

## **The Good News of Christmas 2017**

We continue our Advent series this morning. We spoke the first week about the comfort of Christmas. Last week we spoke about the violence of Christmas and this morning we are talking about the good news of Christmas. I'm ready for some good news, aren't you?

The 400 years between the Old and New Testament were years of silence, without a prophetic voice. As the New Testament opens, God breaks the silence by sending an angel to a young Israeli girl with an extraordinary message of good news. "Don't be afraid, the darkness is being invaded by the Light of the World." Turn with me to the first chapter of Luke's gospel and let's read about the angel Gabriel's encounter with Mary. (Luke 1:26-38.) The good news he brings to Mary is good news for all of us this Christmas.

### **Good news: You don't have to be afraid!**

#### **"Do not be afraid Mary." Luke 1:30**

It's the favorite salutation of Scripture. Of course most of us would need to hear that if a giant angel in shining apparel appeared before us. "Don't be afraid." "Right. Easy for you!" It's what the angel said to Zechariah earlier in Luke 1. "Don't be afraid, your prayers have been answered." It's what the angel said to Joseph in a dream: "Don't be afraid, go ahead with your plans to take Mary as your wife." It's what the angel said to the shepherds: "Don't be afraid. There is good news, a Savior is born in Bethlehem." And it is what the angel said to Mary. "Do not be afraid." Fear not. The Kingdom of God has come. Israel receives her King, the Gentiles receive light in their darkness. Those in captivity receive their liberator. Christ is come. Don't be afraid. This good news is both the message of the Kingdom and the consequence of its' coming. There is no longer reason for fear. Jesus has come. We aren't alone in the darkness any longer, groping to find our way. Messiah has come and his presence dispels the darkness. His love drives the fear away. It is good news for us all.

### **Good news: You have found favor with God!**

**"Do not be afraid Mary, you have found favor with God." Luke 1:30** While Mary's circumstances were unique, there is good news for us today. We too have found favor with God. That word translated favor is the Greek word *charis*. It can also be translated as grace. We have experienced the grace and favor of God. Through our faith in Christ as Savior and Lord, we have become the recipients of his unmerited favor, his amazing grace. Can you hear him say it to you? "Don't be afraid, child of God, you have found favor with the Lord." Don't think so?

Listen to what the apostle Paul says about the grace and favor of God that has been lavished upon us through Jesus Christ. (Read Ephesians 1:3-14). Paul is talking about us! It is the good news of Christmas. We too have found favor with God through Jesus Christ!

**Good news: You have found purpose in life!**

The angel told Mary, **“You will be with child and give birth to a son and you are to give him the name Jesus.” Luke 1:31** Good news Mary, God has given you a new purpose in life. You will conceive and bear a son and call his name Jesus. You will bring the Son of God into this world and raise him to obey the voice of God. Could there be a more profound purpose for anyone? The good news is God desires to give each of us a new purpose in our life. When we come to know Christ as Savior and Lord, there is a new purpose planted in our heart. A purpose to please God and not just ourselves. A new purpose and desire to obey God’s word. A new purpose to serve God and to serve others. A new purpose to share the good news of Jesus with those we know. Could there be a more profound purpose for our lives?

Let me say another word about God’s purpose for our lives. I believe in each of us, God wants to birth something for his Kingdom’s sake and for our good as well. As surely as he birthed his purposes through Mary, he wants to birth his purposes through our lives. Let me warn you, the enemy will oppose anything God desires to birth. As surely as Satan tried to kill Jesus through the efforts of King Herod, he will try to kill what God wants to create and birth and initiate and accomplish through you.

Satan wants to kill what God is birthing in us. He wants to cause us all to remain barren and fruitless in our spiritual lives. If he can’t do that, he wants to cause us to abort what God has conceived in us, in our spirit. He wants you to abandon your dreams, your calling, abandon your walk with God, forget about that burden God laid on your heart, forget about those plans you had for serving others. It’s too hard so give it up. Satan wants us to commit spiritual abortion. You see, both physically and spiritually, abortion is in some sense the abandonment of the future. It is the abandonment of hope, of dreams, of possibility, of what could be and might be.

Don’t abort your purpose or your dreams. Don’t give in to fear! Don’t give in to fear of failure, or fear of success. Don’t give in to despair. Don’t abort what God wants to birth in your life. God has given you purpose. He has gifted you with life, talent and potential. He has equipped you to work for him. Don’t give up on those dreams and plans God put in your heart. Carry them to full term. Let God birth that dream he put in your life.

I know some struggle because we want to over-spiritualize the purposes of God. “What purpose did God have for me? I can’t preach or teach or sing.” God doesn’t need everyone to preach or pastor. He needs people to teach school and nurse the sick back to health. He needs people to repair cars and stock shelves and cook food. He needs people to be faithful fathers and mothers and mentors and role models. He needs people to bring his light into the darkness, wherever you are. God has a purpose for you. Don’t lose sight of that. Volunteer. Get involved.

**Good news: There is hope for today!**

**“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.” Luke 1:32** The angel explained the good news to Mary. There was reason for hope someday, in the future, because when her son grew up he would rule and reign on the throne of his father David. For us there is hope for today because Jesus, the Son of the Most High has ascended not simply to the throne of his father David, but he is seated at the right hand of the Heavenly Father and rules over the universe. Circumstances may look bad today, things may seem overwhelming, but Jesus is on the throne. He is in control, ruling until every last enemy is put under his feet. Jesus is on the throne, redeeming every incident, causing everything to work together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose. It may seem bleak to you, but Jesus is on the throne and through Him we can reign in this life over circumstances and trials. He will cause us to triumph and to overcome. Good news. There is hope for today. Jesus is on the throne.

**Good news: There is hope for tomorrow!** Gabriel told Mary it wasn’t just for today... **“...and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.” Luke 1:33** The good news is getting better. Jesus is ruling and reigning on the throne and there will be no end to his kingdom, his rule and his reign. What a future. What a destiny and what a hope we have. We are part of an eternal kingdom, serving a King whose authority and power will never diminish, whose rule and reign will never end. You don’t have to worry about tomorrow, His Kingdom and reign will go right on through a billion tomorrows and beyond, without end.

That we are part of a kingdom that has no end is good news for all of us who have loved ones who have gone on to heaven. We can look ahead, into the kingdom of tomorrow as we read the words of John the beloved Apostle, **“After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were**

**holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’”** When John asked the angel who these people were, the angel said they are the ones who have come out of the tribulation and trouble on earth, the ones who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. They are before the throne of God and **“Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”** Revelation 7:9-10, 16-17

No wonder we call it good news. There is hope for today and tomorrow. We are part of a kingdom that will not end. Our loved ones are part of that kingdom. Our future is there where there'll be no pain, no death or dying, no farewells. We will be in the presence of God, united with all God's saints, rejoicing around his throne where he rules and reigns forever. That is my tomorrow. That's your tomorrow if you know Christ as Savior and Lord.

Good news. God is at work today, in the present as well as in our tomorrows. God is in control. Jesus is on the throne. Tomorrow is taken care of. Rest in him. All is well!

This Christmas, in spite of circumstances, there is plenty of good news. Good news, you don't have to be afraid anymore. Good news, you have found favor with God. Good news, you have a God given, God ordained purpose in life. Good news, there is hope for you today. Things can be different because Jesus is on the throne. Good news, there is no end to his kingdom. Tomorrow is taken care of as well. The future is secure in Him.

This is the good news for us and this is the good news Mary heard from the angel. Then Mary asked what all of us are wondering today, **“How will this be?” Luke 1:34** “It sounds impossible. It's too good to be true isn't it? I mean, there is never good news, not for someone like me. It's too late. I can't start over, I can't be free from fear, addiction. I can't live a godly life. I can't fulfill God's purposes. I've already messed up my life beyond repair. I can't make a difference. God can't possibly use me for anything. I can't do it. I'm too old, too young, too cynical, too tired. There is no place for me. It's hopeless.”

Mary asked the angel how this could be “since I am a virgin?” You see, we too can say, “Lord, I can't do this, I'm a novice, a beginner, a child, a teenager. A virgin. I've never done this before. I don't have any experience. I don't have a resume. How could someone like me possibly do something like that for God or for others? It's impossible. How could it be?”

Here is what the angel told Mary and we need to see this and get this in our spirit as well. **“The angel answered, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.’ Luke 1:35** To Mary’s totally appropriate question the angel tells her, “Mary, you won’t be on your own in this. I know this is all beyond you, but the Holy Spirit will come upon you. God is going to do this through you and with you.” More good news: **Good news: You aren’t in this alone!**

Does this sound familiar? Jesus told his disciples (and we too are his disciples) **“I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.” John 14:12.** My response to that would be like Mary’s response. How can this be? We can’t do greater works than Jesus! You want us to go into all the world and make disciples. You want us to lay hands on the sick, to minister to the poor, the broken, the hurting and dying. You want us to proclaim the gospel to everyone, but we can’t change the world alone. How can we do this? And Jesus said, I’m not asking you to do this alone. You won’t be in this alone. He told his disciples “...I will ask the Father and he will give you another Counselor or Comforter, or helper, the Holy Spirit - and he will be with you forever.” (John 14:16). And Jesus said, **“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Matthew 28:20**

We aren’t alone. We’re not on our own to do what he has put in our heart to do. It won’t be by you or your ability alone, but you’ll receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, that’s what Jesus said, and then you’ll carry out my purposes and my plans - then you’ll be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and Judea and Samaria and the ends of the earth.

Don’t worry Mary, it’s not all up to you. The good news for Mary and all of us: the Holy Spirit is with us, to comfort, lead and guide us, to teach, equip and empower us, so we can live for Jesus today and tomorrow and every step of the way. Jesus is with us now! Immanuel!

Mary, while you are wondering how such marvelous things could actually happen, they are already happening. The barren are no longer barren. Your cousin Elizabeth, who has been barren all these years, now in her old age is expecting. **“Even Elizabeth, your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month.” Luke 1:36**

How can this be, Mary? How can this be you ask? Don’t you know? Haven’t you understood? Don’t you know the good news of Christmas, Mary? **Good news: The limits have**

**been removed!** Hear the amazing words spoken by the angel to Mary that still brings a message of good news to each of us today: **“For nothing is impossible with God.” Luke 1:37**

The good news of Christmas. There are no closed doors with God. Nothing is too dark, too weak, too extensive. No one is too sinful, too sick, too depraved, too forgotten or too forsaken. Nothing is inoperable, impossible, improbable, impregnable, unlikely with God.

Good news Mary, the Messiah has come, through you and to you. God has become flesh and dwells among us, entering our lives, breaking into time so the impossible becomes possible.

Are you feeling a little overwhelmed today? Maybe you are facing impossible circumstances. You look at your life and you’ve decided there is no hope, no future, it just looks impossible. Have I got good news for you! Because Jesus came, now, through Christ and by His Holy Spirit, according to the will of the Father, all things are possible. It looks hopeless, but nothing is impossible with God. It looks bleak, but nothing is impossible with God. They said you couldn’t change, but nothing is impossible with God. They said you were a hopeless case, but God says nothing is impossible with him. From incorrigible to redeemed. From failure to overnight success. With God, all things are possible. Good news. Jesus has come, a Savior is born, a king is given to us and nothing is impossible with him.

**It is the good news of Christmas!**

**Good news: You don’t have to be afraid!**

**Good news: You have found favor with God!**

**Good news: You have found purpose in life!**

**Good news: There is hope for today!**

**Good news: There is hope for tomorrow!**

**Good news: You aren’t in this alone!**

**Good news: The limits have been removed!**

Let’s rejoice and give thanks for the good news of Christmas. Give thanks, for nothing is impossible with God!