

You Promised

Luke 2:1-20 (NIV)

¹ In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ² (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³ And everyone went to their own town to register. ⁴ So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ⁵ He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ⁷ and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them. ⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." ¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." ¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

What promises did you make for Christmas this year? Was it the promise to come to church on Christmas Eve? If so, congratulations, you fulfilled your promise! Was it to go out and look at Christmas lights? If so, maybe you have already done that or that is what you are going to do as soon as you leave tonight before you head home. Was it to get someone a certain gift? If so, maybe it's wrapped, under the tree, ready to be given.

Are there any promises that you didn't keep? Did you never get around to going and seeing Christmas lights? Did you try your hardest to get that special gift only to come up empty? Did you do everything in your power to make it home for Christmas, but things outside of your control intervened and here you are instead of being with the people you promised to be with?

We all know the pain of a broken promise. We've either been the recipient of it or been the one who broke the promise. It could have been a simple promise like being at a certain place at a certain time or a bigger, unkeepable promise like, "I won't anything bad happen to you ever." We've had to face the person that we've broken a promise to. We've seen the tears in their eyes and the sting of their words when they said, "But you promised." Maybe there was anger, anger that we let that person down, anger that they feel lied to by the broken promise. Either fearing that we ourselves will break a promise or that we will have a promise broken to us, we guard our hearts by not using the word "promise" unless we are absolutely sure that nothing will stand in the way of us keeping our word.

God has made many promises to us, to his people, to all people. One of the very first promises we hear God make came near the beginning of the world to the very first two people: Adam and Eve. In the Garden of Eden, God promised that Adam could eat from any tree in the garden except from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If he ate from that one, God promised that Adam would surely die. Sadly, Adam and Eve tested whether or not God would keep his promise. They trusted the devil's word over God's Word that they would surely *not* die. Shortly after they ate the forbidden fruit, it was reaffirmed to them that God does indeed keep his promises. As a result of their distrust and disobedience, they would surely die.

While God kept his promise regarding the consequences of their sins, he made another promise, and it was actually to Satan of all beings: "I will put enmity [open hostility] between you [Satan] and the woman, and between your offspring[, Satan, your followers,] and hers; he [the offspring of the woman] will crush your [Satan's] head, and you [Satan] will [only] strike his heel." (Genesis 3:15) God promised that he would raise up an offspring from the woman, from Eve, who would crush the lying devil so that people would belong to God.

How long would Adam and Eve have to wait for this son who would crush the head of the devil? At least 9 months? But it was more. Cain was not it. Abel was not it. It was neither of their two sons that we hear about first. Year after year went by with the promise still being just a promise, just words. Would God ever do it? Will he keep his Word? Their trust in him was tested day after day.

God continued to reiterate his promise so that his people who had put their hope in his Word would know that he hadn't forgotten and that he was still going to keep his promise. Thousands of years passed. More and more promises were made about this offspring of the woman who would crush the serpent's head. Then it happened.

"Lord, you promised through the prophet Micah that this offspring of the woman would be born in Bethlehem, the town of King David." And so at just the right time, using a pagan, polytheistic Roman emperor who thought himself to be divine, who thought he was just giving a census to figure out how much tax money he could get from his subjects, the Lord had Joseph and Mary leave their own town of Nazareth to go to their town of ancestry, to Bethlehem. God used the governments of the time to keep the promise he had made. Truly, the government was on his shoulders.

"Lord, you promised through the prophet Nathan that the offspring of the woman would come from David's family line." And so when the time was just right, God selected Mary and Joseph, both being descendants of the great King David, to bring this firstborn son into the world.

"Lord, you promised through the prophet Isaiah that this offspring of the woman would be born of a virgin." So, God, when the time was just right, had a virgin conceive. He did not use natural methods, but supernatural ones. What was conceived in her was from God, not from a husband's will, not from Joseph. Very purposefully Joseph had not consummated their marriage, knowing that the son conceived in Mary was from God and he wanted no one to confuse and think he was the father.

"Lord, you promised through Isaiah that this offspring of the woman would not have beauty or majesty to attract us to him." Mary gave birth to Jesus, wrapped him in swaddling cloths just like anyone would do for any newborn in that day. Had Jesus been born today and put in a hospital nursery, you would not be able to tell him apart from the other babies. He looked ordinary, just like every other kid. That's exactly what the shepherds found that night, exactly as God had promised them through the angel.

"Lord, you promised through Isaiah that this offspring of the woman would be Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, that he would reign forever, one whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." In other words, God, you promised that this offspring of the woman was God from all eternity, no beginning, no end, the Immanuel (the God with us), Creator of the universe now in human flesh. That is exactly what the angel told us had happened when he declared to the shepherds, "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord." (verse 11) This one, this child who doesn't look any different from any other baby born that day, is God in the flesh, just as he promised.

"Lord, you promised through the angel Gabriel to Joseph that this offspring of the woman would be named Jesus, because he will save all people from their sins." That is exactly the name Mary and Joseph gave him. That is exactly who this Christ child is as the angel also declared, "I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you." (verses 10b-11a)

Here he is! This is the one you have been waiting for! The Savior of all! This is the offspring of the woman who crushes Satan! This is the one who takes away the sins of the world – my sins, your sins. This is the one who lived and suffered in our place and so forgives every promise that we have ever broken. This is our Savior, exactly as God promised.

Lord, you promised. You promised, and you delivered. We once thought that you wouldn't make good on your promises, but truly, you always do. With the birth of the Christ child and all these promises fulfilled about him, we know that "the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight." (CW 65:1) We know God always keeps his Word to us. If we ever say to God with tears in our eyes, "You promised," they will be tears of joy and gladness because he always comes through for us. "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." (verse 14)

Our Savior has come, just as God promised. May we return, like the shepherds did, to marvel again and again in all the promises that God has kept to us and for us. May we return to hear his promises over and over again so that we have a sure and certain hope of what God will do for us. Lord, you promised, and you delivered: "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Christ, the Lord." (verse 11) Thank you for this most wonderful Christmas gift. Amen.