



# FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

BOWLING GREEN | WHERE FAITH & LIFE MEET



**FEAR  
NOT**

**“Fear Not: There Is Hope”**

**Luke 1:26-38**

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**Sunday, November 29, 2020**

**Sermon Link: <https://bit.ly/3o7D2qd>**

Christmas always seems to crash into the flow of life with a vengeance. Here we are, still full from our Thanksgiving meals, and the Christmas season is already in full swing. Black Friday has come and gone, and many people are now already feeling like they’re behind on their Christmas shopping. Families are thinking through gatherings (whether in-person, virtual, or not at all this year), children are making lists and checking them way more than twice, and twinkling lights are popping up all over town. Christmas time *was* coming; now it’s here.

That’s very similar to the way the first Christmas came upon the earth. Let’s travel back a little more than two millennia ago to the land of Israel. It has been 400 years since the people of God have heard from God. There has been no prophet, so there has been no communication from God. They’ve held to the Torah, the Writings, and the Prophets, and they’ve endured through persecution and revolt. They’ve seen the rise of superstition, sectarianism, and in-fighting even among their own people. They’ve seen the rise of Rome, and they are currently paying taxes to the Roman government to live in the land that God had called their own. Things are not going well for God’s people. In the middle of it all, a young girl named Mary is pledged to be married to Joseph, and they are preparing to build their life together. Then, out of nowhere, a messenger of God appears...

As we walk through the Advent season this year, we know how the story goes. Mary will become great with child by the Holy Spirit, and the precious baby to be born to her will be called holy, the Son of the Most High God. Joseph will struggle to accept the narrative at first, but that’s nothing an angelic visitation won’t be able to fix. Rome will call for a census right as Mary is nearing the end of her term, and she and Joseph will be forced to go to the little town of Bethlehem to register with the functional equivalent of the Roman Internal Revenue Service. There will be no room for them in the inn. The baby will be born in a stable and laid in a manger (i.e., feeding trough), and some shepherds on a hill nearby will get the shock of their lives:

**Luke 2:8-11** - <sup>8</sup> And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup> And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. <sup>10</sup> And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. <sup>11</sup> For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

Of course, the shepherds must have been frightened by the angel, but I believe the message began with “fear not” for far greater reasons – reasons we will explore this Advent season.

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I believe the angel's message began with "fear not" because of the content of the second sentence the angel spoke – "unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." Let's think through this weighty sentence.

**"Unto you..."** – The angel has appeared to shepherds keeping watch over their flocks by night. They are common, everyday people just doing their jobs. They are not members of the Sanhedrin. They are not the teachers of Israel. They are not the wise and learned theologians of the day. Frankly, in terms of their community, they are not of any great consequence at all. They are shepherds, just watching their sheep. The angel appears to them, because in Jesus Christ, God was coming to people—everyday people—all people. Jesus was coming to open the way to God to all who would come to Him, and God strategically called these shepherds to be the first human beings to worship the Savior and the first human beings to share the good news of Jesus' birth. "Unto you," the angel said. Which you? All of you.

**"...has been born this day..."** – The people hadn't heard from God in 400 years, but even though He had been silent, God was still moving. When the shepherds received the good news of Jesus' birth, God had been preparing Mary, growing Jesus, redirecting Joseph, and even knitting together John the Baptist in the previously childless womb of Mary's relative Elizabeth. God had been up to a lot, so when the news reached the shepherds, they could know that God's movement was a very current event.

**"...in the city of David..."** – Why in the city of David? Because God had said that's where it would happen, more than 700 years before this night. Through Micah, God said, "But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days" (Micah 5:2). The prophecy is being fulfilled right now.

**"...a Savior..."** – God is giving you One to help you, to rescue you, to save you. The Deliverer has arrived.

**"...who is Christ..."** – The One born to you this night is the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One of God. The One who was promised beginning in Genesis 3:15—the seed of woman who would be bruised by the serpent but who would crush its head—and all throughout the Old Testament in more than 300 prophecies, has come.

**"...the Lord"** – You're currently under the thumb of Rome, and you've been told that Caesar is Lord. In fact, you've had to actually speak the words, "Caesar is Lord," in order to stay out of trouble with the Romans. But even saying those words is a direct affront to your deepest convictions, because your God has told you not to put anyone or anything else before Him. Tonight, the angel is telling you that the Lord—the *true* Lord—has come.

In the context of this weighty sentence, the angel says, "Fear not!" God has come to you. He is currently moving among you. He is fulfilling prophecy right now. He has come to save you. His Anointed One is here. He is the Lord! Fear not!

Over the course of the next several weeks, we will see that in this Jesus, who is both Christ and Lord, we receive hope, peace, joy, love, and salvation. Welcome to the Advent season. Fear not!

**Big Idea – Fear Not! There is hope in Jesus Christ.**

## 1. Hope begins with the presence of the Lord (1:26-28).

*<sup>26</sup> In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" (Luke 1:26-28).*

We don't know exactly where Mary was, and we don't know exactly what Mary was doing when God's angel visited her. We know she was in her hometown—a little, insignificant town that was apparently looked upon with disdain by those from other regions (see John 1:46). Mary was young, she was pledged to be married, and she was likely just going about her normal daily routine. Nothing extraordinary. Just the usual stuff. Then God's messenger showed up.

When Gabriel arrives, he greets Mary and says two very specific things to her. First, she is favored. Second, the Lord is with her. The two statements are deeply related. The word translated "favored one" comes from the Greek *charitoo*, which means "to make graceful, to endow with grace." Properly, the word means "highly favored as a result of being receptive to God's grace." This word appears only twice in the New Testament (also in Ephesians 1:6), and in both cases, the word connotes a sense of God extending Himself to freely bestow grace. In Ephesians, Paul is discussing how God has lavished His grace upon us through Jesus Christ. Here, Gabriel is telling Mary that she is the recipient of God's grace.

In Ephesians, God is communicating through the pen of the Apostle Paul that God has adopted us as sons through Christ and that God has guaranteed our inheritance by the presence of the Holy Spirit in us – and the inheritance is the presence of God Himself. We are favored, because we have received God's grace, which assures us that we will always be in God's presence. Mary is favored, because God has extended to her His grace, whereby she dwells in His presence. The Lord is with her. That's favor.

Hope begins in the presence of the Lord. Gabriel, an angel who stands in the presence of God Himself (see Luke 1:19), tells Mary that she is favored and that the Lord is with her. Mary is favored principally *because* the Lord is with her. In God's gracious and loving presence, there is always hope.

After Moses died, God commanded Joshua to lead His people into the Promised Land. Joshua was understandably nervous, as he had assisted Moses for many years but had never been the tip of the spear. To encourage him, God spoke a very specific message to him: "Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you" (Joshua 1:5). His next words to Joshua were a command to "be strong and courageous" (Joshua 1:6), and Joshua could obey that command only because the Lord was with him. Because the Lord would not leave him nor forsake him, he could dwell in the hope that God would empower him to accomplish the task to which God was calling him.

Just before Jesus ascended into Heaven, He commissioned His disciples to carry the gospel message to the ends of the earth. He called them to an impossible task, but He accompanied His call with a promise that they could dwell in hope that God would empower them to accomplish the task to which God was calling them: "...And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

The Lord is with Mary, and when God is there, hope is there. If you're in Christ, the Lord is with you, so you can have hope!

### Questions for Reflection / Discussion:

How does God's presence with you give you hope for today and strength for tomorrow?

## 2. Hope rests on the assurance that God has a plan (1:29-33).

*29 But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. 30 And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end"* (Luke 1:29-33).

Luke records that "[Mary] was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be" (Luke 1:29). I'm sure this is a profound understatement. Can you imagine the scene? The angel Gabriel has appeared to Mary and shared with her that she has found favor with God. I bet she had heard Gabriel's name before, perhaps from her relative Elizabeth, who had received her own visit from Gabriel. Maybe she remembered Gabriel from the book of Daniel, to whom Gabriel revealed the meaning of the prophetic vision he had seen and declared to him that his prayers had been heard. Gabriel is one of two unfallen angels named in the Bible, and now, he is telling Mary that she is favored and the Lord is with her. Of course Mary is troubled. This sort of visitation doesn't happen every day.

Gabriel continues by telling Mary that she has found favor with God. The word he uses in the Greek is *charis*, which means grace. Mary is the recipient of God's grace, which is the very definition of receiving God's favor. In His grace, God looks favorably upon Mary. What a joy! Now for the details...

Gabriel tells Mary that she will bear a son whose name shall be called Jesus. Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua (literally Jehoshua), which means "Yahweh saves." The very name of this child would speak to His divine purpose to provide salvation for God's people by God's mighty hand. Furthermore, Gabriel tells Mary that Jesus will be called the Son of the Most High, a name ascribed to God first in Genesis 14:18 (*Elyon*). He will be given the throne of his father David (thereby fulfilling the Davidic covenant communicated in 2 Samuel 7), and His reign shall know no end.

What has God just communicated to Mary through Gabriel? He has a plan, and it is unfolding. God's plan that is prophesied throughout the Old Testament is coming to fruition, and Mary will be a key player in it all. She will bear the Son of God, the One whose kingdom and reign will know no end. God has a plan, and it's being enacted before her very eyes.

Most of us are familiar with Jeremiah 29:11, in which God communicates through the prophet Jeremiah to His people who are in exile in Babylon: "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope." We also know that God has plans for Jeremiah before He even formed him in the womb, for He told him, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5). We can infer from this evidence that, if God had a plan for Jeremiah and for His people, He has plans for us, too. After all, Psalm 139:16 tells us that "[God's] eyes saw my unformed substance; in [God's] book were written, every one of them, all the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them."

Just as God had a plan for Jeremiah's life, for Israel's lives, and for Mary's life, He has a plan for your life. God is acutely aware of and active in what's going on in your life. He has a plan, so you can have hope.

### Questions for Reflection / Discussion:

God has plans for your life. He really does. How does this truth give you hope today?

### 3. Hope grows as God illustrates that, with Him, the impossible is probable (1:34-37).

<sup>34</sup> And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” <sup>35</sup> And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. <sup>36</sup> And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. <sup>37</sup> For nothing will be impossible with God” (Luke 1:34-37).

Mary had questions. Actually, she just had one question, but it was a big one. “Umm, there’s a prerequisite to what you’ve shared that I haven’t yet met. How is this going to work?” Gabriel gladly explains.

“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). Jesus will be the Son of God, and because God will literally be His Father, He will be both fully human and fully divine. He will not be stained with the sinful nature passed down by Adam, but He will live without sin in any form. He will be the better Adam, the One who stands firm in righteousness over against all temptation. Whereas Adam’s disobedience to God made mankind to be sinners, Jesus’ perfect obedience to God will result in many being made righteous (see Romans 5:12-21).

So a virgin will conceive by the Holy Spirit and bear the Son of God, who will reign forevermore. He will bring salvation from the very hand of God. In the words of Mark Lowry, “the child that you deliver will soon deliver you.” Salvation is coming, Mary, and it’s coming through you. Incidentally, Gabriel says, you know your relative who has struggled with infertility so long that she’s just given up all hope that she’ll ever have a baby? Yeah, she’s getting ready to enter her third trimester. How? Nothing is impossible for God. Nothing.

Do you remember when Jesus was teaching His disciples about how hard it is for the rich to enter the Kingdom of Heaven? He had just finished talking with a rich young man about what it takes to inherit eternal life (the young man was unwilling to repent and therefore be saved), and He was explaining to His disciples how hard it is for those who have great wealth to be saved. Do you remember the story?

**Luke 18:24-26** - <sup>24</sup> Jesus, seeing that [the rich young man] had become sad, said, “How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! <sup>25</sup> For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” <sup>26</sup> Those who heard it said, “Then who can be saved?” <sup>27</sup> But he said, “What is impossible with man is possible with God.”

Jesus said, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God” (Luke 18:25). Some have said Jesus was referring to a small hole in the wall next to a gate in Jerusalem, but I think He was referring to a full-grown camel fitting through the eye of a sewing needle. He was communicating that it is absolutely impossible for the wealthy to be saved. His disciples understood that, because they asked, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus’ answer is profound: “What is impossible with man is possible with God” (Luke 18:27).

Do you ever tell God what He can and cannot do in your life? It’s not a good idea. Dwelling in hope means we surrender our limitations to His possibilities. To do that, we must humble ourselves in prayer, trust God with our whole hearts, and walk by faith, not by sight. With God, the impossible is probable, so you can have hope.

#### Questions for Reflection / Discussion:

How has God overcome the impossible in your life? How might He do so in days to come?

#### 4. Hope thrives in those who are willing to obey God, no matter what (1:38).

<sup>38</sup> And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her (Luke 1:38).

This one sentence reveals more about Mary's character than perhaps any other line she speaks anywhere in the Bible. The angel Gabriel has come to her with an impossible message from God. Mary asks one question (albeit a big one, but just the one), and then she expresses her complete and total willingness to obey God, no matter what. Her answer is yes, and the way she phrases her answer indicates that her answer was yes before God even asked the question.

Sometimes a sermon will stick with you beyond the moment of its delivery. I have just a few sermons that have had such a profound impact in my life that I can remember them vividly still today. One such sermon was preached by Chris Osborne at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 2014. Osborne was then the pastor of Central Baptist Church in College Station, Texas; he now teaches at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. In his sermon, Osborne made this statement:

"Here's what Jesus did.... He intentionally ran off the people that liked Him to find the people that believed in Him. There's a distinction. He didn't want the people that liked Him. He wanted the people that believed in Him. You're not a disciple because you cry during a song. You're not a disciple because you raise your hand when you sing. You're not a disciple because you buy a Beth Moore tape. You're a disciple when you come to a place where you so believe in the person of Jesus Christ, you don't care what He asks you to do, you don't care what He asks you to believe, you don't care how He phrases it, you're in. He ran off intentionally the people that liked Him, and He kept the people that believed in Him."

Mary was no fan of God; she was a follower of God. She had received His grace, and she was willing to obey Him, no matter what He called her to do. Her answer was "yes" before God even asked the question. She fundamentally identified herself as the Lord's servant, and she was willing to do whatever He wanted.

What is your relationship with Jesus? Do you like Him, or do you believe in Him? Are you a fan, or a follower? He's calling you to follow today.

#### Final Thought

When the angel appeared to the shepherds on the night of Jesus' birth, the message from God began with the words, "Fear Not!" The angel was communicating that God was moving in a way more amazing than anything anyone had ever heard of, and in God's movement, there was hope. When the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, he communicated hope. There was hope because the Lord was with her; there was hope because God had a plan; and there was hope because God makes the impossible probable. Mary was able to embrace that hope, because she was willing to obey God, no matter what.

If you are in Christ, God is communicating hope to you today. There is hope because the Lord is with you; there is hope because God has a plan; and there is hope because God makes the impossible probable. Do you, like Mary, embrace that hope by your willingness to obey God, no matter what? "I am the Lord's servant," Mary said. "Let it be to me according to your word." May we who trust and follow Jesus follow her example and thrive in hope.