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## Why Christmas is Still Merry: God's Got This!

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TEXT: Luke 1:26-38 (ESV)

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 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, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

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. 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. For nothing will be impossible with God." 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.

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Dear friends,

A few weeks ago, I was over at my daughter's house playing with my grandsons, Henry and Johnny. Henry's five and Johnny is three. These boys delight and surprise

me frequently with things they'll say. In the middle of our playing, Johnny said to me, "Papa, God's got this." I was somewhat taken aback by this announcement, which came out of the blue. And when I asked him, "Where did you learn that?" I found out that he had learned it in Sunday school with his brother Henry the weekend before. Because of this pandemic, they've been tuning in online to Sunday school together at the church. And the lesson that Sunday had been the rescue of Moses and the Israelites at the parting of the Red Sea. The theme for the day was, "God's got this." Quite appropriate, don't you think?

Well, "God's got this" strikes me as a good theme for today's passage as well. It marks the beginning of another rescue story, the birth of Jesus Christ, the savior of the world. The world needed rescuing. It was captive to the power of sin and death and the devil. And on the surface, it seemed the darkness was winning the battle and things looked rather hopeless. But lo and behold, we see in this story that God's coming to the rescue. We hear an announcement of a coming savior from this angel sent from God. His message is basically: "Mary, God's got this." In the Angel Gabriel's announcement to Mary, he reveals some startling news from God. And with this news, Mary would never be the same, and neither would the world.

Now, Mary was a young lady from Galilee. She was betrothed, or engaged as we call it, to a man named Joseph. We're also told that Joseph was one of the descendants of King David, Israel's greatest king. She's in the middle of an ordinary day doing the things that teens did in those days I suppose – maybe she was thinking about her upcoming wedding, who knows? But suddenly she finds herself face to face with this angel, a messenger from God who greets her in this way: "Greetings, oh favored one. God is with you." That title "favored one," we're about to find out, is about God's grace shown to Mary. He didn't say "greetings, lucky one" or "greetings, gifted one" or "deserving one." Mary has no special credentials for this calling upon her life. It's God's grace at work. And Gabriel also tells her God is with her, which normally would be great news. But Mary wasn't so sure about that. She's troubled now and wondered what the angel meant by all this. The angel sensed the apprehension and went on to explain:

You have found favor with God, Mary. He's chosen you and you're going to become pregnant and have a baby and you'll name him Jesus, [which means "God saves."] And He will fulfill God's promises to His people in the Old Testament. He'll be great, called the son of the most high, like a king – the Messiah that you've been waiting for. And the Lord will give to Him the throne

of His father, David. He's going to fulfill all of Israel's hopes and dreams of a king from the line of David, Israel's greatest king.

Now, God had promised King David, back in 2nd Samuel, that his throne would go forever. The people of Israel always wondered after the exile in Babylon if this was even a possibility anymore. Since the Kings had been put out of commission by the world powers like Babylon and then Persia and then the Greeks and the Romans, it all looked rather hopeless. They had hopes that God would come through for them, but the odds seem to be against that ever happening for Israel. But now we're told Israel's world is a bit of a mess, but God's got this. God is taking action, fulfilling his promises to King David. And this king, Gabriel says, will reign over the house of Jacob, which means Israel, forever. And His kingdom – there will be no end. We see Israel has a bright and everlasting future ahead, according to what Gabriel saying here, because this is no puppet king put in place by a foreign power – He will actually reign and He will reign forevermore. The angel's words remind me of the prophet Isaiah's words in chapter 9:

For to us a child is born, to us a Son is given. And the government shall be upon His shoulders, and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over His kingdom to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness, from this time forth and forevermore; the zeal of the Lord of Hosts will do this.

So Gabriel's message to Mary is basically: I know things haven't looked promising for Israel, but God's got this. When He promises something, it will happen. He always keeps His word. And He is still in charge of this world; it's His, He made it. He holds it in the palm of his hand.

Mary asks, "How will this be since I'm a virgin?" In other words, "I've never slept with a man." As a faithful Jewish woman, she was devoted to God's law and would never have had sexual intercourse with a man outside of marriage. Again, Gabriel explains, "No problem, Mary. God's got this. The Holy Spirit is going to come upon you." Now, that line reminds us of the Holy Spirit of God hovering over the waters in Genesis 1 in the creation. Or perhaps of the prophets were filled with the Holy Spirit, or Kings when they were anointed. But this is different. Jesus will be born of the Holy Spirit. And the power of the most high, meaning God, will overshadow you, Mary. This overshadowing signifies God's presence. And therefore, this child will be called "holy," which means pure, perfect; He's the son of God.

And the Angel says, “And here's some more evidence about what I'm saying is going to happen, your kins-woman Elizabeth, who is old and unable to bear children, is pregnant. Can you believe it? She's six months along now. You see, Mary, nothing will be impossible with God.” Wow, that's a reassuring and powerful statement to carry in your heart, isn't it? And Mary responds with faith, trust in submission to God, “I'm a servant of God, let it be to me according to your words.” Yes, I believe your message, she's saying, I don't quite understand it all, but I believe God is up to something big here and He wants me to be involved. I believe it. I believe that God's got this.

Well, that's still God's good news to us today in 2020, as we prepare to observe that first Christmas, the birth of Jesus, God says, “I've got this.” The world may appear to be dark and depressing and frightening and spinning totally out of control. And God says, Don't be afraid. I've got this. I made it. I redeemed it. It's still mine. I'm all powerful. I can do anything. I'm still at work. I have a plan and it's a glorious plan. It's all coming to a head. And in the end, you'll see that I had the last word over this world and over you. In trusting in Jesus you're mine and nothing can snatch you from my hand.

You might be feeling isolated and alone these days. The family isn't going to be together this year, the kids can't come to see you because of the risks due to the pandemic. You can't be with your mom or dad, perhaps, or grandma and grandpa this year in order to protect them and you from that virus. God says,

I know you feel alone, but I've got this, I am still with you. You are not facing these moments alone. Remember, Jesus is Emmanuel – God with us. I'll never leave you, never forsake you. You lean on me, talk to me. Let me speak to you through my sacred word as you read those gospels of Jesus Christ and you will see for yourself. You're not alone.

Someone listening to this message today might be facing terminal illness. Others of you perhaps might be people who are aged and, you know, you're nearing the end of your lifespan. Or you might even be someone younger than that that's had your eyes opened to your own mortality as you sit at a funeral or read of someone your age dying in the obituary section. And you try not to think about this too long; it makes you shiver because it makes you uneasy and afraid of the unknown. And God says to us today, Death? It's natural that you would hate the idea of death. I hate death, too – it's the enemy. But listen, I've got this. I've conquered the power of death through

Jesus, my son. He died on a cross, you know, but I raised him on the third day and He lives; and because He lives you shall live also, forever. Believe these words of Him who rose from the dead and said, "Let not your heart be troubled. You believe in God. Believe also in me. In my father's house here are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go and prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare that place for you, I'll come again and take you to myself; that where I am, you may be also."

Maybe you're someone who's miserable because there's some bad things happening in your life, you've perhaps made some wrong decisions and you're thinking things are impossible – it's an impossible lost cause. And God says,

I've got this. Impossible causes are my specialty. Remember the Red Sea parting, or the manna in the desert, or the virgin birth of my son, or the conversion of the apostle Paul, (who was the church's greatest enemy earlier and only become the greatest evangelist)? There's no one and nothing that is irredeemable in my sight. Nothing is impossible for me. I can make all things and every person new through Jesus, who came not to destroy, but to give life.

Come to Him, you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens, messy lives, and He'll give you a rest. Take His yoke upon you and learn from Him and discover that His yoke is easy and His burden is light because He knows what makes life work best.

Finally, maybe someone that's burdened with regrets and guilt. Thinking, "I've said and done things I'm sorry for, I wish I could take them back, but I think it's probably too late. There's no hope." The core message of Christmas is there is hope. Yes, you might be totally messed up and far from God, but God's got this. The Christmas message is that there is hope for a ruined humanity, hope of pardon, hope of peace with God, hope of glory. Because of the father's will, Jesus Christ became poor and was born in that stable so that 30 years later He might hang on a cross in a sacrifice for your sins and mine. Therefore, our relationship with God can be restored through faith in Christ.

And it's at this point of the message, I want you to pause and let me ask you: have you experienced these great realities I've just described – His love in your own life? Has Christ been born in your heart? Have you placed your trust in Him and received these great promises of God for your life? Christian writer Corrie ten Boom writes in a devotional article from years ago, "If Jesus were born one thousand times in Bethlehem and not in me, then I would still be lost." Has he been born in you? If not, ask Him in.

Make this the merriest Christmas you've ever had received, those promises make this a glorious, glorious Christmas week. I don't think we can truly fathom how much God loves us. I so appreciate the statement by Christian writer Max Lucado:

There are many reasons God saves you: to bring glory to himself, to appease his justice, to demonstrate his sovereignty. But one of the sweetest reasons God saved you is because he is fond of you. He likes having you around. He thinks you are the best thing to come down the pike in quite awhile.

If God had a refrigerator, your picture would be on it. If he had a wallet, your photo would be in it. He sends you flowers every spring and a sunrise every morning. Whenever you want to talk, he'll listen. He can live anywhere in the universe, and he chose your heart. And the Christmas gift he sent you in Bethlehem? Face it, friend. He's crazy about you.

Well, you know the rest of the story, don't you? Nine months later, the birth happened, just as God said. For Mary, it wasn't easy. Neighbors in Nazareth were gossiping, Joseph and her parents were confused and upset with her, at least at first, and delivering a child is never easy. Back then, there were no meds, no doctors. And then to have it far from home, away from her family and in less than ideal circumstances due to a looming shortage in Bethlehem... how frustrating and inconvenient can you get? She had no cradle for the baby, only a manger – a feeding trough for cattle. She had to have wondered, “Really, God? This is a hard place to give birth to a king. Where are you in all of this?” But then suddenly some shepherds show up from the fields outside of Bethlehem and tell Mary and Joseph this news, how the angels of God came to them and told them a savior, Christ the Lord, had been born. And the sign that this was true would be a baby lying in a manger in a cattle trough. And there He was. And we're told that they were amazed. Everybody and the shepherds praised and rejoiced after this encounter.

But what about Mary? Luke tells us that in the midst of the commotion, Mary treasured these words in her heart, and pondered them. She would hang on to this thing – to keep her going as she went through hard times of watching her son rejected and later crucified. And I imagined her praying that night later: “Lord, I don't know the future, but I know you hold the future. And Lord I believe, that no matter what, you've got this.”

And that is why Christmas is still merry in any circumstance. The birth story of Jesus, the Son of God, points us once again to the life-giving truth of God's faithfulness, power, and love for you and me. And if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, nothing can separate you from Him. You're never alone and you belong to him forever. It's true, life can be scary. The world is a messed up place and we're unable to fix it ourselves, but this upcoming week, I encourage you to read chapters one and two again and take some time to ponder this great thing God has done for us. And trustingly pray to Him: "God, I believe you've got this, but even more importantly, I believe you've got me."

Amen.