

**HOPE: THE LORD IS WITH YOU****Luke 1:26-38****(Read Luke 1:26-38)**

**Intro:** Look at your bulletin cover – The Hebrew word **אֱמָנוּאֵל (Immanuel)** which means “God with us” is there. That’s a word you hear a lot at Christmas time – especially if you’re a Christ Follower. It’s what Isaiah prophesied would be the name of the one who would come as a deliverer for the people of God. (Isaiah 7:14). Our text says that Mary was to name this same son a very common name. It would be Jesus, which means “God is salvation”, because indeed that **IS** what he is.

On this first Sunday of Advent, we look at the hope we have because Jesus came into humanity. In uncertain times, when chaos threatens, we can be encouraged that Jesus is with us. When Mary was troubled by the words of the angel, she could take comfort in Immanuel. When we are troubled and even fearful, we need only to remember the reality that Immanuel is born. Truly, the Lord is with us.

Facebook has kind of messed up the Christmas card industry. The other day my niece posted this “*I can’t remember who all I send Christmas cards to, who wants one this year?*”. I didn’t raise my hand. It’s not that I don’t like Christmas cards, I just figure if I can help save a tree or two by not getting as many of them, I should step up and do my part. I can just go online at any given time for the next several weeks and send out our Christmas greeting. Actually we do send cards and letters, but it’s true that our ability to say Merry Christmas online has vastly expanded the number of people who receive it across the world.

I do enjoy catching up with those who aren’t as computer savvy or, maybe, simply refuse to be pulled into the online quicksand. They’re the ones that I hear from just once a year when I get their newsy Christmas letter. I just received such a letter from our friend, June, who has been a dear friend for more than 40 years since our Navajo Mission days. We touch base a time or two through the year by email, but her Christmas letter is always welcome in our family. Her letter was bittersweet – she’s doing well, but she misses her husband who died two years ago. She’s retired now, but she keeps busy and her determination to be Jesus makes her one of my heroes.

From what I read as I began this talk, we know that Mary got a Christmas greeting some 2000 years ago. She didn’t get an online greeting, of course, but it certainly came special delivery. The word angel is derived from the Greek for “messenger”. The angel Gabriel appeared to her with the word of God himself – and his words were disconcerting to say the least – I mean how would you feel if a heavenly being suddenly appeared said you are highly favored and that the Lord was with you? Well, the message is ours, nevertheless. Christ came as a baby to the Virgin Mary, but in reality, He came for us all, and He came as Immanuel, God with us. That is reason for great hope and I’ll list them for you:

**We have hope because God knows our status (Luke 1:26-28)**

- Before Gabriel showed up, Mary was just a girl, not insignificant because she was no doubt cherished by her parents and certainly by the man to whom she was engaged – Joseph. A couple weeks ago I talked about the way women were viewed in 1<sup>st</sup> century society and I pointed out that while a woman was to be loved and cherished, she was essentially the property of her father or her husband. So this is what Mary was, a young lady, destined to be what society dictated. But God knew her. And He knew where she lived in Nazareth; a rough, cross-road town where travelers and freight from Jerusalem and points east and south travelled to the port cities of Tyre and Sidon on the Mediterranean. He knew Mary’s name, He knew her personality, and most importantly, God knew Mary to be a willing and obedient servant.
- In the same way as with Mary, God knows who we are and what we deal with day to day. He knows where we live – most of us live in a crossroad between two bigger, more “significant” cities named Columbus and Cleveland. He knows our character. God even knows our ambitions and regrets. He knows us so well, not because He’s some creepy, cosmic stalker, but because He loves us. And because of that, He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to be with us bring to all the hope of eternal life. So He didn’t come to this earth to leave us alone, instead He sent Jesus to the earth in the form of Mary’s baby boy in order to meet us right where we are today. So never fear because . . .

**We have hope because God knows our fears (Luke 1:29-30)**

- Mary was troubled by Gabriel’s greeting. Wouldn’t you be? Just put yourself in Mary’s sandals, what would you think? Just one experience like that, and everything would be different. Yes, Mary was troubled – and with good reason.

- By the time Gabriel finished his announcement, Mary was scared – she had to be. That’s what “*greatly troubled*” means. She would be carrying God’s Son in her womb. From our perspective, that might seem exciting, after all, that’s quite an honor. But for Mary, and even Joseph, it could mean death. That’s what Jewish law dictated as the punishment for the unfaithfulness of a virgin engaged to be married. At the very least it meant shame for her family and certain ruin for Mary. So God wasn’t surprised by Mary’s emotions and the predictable reactions of others.
- Now, what troubles you? What leaves you emotionally wiped out? What makes you question God’s timing? Do you feel He is interrupting your life in an inconvenient and insensitive manner?
- He knows your fears, and because of that, you are not alone. You can count on the fact that He’s working things out in a way that you can’t see just as He did by sending an angel to Joseph (Let me read Matthew 1:20-21). He also encouraged Mary with Elizabeth’s response when Mary came to visit her (Let me read Luke 1:41-45). God knows our fears and he sends just in time encouragements to help us through them. And that’s why . . .

### **We have hope because God knows our purpose (Luke 1:31-33)**

- The purpose God had for Mary went like this was all laid out:
  1. You will become pregnant by the Holy Spirit;
  2. You will give birth to a Son;
  3. You are to give Him the name, Jesus;
  4. You and all will know that He will be great;
  5. You and all will know He will be called the Son of the Most High;
  6. You and all will know that the Lord God will give Him David’s throne;
  7. You and all will know that He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and
  8. You and all will eventually know that His kingdom will never, ever end.
- The plan was perfect. The purpose was obvious. Would that it be that simple for us. But then again really, was it simple in reality? Those 8 steps are a picture of God’s salvation that is available to all who will receive what has been in process for all of human history.
- And God had a purpose for each step of Jesus’s life here:
  1. He came as a baby
  2. He was baptized
  3. He taught
  4. He sweated drops of blood in Gethsemane
  5. He went to the Cross
  6. He arose
  7. He returned to the Father so the Holy Spirit would come
  8. And he is coming again
- As we read on into the next chapter as the Christmas story progresses, we see that everything is being directed by the hand of God. Caesar unwittingly became an instrument of God by commanding Joseph and Mary’s presence in Bethlehem for the census. This fulfilled the Old Testament prophecy regarding the place of the Messiah’s birth. It all fit God’s perfect purposes.
- God obviously knew then and still knows what He is doing. Isaiah says that His ways are not our ways, (Isaiah 55:8) but He desires our ways to follow His ways. Mary did. We can.
- So really, why do we question what God is doing in or through our lives? Mary would tell you that God knows what He is doing and needs faithful servants to carry out His purposes. But just in case . . .

### **We have hope because God knows our doubts (Luke 1:34-36)**

- Think about the doubts Mary and Joseph legitimately would have carried when hearing all of this from Gabriel:
  - Mary was a virgin. How was she going to “*...be with child?*” I’ve already pointed out this could have fatal ramifications, not to mention the damage to reputation which would plague the family for life.

- Mary was too young and inexperienced to be the Son of God's earthly mother. Truthfully, is anyone ever ready for this? And Mary was literally just a girl.
- This was quite literally not in their plans – they had a far different plan that included a wedding and THEN having babies in a timely fashion. Mary and Joseph were good people – they did things right, and in the right order. They had a right to wonder what was going on.
- What doubts do you have today? Do you doubt God's plan? Do you doubt your future serving Him? Do you have doubts about tomorrow? He's ready to hear what they are. Yes, he already knows what they are, but when you voice them to him it helps you to clarify in your own mind. God's not afraid of your doubts – tell him. This will be a confidence builder and then remember . . .

**We have hope because God can do the impossible (Luke 1:37-38)**

- Mary was ready for the impossible – to be a virgin and give birth to God's Son, Jesus. People struggle with this fact, but really, can the Creator not intervene in His own creation to bring about His purposes?
- The virgin birth is just one of the powerful facts in Christian belief that demonstrate God's impossible, miraculous power. If the virgin birth didn't take place, there is no perfect Savior. There is no forgiveness of sin. There is no possibility of living a holy life. Without the virgin birth, there is no eternity in heaven. God is a God of the impossible. After all, do we mean what we say when we sing, "*What a mighty God we serve*"? or are we just mouthing words.

**Conclusion:** So as we wrap this up let me ask some questions:

- What is impossible in your life today? God is the God of the impossible.
- Can you get yourself to the position of Mary's willing heart even though God's ways of doing things are not making sense at the moment? Are you able to respond, "*I am the Lord's servant, may your word to me be fulfilled.*"?
- Are you placing your hope in yourself or in God? If it is the former, you have reason for doubt and fear, but if you place your hope in the living God, you can have assurance He will never leave you or forsake you,
- Gabriel may have left Mary when his message was complete, but because of her son who was born, God has never left us.
- Immanuel The Lord is with us. He didn't just come to Mary or a choice few. He has come for all who will believe! Amen.