

The Ancient Promised Fulfilled – Luke 2:1-7

These first 7 verses from Luke chapter 2 are perhaps the most recognized words from the Bible. As you read them, you can't help but notice all the details. You have Caesar Augustus and Quirinius. You have places like Syria, Nazareth, Galilee, Judea, and Bethlehem. And then you have the blessed parents – Mary and Joseph. Have you ever wondered why Luke includes all these details? Biblical scholars rightly point out how all these details prove that Luke is writing about real people and real places. But there's more to it than that. Luke has all these details to show how God was fulfilling the ancient promise he made to Adam and Eve about our Savior. And it's tonight on Christmas Eve, we hear how God fulfilled it in Bethlehem.

Bethlehem isn't all that big of a place. Out of curiosity I went to Google Maps to see just how far I had to zoom in until Bethlehem showed up. So I centered my zoomed out screen over Israel and started to zoom in. It didn't take long for Jerusalem to pop up. But I couldn't see Bethlehem which is only 6 miles away. So I kept zooming in until I got it. I had to zoom in to the point where roads like Ajo Highway and Oracle Road finally gets their own little numbers. Bethlehem is a small town, no doubt about it. And yet, why did God choose this little town of Bethlehem to be the birthplace of our Savior?

To answer that question, you need to read what our God tells us in the Old Testament book of Micah chapter 5. **“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.”** God has the prophet Micah prophesy this 700 years before Jesus was born on Christmas Eve. Although Bethlehem isn't a big city, it will always be famous because of Jesus' birth. But why did God choose Mary and Joseph to be his parents who lived all the way up north in Nazareth?

To answer that question, I bring you all the way back to the Garden of Eden. After Adam and Eve sinned, God promised Eve that one of her descendants would crush Satan's head. Fast forward a few thousand years to 2,000 BC with Abraham. God promised him that all people will be blessed through his descendants. Fast forward to 1,000 BC to King David who grew around Bethlehem. Listen to what God promised him in 2 Samuel chapter 7 **“When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son.”**

Matthew and Luke show us with Jesus' family history that he is the promised one. He is the fulfillment of the ancient promise made to Adam and Eve who would crush Satan's head by freeing us from the terror of death. He is the fulfillment of the ancient promise made to

Abraham who would bless all nations on Earth by being our substitute on the cross. He is the fulfillment of the ancient promise made to David whose kingdom will last forever by placing it in heaven and in our hearts.

So as you read these opening verses from Luke's Gospel and hear all the details, let your eyes look upon the fulfillment of the ancient promises. And not just the ones I've mentioned, but all the other promises in the Old Testament. But you know what the best part about this is? God didn't stop fulfilling his promises on the first Christmas. No, he continues to fulfill them. And this is what we get to consider tonight as we continue to look at the manger in Bethlehem. Amen.

Peace Has Come At Last – Luke 2:8-14

It's a cold night, colder than it has been at least. You readjust your sheepskin coat and get closer to the fire. You enjoy the company of the other shepherds with you as you keep watch over your flocks by night. It's like any other night with the baas of the sheep as they wind down for the night. At least until you see a mysterious light in the sky. You ask the other shepherds if they see it and they do. As the light gets closer, you see it's an angel and immediately terror fills your mind. But the angel of the Lord says to you **"Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord."** And then a whole crowd of angels appears in the sky praising God and saying **"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."**

If you were one of those shepherds on Christmas Eve, how would you have reacted to the angels? I know I would reacted just like Luke describes. Terrified at first followed by joy when I heard the angels' news. Joy because with Jesus' birth there is peace. We need the peace that Jesus' birth brings in this troublesome life. What are some ways you have found this in your life? I found some as my wife and I were buying presents for Christmas. I was buying presents but sometimes for the wrong reasons. Did you have to struggle with this? When we buy gifts, it should be so we can selflessly give them as a sign of love and thanks. But how many of your presents this year are you giving with this honorable motivation?

Maybe you included some people this year because of a guilty conscience. You know, those we lost our temper at or didn't thank as we should have. So you're making up for it with an expensive gift to selfishly get back on their good side. Or maybe it's your coworkers whom you're including because you have to. If you had it your way, you wouldn't exchange gifts at all! But you do it anyways all the while wishing it was the other way around. It's amazing when we stop to think about it how such a simple thing as giving gifts shows our need for God's peace.

And how great it is God has given us this peace in Jesus Christ. The fulfillment of the ancient promises came to Bethlehem so he could bring peace to our troubled hearts. Decades after the angels told the shepherds this joyous message, Jesus would show us how he would bring peace to all people. He would live a perfect life from the moment he came to Bethlehem until his death on Calvary. He allowed himself to be arrested and condemned at a mock trial. He willingly carried his cross to Calvary to die as a common criminal. He suffered the full extent of God's wrath for our sins of selfish giving and unthankful hearts. And he died so that we may believe that this baby in Bethlehem is our Savior and have life in heaven.

The angels knew how great God's peace is from firsthand experience. And when the time came for Mary to give birth, the angels knew that God's peace had come to Earth at last. My brothers and sisters, we have seen this peace and his name is Jesus Christ. And as continue to consider Christmas, we see indeed that God has shown us his favor. For the one born to us this Christmas Eve is Christ the Lord our Savior from sin. So it is with believing hearts we can sing with the angels "**Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.**" Amen.

Treasure God's Priceless Gift – Luke 2:15-20

Mary and Joseph made it to Bethlehem and had their firstborn son. The shepherds came to the manger to see what the angels were talking about. And so the Nativity Scene is set. How do you picture it in your mind? Maybe you have something in mind from Sunday School. The colors are simple, everyone is happy including the cows, and the baby Jesus is asleep on the hay. Maybe you have something more realistic. Light and shadows are in perfect harmony, the shepherds and Joseph have faces of expectant joy, and Mary somehow looks at peace, happy, and tired as only new mothers can. I'm sure we all picture the Nativity Scene in our different way. But we all have the baby Jesus in the middle with everyone gathered around him.

The Virgin Mary had her eyes on Jesus as she treasured God's priceless gift. How she found out 9 months earlier from the angel Gabriel told that she, a young virgin, would give birth to God's Son. Mary believed these impossible words which would change her life. How she and Joseph found out that they had to go to Bethlehem for a mandatory census in her last month of pregnancy. How there was no room in the inn so they had to find a place elsewhere. And how God was with Mary for those stressful 9 months so she could bear our Savior on Christmas Eve. There were a lot of things for Mary to ponder and treasure up in her heart in the original Nativity Scene. For she was looking at Jesus, who is God's priceless gift.

And so it is with us today. The Nativity Scene is not the finale of a cutesy story that has no bearing on our lives today. It is just the beginning. The beginning of how Jesus would bring that peace we so desperately need at long last. The beginning of how God fulfilled his ancient promises only to fulfill new ones. It is the beginning of our lives where we continually treasure God's priceless gift.

Because as you do this, it affects everything you do. We no longer live for ourselves, now we live for God who gave us this priceless gift. So when you give your gifts this Christmas season, let it be with a heart that has treasured God's priceless gift. Let your giving be as selfless as when God gave us Jesus. Let your guilty consciences be at ease for your Savior has washed you clean. Let your eyes be drawn to the center of the Nativity Scene as you look at the baby Jesus and what he has done for you. Let your heart be as Mary's, who treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. So that when you step away from the Nativity Scene, you will do so as the shepherds who returned **“glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.”** Amen.