

Faithfulness Of God's Promises

Text: Zephaniah 3:14-20
Philippians 4:4-7 (Series C, 3 rd Sunday in Advent)
Luke 3:7-18

Prayer:

In the midst of this otherwise reverently penitential Advent, our season of waiting for the Nativity of Jesus, we come to the Sunday of *Rejoicing*. The rose candle, the symbol of joy, will be lighted as a sign of our call to be joyous in the nearness of God, in the coming of Christ. Time to experience the excitement, that in Christ, we will be baptized with the Holy Spirit and the fire to spark our faith into action.

The writer of Philippians is quite specific by saying *Do not worry about anything*, because the *Lord is near* with the *peace that surpasses all understanding*. It's hardly easy to relax and not worry in a world seemingly mad with fear of Covid-19 and anger, division and hate.

Yet all the readings for today exhort us to rejoice, exult, and sing ~ even John the Baptizer, while issuing some serious warnings, *proclaimed the good news to the people* about the One who is coming.

This morning, I would like to share few thoughts on **Promises**, not just any promise, but **God's Promises**. Watch TV and you will hear the promise that a particular washing powder washes cleaner and brighter than any other.

Talk to a car dealer and he *will promise* that if you buy this car you will be the happiest person in the world. Talk to a washing machine salesman and he will *promise* that you won't get a better deal anywhere else in the world.

Politicians *promise* at election time that their party's policies will build a better Canada. Listen to the couple standing at the altar making their *promises* of love and commitment to each for as long as they will live. Read what is written on a cheque. It is a *promise* from the giver to pay the amount specified.

The real purpose of a promise is to carry out what has been promised. When a person makes a promise but has no intention of carrying it out this is not a promise at all.

Many centuries before the birth of Jesus, God promised that he would send a Saviour. The Christmas story begun in Genesis chapter 3. God wanted to do something about the mess we have made of our world and our lives. From the time of Adam and Eve we been trapped in a cycle of violence and sin can't find our way out.

So, God promised "***The Lord himself will give you a sign: a young woman who is pregnant will have a son and will name him Immanuel***" (*Isaiah 7:14*). God promised that he would not abandon his people who had gone against him so often. He promised that in the small town of Bethlehem, a woman would give birth to a son who will rule with strength and bring peace (*Micah 5:2-4*).

The angel Gabriel promised Mary that she would have a son in some miraculous way and that this child's name will be Jesus. Gabriel continued, "*He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High God. The Lord God will make him a king, as his ancestor David was, and he will be the king of the descendants of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end!*" (*Luke 1:32,33*).

The angel promised Joseph that this child will "*save his people from their sins*" (*Matt 1:21*). God had kept his promise; a Saviour was born in Bethlehem to a poor couple, Mary and Joseph.

The angel Gabriel said that this little bundle was "*the Son of the Most High God*" and that "*he will save his people from their sin*". They were told a few days later, that this child will bring them deep sadness. Old Simeon told them, "*Sorrow like a sharp sword will break your own heart.*"

The name "Jesus" (**Yeshua** in Hebrew, often translated as "**Joshua**.") means, "**God saves.**" Jesus would truly live up to his name. He would die as the Saviour of the world. The reason he came and was born in this world was so that he could die. We were born to live.

We wonder what will happen as life unfolds for this child, we don't give death a second thought. That's not to say that what happened between his birth and death isn't important. He **did** come to earth:

to reveal God to all people....

to teach truth....

to fulfill the law....

to offer His kingdom.

He came to show us how to live...

he came to communicate God's love... in love with one another.....

to bring peace...

to heal the sick and help to the needy.

But doing all these things wasn't the main reason that he came to earth as a human. All those things that I just mentioned could have been done without his being born as a human. He could have simply appeared - like the angel of God and accomplished everything in the above list, without becoming a human being.

You see my friends in Christ, Christmas is closely tied up with *Good Friday* and *Easter*. The story of Christmas by itself could be just another folk tale, or legend, or a nice story about a baby born in the most unfortunate circumstances. But when Christmas is connected with Good Friday then we see the birth in the stable from a whole different perspective.

Those soft little hands, fashioned by the Holy Spirit in Mary's womb, would one day have nails driven through them. Those baby feet, pink and unable to walk, would one day walk up a dusty hill to be nailed to a cross.

That sweet infant's head with sparkling eyes would one day have a crown of thorns forced on it. That tender body, warm and soft, wrapped in swaddling clothes, would one day be whipped and speared. Jesus was born to die.....for the sins of all people.

Let me conclude with this assessment of Christmas:

"If our greatest need was for information, God would have sent an *educator*.

If our greatest need was for technology, God would have sent a *scientist*.

If our greatest need was for pleasure, God would have sent an *entertainer*

If our greatest need was for money, God would have sent an *economist*.

But since our greatest need is for forgiveness...

God sent a ***Saviour...a Redeemer***." This is the true meaning of Christmas.

I don't want to put a dampener on your Christmas celebrations by talking about this baby's death. But it is precisely for this reason that God became human – to save us from the cycle violence and sin. God kept the *promises* that he had made. He sent us a Saviour. Take note of the promises of God has made through Jesus.

- When Jesus died on Good Friday, God made a *promise* that Jesus has paid for all of our sins; he paid with his life. He has saved his people from their sins.
- When Jesus rose again from the dead he *promised* that "*all who live and believe in Jesus will never die but have eternal life.*"
- When we leave this life he will welcome us into eternal life. God keeps his *promises*.
- God promised that he will be our helper and strength through all the ups and downs of life, and will always be our ***Immanuel***, which means "God with us".
- When we were baptized God made a promise with us that he would always be our heavenly Father, and welcomed us into his family.

When God makes a promise, God keeps it. In fact, the whole of the Bible is a story about God keeping his promises. And so, at Christmas we celebrate with carols, nativity plays, Christmas trees, and giving gifts the fact that God is true to his Word.

God has given us so much. A Saviour as God had promised many centuries ago. God has given us the most precious gift that we can possible get at Christmas - the gift of his Son Jesus, our Saviour.

In midst of Covid-19, Delta, Omicron fourth wave and so on! Next week we will be in the middle of our Christmas celebration. In the midst of this global uncertainty. Remember, with thanksgiving that God has kept his promises to his people. Promises of **Peace** and good will to all people.

It is no wonder old Simeon said, *Now, Lord, you have kept your promise* when he held the baby Jesus in his arms. God has kept his promises as the Gospel writer reports, *"All this happened in order to make come true what the Lord had said through the prophet, "A virgin will become pregnant and have a son.*

Together in faith we become a spiritual orchard bearing only good fruit, gathered by Christ, our Savior, stirred up in Faith, and brought Home. *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice!* (Philippians 4:4)

Until we see Him coming Victorious in the sky We'll run the race with gratitude exalting God most high. Yes, there'll be good times and yes some will be bad, but... Zion waits in glory...where none are ever sad!

This is God's promise that we can all stand on. Amen.