

A Christmas Promise Kept

Luke 2:11 (NIV)

"Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord."

"I'll be home for Christmas. You can plan on me." It's a Christmas classic sung by the one and only Bing Crosby. As I look around here tonight, I can only imagine how many of you had these words come true for you. I can see it with the extra family members sitting with you and by the big smiles on your faces. It is probably the best Christmas gift you could have gotten for someone this year – just being home with them for Christmas.

God made the first Christmas promise all the way back near the beginning of time, when the first two people, Adam and Eve, were in the Garden of Eden. They had just fallen for the devil's deceitful proposition. Adam and Eve had chosen to rebel and disobey God. Before any punishment is announced, instead of getting angry and yelling at them, the very first thing he says is a promise to send an offspring, a son, from the woman who will crush the devil's head and rescue all people from the devil's clutches.

To Abraham, the father of the Jewish people, God promised that all nations would be blessed through him and his offspring. To his great-grandson Judah, God promised that the ruling scepter would never depart from his family tree. To David, pretty much the greatest king of Israel, God promised would build David a house, a dynasty, through his family line.

Through the prophets of old, God continued to add details about this coming male offspring of the woman. He would be born of a virgin in the town that David came from, in Bethlehem. "The government will be on his shoulders." (Isaiah 9:6) "Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end." (Isaiah 9:7) "He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:6) He will be called "Immanuel" – meaning "God with us." God promised us, before Christmas was even a thing, that he would be home for Christmas. You can plan on him.

Many of you are happy tonight because you are surrounded by family and friends, but who here had a Christmas promise broken to them? Did you yourself make a Christmas promise that you didn't or couldn't keep? What stopped you from keeping your promise? Was it work? Weather? Finances? Death of a loved one? Did you forget? Did you fail to keep your promise or did someone fail in the promise that they made to you?

Maybe by tomorrow morning you might find other Christmas promises not kept. Maybe someone won't be able to make it in when they had planned. Maybe that toy that you asked for, that Mom and Dad assured you would come, never actually shows up. Maybe you were unable to get that gift you promised your spouse. Maybe an emergency will come up and you will have to break your Christmas promise of simply being home.

How long do you wait for a promise to be kept before you give up on it? I remember one such time. Now, let me preface this by saying that I love my brother. He's a good man, and I respect him. He's my older brother; I looked up to him growing up. He's influenced a lot of my interests. He lives in Tennessee with his wife, and would come back home to Wisconsin to visit at least once a year. One time when I was in high school, he was coming up and I asked him to bring a copy of the video game that we both really enjoyed growing up. Once he arrived, I was cautious to ask about it because I didn't want to be the pesky younger brother who just wants stuff from his siblings. I did actually care that he was home and that I could spend time with him.

A day or so into his visit, I asked him. He told me that the game was at the bottom of his suitcase but that he would get it for me before he left. That answer sufficed. I didn't bug him about it again until the night before he was leaving. I asked, and he assured me that he would get it out and leave it for me before he left.

Then the next day came. He got into his car, and started heading back to Tennessee. I asked my Mom if he had left the video game for me. She said no. I explained that he said he had brought it with him and was going to leave it for me. My Mom even offered to drive and try to catch up to him because he was going to get gas before leaving town. I politely declined her very loving and generous offer. That's when I realized that I had given up on the promise.

I don't know that I ever asked my brother if he had actually brought the game along with him or not on that visit. I put the best construction on it and decided that if he had brought it along, he honestly forgot to leave it for me. Maybe he had forgotten altogether but didn't have the heart to tell me and see me disappointed. Whatever the reason actually was, it doesn't matter. It was

only a video game, and I still love my brother. But the point of the story is to answer that very real question: when do you give up on promises?

For people who put their trust in God before the very first Christmas, how did they keep their hope in the promise alive? Generation after generation after generation came and went with no male offspring of the woman arriving to save the world. Occasionally believers received a little bit more to the promise and a little bit more was revealed, but how can anyone keep trusting in a promise that is seemingly never kept?

Are you still waiting on a promise to be kept for you? Are you still waiting on God to make good on what he said to you? Is your faith in him dormant because you don't see the promises being kept? Is your faith hanging by a thread because he just hasn't come through for you?

A promise is just words until the person actually does what they said that they were going to do. It's easy to give up on words. When someone promises something to us at a certain time, we give up on it when the time has come and gone. I gave up on the promise of the video game from my brother on that trip when his trip was over and he left. The time frame had come and gone, and there was no video game. However, if my brother had simply said that I will get that to you, but never specified when, then I could still expect that one day I would receive it. Now, granted, about 20 years have passed. But if the game would show up in a package, then my brother would have kept his promise. Then I would be the one at fault for giving up on him on keeping his promise.

God didn't specify in his promises the exact time when his Son would be born of the virgin. Certainly there were signs and God gave many prophecies and details on the fact that it was going to happen. This is where faith comes in. Faith hopes and trusts even when the circumstances seem to say that it's never going to happen, that I should just give up and call it a failed Christmas promise. But faith, given to us by God, continues to trust even when we think we should give up.

Faith in God is trust well placed. The day came when God's promise was finally kept. The virgin was with child. "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." (Luke 2:7) An angel of the Lord appeared to shepherds who were keeping watch over their flocks at night. The glory of the Lord shone around them. The shepherds were terrified! But the angel calmed them, "Do not be afraid. 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; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." (Luke 2:10-12)

Wait, what? A Savior has been born for us? A Savior born in the town of David, in Bethlehem? He is the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Christ? He is God?! He has finally come! We have waited thousands of years for this, but now he has come to earth and made it his home for Christmas! God keeps his promises! You can plan on him.

For those who never gave up on God fulfilling his promise, they were rewarded. "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord." (verse 11) The male offspring was born of the woman. He is the Savior, born in the town God said he would be. He was born of a virgin, a completely impossible situation, but God made it happen. He is the one who was coming to crush the head of the devil. By his coming he freed us from his clutches so that we would belong to him and be saved.

God kept his Christmas promise. This means that God will keep all his promises to you as well. You can plan on him. If God has not specified a time of when he would keep his promise to you, don't give up on him. Instead, trust him. Trust him to always come through and do what he has said that he will do. He gave us the offspring, born of the woman, born in the town he said he would. That child is the one appointed to take our sins away. He is our Savior. Rejoice with the angels and with the shepherds. God keeps his Christmas promises. "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord." (verse 11) Amen.