

December 26, 2021

"The Lord Keeps His Promise"
Lesson 4 of UnitLuke 1:46-55
Luke 2:1-7**Intro**

The lessons for the last three weeks have focused on God's covenant promise to Abraham, from Genesis 12, 15, and 22. In each of these chapters, God promises to make Abraham a great nation, and that all nations would be blessed through him.

Since God made this covenant with Abraham, over 2000 years have passed until we get to Mary and Joseph. No doubt many in Israel are thinking, "I don't see this promise of God coming true anytime soon!" Israel has become a large nation, but centuries of political turmoil and idolatry have resulted in the nation being sent into exile and being dominated by foreign nations.

Now, God's ultimate plan for the fulfillment of this covenant promise is about to take place. It may seem like a long time coming from a human perspective, but God always keeps His promise.

The first part of today's study is Mary's hymn of praise, following Elizabeth's (John the Baptist's mother) praise of God and her blessing of Mary and her child. The second part is Luke's account of how Jesus' birth came about.

Read Luke 1:46-55

1. vs. 46: Mary begins with praising God

"My soul glorifies (some versions say "magnifies") the Lord

Mary's first response to Elizabeth's praise is to follow in praising God's goodness

2. vs. 47: Her second thought is to rejoice "in God my Savior"

A savior is obviously one who rescues another from difficulties

One thing Mary may be thinking of here is God's rescuing Elizabeth from barrenness

The concept of a Savior and what He will do is echoed many times in this passage

Most noticeable are the things He does which seem impossible to humans

3. vs. 48: Two things of note come out of this passage

First, Mary's humility stands out

She recognizes that she is someone lowly in society

She is also humble before God, calling herself "His servant"

Why should God choose her for anything so special as this?

Second, Mary realizes the historical significance of this call of God on her life

"From now on, all generations will call me blessed"

She has been given a position unique among all women for all time

4. vs. 49: Mary uses the term "Mighty One" to describe God

This term highlights God's use/display of power

She again acknowledges how God has particularly blessed her

5. vs. 50: Mary adds an important element of God's total character here
She praises God for His mercy "from generation to generation"
God shows this mercy "to those who fear Him"
 This "fear" means awe and respect
Respect for God is for all His characteristics
He is mighty, but He also has shown mercy to His people for generations
He made a promise to be faithful to the covenant He made with Abraham
Mary, a descendant of Abraham, is now present as this promise is being fulfilled
6. vs. 51: A key teaching of Christianity is that God does things counter to how man would do them
The next several verses deal with "the last shall be first" idea (see Matt. 19:30)
Here, the proud "in their inmost thoughts" are scattered
 These are ones who see themselves as better, even if they don't say so
 God scatters them—they don't get rewarded by Him
 People like Herod and the Wise Men fit this pattern
 Herod had man's pride, and sought to keep his kingdom through force
 The Wise Men laid aside pride, and sought the newborn king
7. vs. 52: This verse has both a past and a future application
God has "brought down rulers" and "lifted up the humble" in the past
 Think of Saul and David
This idea is also true of the future
 Jesus humbled Himself to die as a human to save mankind
 God exalts Him for humbling Himself
These two concepts are typical of how God deals with humanity
8. vs. 53: In the ancient world, and at times today also, people see wealth as a sign of God's favor
Here, the opposite ideas are being used
The hungry are being filled, but the rich are sent away empty
In either extreme, rich or poor, the contents of the heart matter to God
 The rich aren't rejected by God for their wealth
 The poor aren't accepted because of their lack of wealth
This verse reminds us why Mary was chosen to bear God's Son
 She has a heart that is in tune with God's
 Her lack of money disqualifies her by the world's standards, but not God's
9. vs. 54: Two qualities of God are mentioned here
He "remembers" and He is merciful
God keeps His promises by doing something to lead to their fulfillment
 He is ever-mindful of His covenant and of leading His people toward it
God's mercy / help is described as being for "His servant Israel"
God is seeking to bless not just Mary (who is praising God here)
 He always seeks to bless the entire nation

10. vs. 55: The Jews see themselves as Abraham's descendants, physically and spiritually
The promise is "to Abraham and his descendants *forever*"
All who follow God in faith, as Abraham did, are Abraham's descendants
That includes we who place our faith in Christ today

Read Luke 2:1-7

11. vs. 1: The story has moved forward from Mary's praise while pregnant to her time of delivery
Caesar Augustus has ordered a census of his kingdom, the Roman world
This happens just at the time that Mary is about to deliver Jesus
12. vs. 2: This verse describes when the census took place
There is some dispute about the dates/times of the census compared to Quirinius
Here's the key things:
Nothing in the Bible has been proven false by worldly sources
There have been things that haven't been fully validated by them yet
Since the rest of Jesus' life is established by both Biblical and non-biblical sources,
this "dispute" is minor to those who accept the Bible's proven truthfulness
This verse shows Rome at the height of its power, ordering a census
God is not stopped by worldly power; He brings His Son into the world as He wills
13. vs. 3: People have to return to their ancestral homes to register for the census
This would be like us returning to the county where we were born
This is where the official court documents would be kept
14. vs. 4-5: Joseph is from Bethlehem, the place where King David was from
Joseph isn't Jesus' biological father, he is Jesus' legal father
This fulfills the promise in 2 Sam. 7:16 that David's heir would reign forever
God directs human events to fulfill OT prophecy (Micah 5:2)
This prophecy caused people to doubt Jesus, as it was known He was from Nazareth
15. vs. 6-7: Joseph is from Bethlehem, so he likely has family/relatives still living there
People then didn't move from hometowns as much as we do here and now
The word "inn" refers to the house
There was no room in any relative's house
Many people had come back for the census
Luke's account here doesn't specifically mention the place where Jesus was born
In Luke 2, the angels tell the shepherd where to find the Christ child
He will be lying in a manger
A manger is a feed trough for animals, so Jesus was born where the animals are
Mangers were made of scrap wood, and were dirty
Jesus, God's Son and our Savior, was born in the most unexpected way
He was born in the lowliest of places, in complete humility

Application: Jesus is God's fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham centuries before. But notice how unusual (from a human perspective) this fulfillment was. He was born to an unknown, lower-class girl in a place where the animals rested, and laid in a manger. He gets visited by shepherds, even lower-class than the girl who gave birth. As He grew, He wasn't a warrior to drive out the Gentiles. He wasn't anything like people at the time thought the Messiah would be.

This is typical of how God works in dealing with humanity. He does things in ways completely different than we expect, or how we would do them ourselves. We think, "Get back at the one who caused you pain", and He says, "Love your enemies and pray for them." The Jews thought the Messiah would be an earthly king who would drive out the Romans. Instead, He came as a heavenly king who taught people God's truth, and who came to sacrifice himself for a people without understanding so they could be reconciled to God.

Prayer: Father God, thank You that You always keep the promises you made, and are faithful to them. Help us to be patient as You work out Your plans for us, and for this world. Thank You again for Jesus, who reminds us what true humility is. In Jesus' name, Amen.