

Christmas, The Gift of Hope

Luke 1:26-38

We learned last week that the period between Isaiah's prophecies concerning the coming of Christ, the advent, was 700 years. The period between the Old Testament writings and the New Testament were 400 years, the Intertestamental Period. 403 BC was the ending of the Old Testament with the book of Malachi. Persia was the ruler during this time and then Alexander the Great comes in and spreads the Greek culture throughout the Middle Eastern region. This is why you had Greek Rulers with Jewish representatives during the time of Jesus. It was a time of waiting, a time of uncertainty, a time of looking for hope. After this long wait, in God's perfect timing, an angel named Gabriel came to Mary and unfolded the plan that Isaiah had prophesied. Gabriel shared that Christ would be the hope for all of humanity! What is hope? It is the assurance that God will care for us eternally and forgive our sin, through us placing faith in Jesus Christ!

The Recipients of Hope (Luke 1:26-27) We learn of two ordinary people, Mary and Joseph. They were betrothed, which in that era meant more commitment than our modern day engagement. Mary and Joseph were practically married. They weren't allowed to live together or engage in intimacy that is Biblically reserved for married couples, but in order to break the commitment of becoming betrothed, a divorce decree was needed. All of this is unique to that culture and time. This passage mentioned the sixth month referring to Elizabeth's pregnancy with John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ. This miracle of birth had been given to Zechariah and Elizabeth who were not able to have children. This was done to ignite the coming movement of hope! Also, this passage mentioned Nazareth, a city with a bad reputation! I tell you all of this to say: Jesus is hope to the ordinary, unique, those with bad reputations, and foreign people of that day and of today. As Mary and Joseph were the recipients of hope, you and I too are the recipients of hope when we place faith in Jesus Christ, regardless of what you have done!

The Messenger that Relayed Hope (Luke 1:28-33) Gabriel and Michael are the only two names of angels mentioned in the Bible. Angels in the book of Revelation are described as being really scary. We're not sure of Gabriel's appearance, but we do know that Gabriel relayed hope by sharing these truths: 1. Mary would conceive a son. 2. His man would be Jesus. (According to Matt. 1:21 means "He will save his people from their sins."). 3. He is the son of the Most High. God's own Son. 4. The Son will fulfill the promise made to King David hundreds of years earlier (2 Sam. 7). In Luke 1:31-33, Gabriel conveys the message of hope that the world has been waiting for!

The Response to the Message of Hope (Luke 1:34) Mary's response is a lot like Zechariah's response, but she's not asking if it's possible, but how will it be done? How do most of us respond when God calls us to a task? We run, we reroute, or we relax in His calling. We can

run or reroute like Jonah, or we can relax in God's call like Isaiah, ***"here I am Lord, send me."*** Mary's response is a lot like ours! ***"How is this impossible?"*** Gabriel replies with nothing is impossible with God! It reminds me of the insight that God gave Habakkuk, recorded in Habakkuk 1:5 ***"Look among the nations, and see; wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told."*** I also love what Paul told the Ephesians recorded in Ephesians 3:20-21 concerning this same thing, that God alone is the giver of life. He brings dead men to life! ***"Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen."*** God has called us to trust him because we know He cares for us. Respond this Christmas knowing that He has everything worked out for our good and His glory!

The Reply to the Coming Hope (Luke 1:35-38) God uses Gabriel's explanation to reveal two of the greatest mysteries of Christianity: 1. Incarnation, and 2. The Trinity! Verse 35 shares the work of each part of the Trinity to bring about the Incarnation of Jesus, fully God and fully man! Sometimes God will ask you and I to do something, even radical, but He doesn't unfold the plan until we begin to walk closer to Him. When we cling to the gift of hope as a result of the first Christmas, may we too be obedient with faithfulness. The gift of hope is truly received when we strive to live a life of faithfulness to Christ!