and then took some himself, it was a pivotal moment for the human race. Along with that commandment about the tree God had already announced the consequences: death—spiritual death, physical death, and eternal death all

came about because of that one fateful event.

But even when Adam and Eve deserved nothing but condemnation and death because of their sin, God gave the first promise of the Savior he would send. Speaking to Satan God said: “I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. He will crush your head, and you will crush his heel” (Genesis 3:15, EHV). To 21<sup>st</sup> Century people God’s words sound very obscure and hard to understand, unless you have been a Christian for some time and have come to realize what they mean. Adam and Eve, however, immediately understood that God was promising that one of their very own descendants would deal with their sin problem and restore their broken relationship with God.

God had to repeat the promises again and again through the millennia. All but a small portion of the population quickly forgot about God and his promises. Even his Chosen People — the People of Israel who had more repetitions of his promises than anyone else — kept turning aside from the truth to follow their own ways, or the pagan ways of their neighbors. To make sure they didn’t begin to think their own merit or worthiness had anything to do with the promise, God told them: “You are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession....”<sup>8</sup> It was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers” (Deuteronomy 7:6, 8, NIV84).

As surely as too many human promises are broken, God *keeps* every single one of *his* promises. Today’s First Lesson is an account of God’s continuing promises. King David had been planning to build a spectacular house of worship to the Lord—the temple. God turned things around on him and promised David that he would make *David* a house. In other words, he would establish the line of David. God said: “Your house will stand firm, and your kingdom will endure forever before you. Your throne will be established forever” (2 Samuel 7:16, EHV). From David’s line would come the long-promised Savior. With each successive repetition of the promise came more detail. Isaiah recorded: “Look! The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and call his name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14, EHV).

## II.

Paul summarizes the entire story of the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus with just a few words: “When the set time had fully come, God sent his Son to be born of a woman, so that he would be born under the law,<sup>5</sup> in order to redeem those under the law, so that we would be adopted as sons” (Galatians 4:4, EHV).

When the angel appeared to Mary in our text, he gave yet another announcement of God’s promises. Luke wants us to know the particulars. “In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee named Nazareth,<sup>27</sup> to a virgin pledged in marriage to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary” (Luke 1:26-27, EHV). The sixth month of what? Previous verses in Luke chapter 1 tell us that a promise had been made to Zechariah and Elizabeth about a son to be born to them, as well. Though they were well past the ages where it was feasible to have children, Elizabeth was in the sixth month of her pregnancy.

Mary was told: “Listen, you will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus.<sup>32</sup> He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David.<sup>33</sup> He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will never end” (Luke 1:31-33, EHV). This was some promise! This time it was different. It wasn’t off in the distant, hazy future. “The set time had fully come for God’s plan to take on human flesh,” as Paul had put it in that verse to the Galatians.

Mary was understandably a bit startled. First of all, she didn’t think of herself as

anything special. She was just an ordinary girl. People married young in those days—Mary was probably 14 or 15 years old. She was engaged to Joseph, but they were not married yet. Though she didn't think of herself as special, Mary was a good girl who followed God's will. "Mary said to the angel, 'How will this be, since I am a virgin?'" (Luke 1:34, EHV).

The angel assured Mary that this *would* happen. He spoke about Elizabeth, Mary's relative, and *her* pregnancy that was progressing — seemingly against all odds. Many things *appear* to be impossible, but with God *all* things are possible. God keeps his promises. "Then Mary said, 'See, I am the Lord's servant. May it happen to me as you have said'" (Luke 1:38, EHV).

### III.

We know that it *did* happen, just as God had promised. In the next 24 hours we will meet twice more to focus on the particulars of the birth of the promised Messiah. The Gospels written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John give the account of God keeping his Word of promise that he gave to Mary, as well as the fulfillment of those prophecies given over thousands of years.

Those promises weren't just for Mary, or Adam and Eve, or the People of Israel living in the times of the Old Testament. They aren't just for the people of the early Christian Church who were privileged to see many of these things first-hand. They are also for you.

Perhaps you have been the victim of someone who didn't keep their word. Pain and loss were the result. You don't know where to go or to whom to turn. Jesus says: "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:28-29, EHV).

Maybe *you* are the one who didn't keep your word. *You* have betrayed a trust and broken your promises. *You* have hurt others and now carry the guilt of what you've done. There isn't really anything you can do to fix the broken promises of the past, but there is forgiveness from the Lord Jesus. Paul tells us: "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1, EHV). In the same Savior promised of old, and promised to come from the womb of Mary, God has given us his Word; and God always keeps his Word.

We live in a postmodern society that believes what it can see or taste or touch. Perhaps you are one who struggles with God's promises — you *want* to believe God's promises, but find it difficult. For you — and every believer, struggling to understand or not — God gave the tangible evidence of his saving activity. "Take and eat, this is my body, given for you. Take and drink, this is my blood, poured out for you, for the forgiveness of sins." The Lord's Supper is the very forgiveness Jesus won for you in a form you can taste and see and touch.

"I am the Lord's servant. May it happen to me as you have said" (Luke 1:38, EHV). God gave Mary faith to take him at his Word. She heard the message of the angel Gabriel and trusted and believed that the impossible would happen, just because God said it would. In Christ Jesus God has given us his Word. God acts according to his Word. God grants to you and to me the faith to respond to all his promises with the same words of Mary: "I am the Lord's servant. May it happen to me as you have said."

This morning as we listen to the promise made to Mary, and this evening as we see with the eyes of faith the fulfillment of that promise in the stable at Bethlehem, and throughout the year as we contemplate the words and works of Jesus and his life, death, and resurrection, may God grant us this same response of faith: "May it happen to me as you have said." Amen.