

Unexpected Hope

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[0 : 00] Today, and for the next couple of weeks, we're going to go through Luke's Gospel as we look at the birth of our Savior, the incarnation of the eternal Word of God, Jesus Christ.

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

And the angel answered her, May God add a blessing to the reading of His Word.

Would you please be seated? We obviously learn a lot about God through reading our Bibles.

[2 : 37] In the Bible, we read about God's attributes, His character, His desire, His will, His plan for His creation. In the Bible, we read that God often accomplishes His will in ways that people wouldn't expect.

He often calls ordinary people and leads them and empowers them to do extraordinary things. For example, in Genesis 6, God expresses regret for having created humanity because every intention of people's hearts was to do evil continually.

But one man, Noah, found favor in the eyes of the Lord. And God chose to spare him and his family in an unexpected way.

If you recall, God told Noah to build an ark, basically a giant floating box. And God instructed Noah to go into it with all of the animals.

And God delivered Noah and his family and those animals from the floodwaters that enveloped the earth. Later in Genesis 12, God calls Abraham.

[4 : 00] He separates Abraham from his home, from his country, and from all other people. God chose Abraham to be the source through which all of the families of the earth would be blessed.

Later on, Abraham and Sarah, his wife, conceive of a child late in their life, in the twilight years of their life. When Sarah heard that she would finally be blessed with a child after being childless for so long, and now being so old, she laughed at the unexpected news, which was certainly hard for her to believe.

In Exodus chapter 2, Moses is delivered from infanticide. The Egyptians attempted to control the growing population of their Hebrew slaves, and so they ordered the execution of all male babies and toddlers.

But if you recall, Moses was put in a basket, a miniature ark, if you will, and he was sent down the Nile River where he was retrieved by Pharaoh's daughter who adopted him and raised him as her son.

Later, Moses killed an Egyptian for beating a Hebrew slave, and he goes on the run. He's a fugitive. On the run, he goes to the land of Midian where he basically starts his life over.

[5 : 29] He gets married. He has children. He starts working for his father-in-law, tending his flock. And when Moses was an old man doing these things, the Lord appeared to him in a burning bush and told him to go back to Egypt and to tell Pharaoh to let my people go.

An unexpected hero, an unexpected person, to be called to do such an extraordinary task. Esther was a young Hebrew girl living in Persia during the time of Jewish captivity.

Her parents died, and she was adopted by Mordecai, her older cousin. Eventually, Esther is chosen by the king to be his new queen, and Esther rises from rags to riches, from Jewish maiden to queen of Persia, and she is put in a place where God uses her to rescue his people from a murderous plot to exterminate them all.

In the New Testament, the first disciples chosen by Jesus are ordinary fishermen who God used to spread the gospel and who quite literally turned the world upside down.

Saul was a Pharisee who ravaged the church. His goal was to blot out, to exterminate Christianity. He searched for Christians from town to town to arrest them and to haul them off.

[7 : 11] He hated Christians. He hated Jesus. But when Jesus, now resurrected, appeared to him on the road to Damascus, he called to him.

He saved him. He rescued him from his sins. And he, Paul, became one of the church's greatest champions in yet another unexpected move by God.

And I could go on. The Bible is full of examples of ordinary people whom God unexpectedly appeared to, called to, and enabled to do extraordinary things.

But of all those people I've mentioned, none of their stories as great as they were compare to the extraordinary visit of an angel to a girl who was about 12 or 13 years old, 2,000 years ago, in a town that was well off the beaten path.

With the unexpected news that a child would miraculously be conceived in her womb, and that child she would bear and raise in her home as her son, was none other than the second person of the Trinity, the eternal word, God the Son, the Messiah, Lord of Lord, King of Kings, the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ.

[8 : 49] And so, this morning, I want to look at something that stuck out to me as I was studying this text, which is our main idea. God fulfills His plans through ordinary people in unexpected ways.

God fulfills His plans through ordinary people in unexpected ways. Whether you're young or old, male or female, rich or poor, our text this morning reminds us that God fulfills His plans through ordinary people in extraordinary ways.

God in the past and in His grace chose regular folks to play a significant role in His redemptive plan leading to the incarnation, the first advent of His Son, Jesus Christ.

And guess what? God has not changed in the present. He continually uses ordinary people who trust Him and who submit to His will to do extraordinary things as we wait for the second advent, the return of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Do you believe that God uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things today? You know, I think we are more likely to believe that God only uses the best of us to accomplish great things these days.

[10 : 35] But take a moment and think of a few people whom God has used to impact your life. Think of them. who are those names that just come to your mind instantly?

This person. God used them to impact my life in an extraordinary way. You know, I'll bet that the names that came to your mind were regular, ordinary people.

People whom few of the rest of us would even know who they are. But they were faithful to God and they helped you. They inspired you in an extraordinary way.

And so my hope today for you as a Christian who has trusted in Christ for your salvation that Mary's response to the unexpected news she received on the day she was visited by Gabriel will inspire you to live your life in greater submission to God, His Word, and His will.

That you will be convinced even more so that God is worthy of your trust and your service and that you will submit to His will that you will say yes to Him in whatever He asks in obedience even though whatever He asks you to do may seem very ordinary.

[12 : 11] But God will bless your obedience in extraordinary ways. If you're an unbeliever, welcome. We are so glad that you are here, that the Lord brought you to us this morning.

And I don't know what you might have been expecting when you showed up this morning, but my hope is that you will be saved today by the reality that Jesus is the Christ, is the Messiah, and that who He is and what He came to do, you will understand and you will believe that you will see in the announcement of His birth in this passage today that you will see the truth that you need that the story of His incarnation will result in a new birth in you today and that you would know Jesus Christ savingly having heard this extraordinary news this morning from an ordinary human being.

Our passage today contains two unexpected but extraordinary realities which attest to the truth, again, that God fulfills His plans, extraordinary plans through ordinary people.

And so the first reality, the first truth from our text today comes through the unexpected messenger, an unexpected messenger.

Look at verse 26 again. In the sixth month, that's referring to Elizabeth's pregnancy with John the Baptist. She was in the sixth month carrying him. The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth.

[13:57] Now, there are a couple of things worth considering in this verse. First, if you regularly read the Bible, you can come away with the thought that angels appeared to all people all the time.

And that's just not true. They didn't. In fact, between the completion of the Old Testament and Gabriel's visit to Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist in Luke 1, it had been 400 years since God had any kind of revelatory communication with people.

And so God had here broken four centuries of silence when Gabriel foretold the birth of John the Baptist to his father, Zacharias.

And then now, soon afterwards, the announcement to Mary. So the timing of Gabriel's visit was unexpected as far as God's people were concerned.

It had been 400 years. And perhaps as startling as the brokenness of the silence after all this time was the unexpected location that God's messenger was sent to.

[15:20] Jerusalem was the epicenter of the Jewish world. And you would have thought back then if God was going to break the silence, if he was going to send an angel somewhere, someplace, it would have been in Jerusalem or in that close vicinity.

But God had other plans. God sent an angel, Gabriel, to Galilee. Galilee. If you remember from our text from last week, the prophecy of Jesus' incarnation in Isaiah, which, you know, took place 700 years before the events in our passage today, you remember that Isaiah in that prophecy said this of Galilee.

He called it Galilee of the nations or some translations say Galilee of the Gentiles. Now, the region of Galilee was the northernmost territory of the land of Israel and was the region in closest proximity to the Gentile nations, nations which the Jewish people despised.

I grew up in the northeast corner of Kansas in a city called Shawnee, which was a suburb of Kansas City.

And Kansas City, if you're familiar with it, it's a strange place because there's actually two. There's Kansas City, Kansas, and there's Kansas City, Missouri.

[16:52] Two different cities in two different states, but those of us who live in and around those places sort of consider it as one giant metropolitan community.

And so when we travel outside that area and people ask us where we're from, we'll say, Kansas City. A Kansas City in Galilee would be western Kansas.

One of the worst drives that anyone can ever make is through western Kansas unless you like wheat because it's nothing but flat ground and tall grass and no trees as far as the eye can see.

I had a friend in college and I found out that he was from western Kansas and I assumed that everybody in Kansas was a Chiefs fan.

And I was shocked when he told me that he rooted for the Denver Broncos. Yuck. Why? You are in Kansas.

[18:05] Why would you root for that garbage? Well, he lived, where he lived was in closer proximity to Denver than it was to Kansas City and so thus he rooted for them.

It helps me to understand how most Jews thought of Galilee by comparing Jerusalem to Kansas City and Galilee to western Kansas. You know, the thought would have been those people out there who are technically a part of us but they're so strange.

They're so weird. Why would you live out there? And if I've offended someone from western Kansas this morning, I'm sorry but the truth hurts.

Like western Kansas, Galilee was full of remote towns and Nazareth was one of Galilee's most obscure locations.

Luke is generous here when he calls it a city. Nazareth was more like a hamlet. It was a village of about 300 people. We could fit the whole entire population of Nazareth in this room that we're in this morning.

[19:24] This town was so insignificant that it didn't even appear in the Old Testament. It wasn't connected to any major trade route. All the important roads bypassed it and where I'm from we call places like that the boonies.

Just a place out in the middle of nowhere connected to nothing. And it was this strange desolate mostly unknown place that God sent an angel Gabriel in verse 27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph of the house of David and we're told the virgin's name was Mary.

In Jewish practice girls were usually engaged at the age of 12 or 13 to young Jewish men. We have some girls that are that age or close to that age or maybe a little bit older than that age and guess

what?

You would at this point in your life if you were Mary you would either be married close to being married and you would have a husband who your parents set you up with and maybe if you had nice parents they would have asked if you liked the person and this was how it was in Jewish life. Mary was betrothed to Joseph an ordinary carpenter but a man who had an extraordinary lineage. He was a descendant of David who was Israel's greatest king.

[21 : 04] God promised in his word long before this event that the Messiah would come through David's family tree and although Joseph wasn't Jesus' natural father his adoption of Jesus made him legally part of David's lineage which Matthew's genealogy establishes.

Now like Joseph Mary could also trace her ancestry back to David. So through Joseph Jesus' adoptive father Jesus had a legal right to the throne of David and through his mother Mary he was a physical descendant thus Jesus both legally and physically was the son of David and born to be Israel's true and greatest king in fulfillment of God's promise.

But imagine you're Mary in this moment. Luke doesn't provide any details for us really about her but it's safe I think to assume that in the eyes of the world Mary was nobody.

In the eyes of her community she was just another young girl soon to be married. In our passage she appears to have been just minding her own business probably doing her chores that she was used to doing every single day when suddenly an angel appears to her most unexpectedly.

How much do you like or appreciate unexpected visitors coming to your house? You know if somebody you know unexpectedly rang your doorbell while you were in the midst of doing your chores or working around the house you might answer it depending on how you looked depending on what you were doing you'd at least have time to prepare to answer the door by looking through your peephole or your ring doorbell if you have one of those and seeing who's on the video but if you were inside your home doing your chores and then you turned around to see an unexpected visitor inside of your house you'd probably be just a little bit startled wouldn't you?

[23 : 31] But God doesn't have to ring doorbells he doesn't have to ask entry into our lives Colossians 3-4 says that for Christians Christ is not just a part of our life he is our life and sometimes God shows up in our lives in unexpected ways and asks us to do unexpected things and how you respond reveals who you believe God is in relation to you Jesus is Lord he's master we are his to command and it's our duty to obey I was called to ministry when I was 16 years old and I wish that I could have been more like Mary in that moment in submitting to God's will I wish I could have echoed her statement let it be to me according to your word but for the next eight years

I ran from that call and I wish I had it and I learned the hard way that it's better to say yes to God than to say no young people God has a plan for your life that plan for your life may include vocational ministry serving in the church or serving the church by going overseas in working as a missionary even if he doesn't have that plan for your life he does have a plan for your life wherever he has you to go whatever he has you to do he has a purpose for you in that he has something for you to do in service to him and so I encourage you to be making that your prayer now God show me what it is that you want me to do where do you want me to go how best can I serve you and listen for those of us who are older it's no different

God's not done with you and you know maybe in your older age even in retirement God might be saying to you I want you to serve me in ministry and we go to our national convention and there are many couples who are past the age of retirement they were retired and they are going overseas to serve the Lord as missionaries in a foreign nation and it could be a number of different things to teach a class to witness to a co-worker to serve in some area of ministry in this church and God may ask you to do that in an unexpected way and you might be tempted to doubt that you're able to do it but you trust him and you say yes and you'll be surprised by what he's able to do all this to say don't ever treat Jesus as if he's an unexpected visitor in your life don't ever doubt that he has a plan for you and a purpose for you every day until that day you go to be with him don't doubt that God can use you right now to do extraordinary things so we've seen an unexpected messenger now we look at his unexpected message an unexpected message verse 28 and 29 if you'll look at those with me again he came to her and said greetings oh 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 Gabriel calls Mary favored one and he tells her the Lord is with you I think in an effort to put this frightened girl at ease to reassure her that the news he had was good news and that she should not be afraid but our text says that Mary was still greatly troubled understandably so she

was probably I'm sure in a state of shock as she was trying to discern why this messenger had appeared to her of all people and I think in her humility she wondered why God would choose to show favor to someone like her but Gabriel didn't show up at the wrong address he was where God had sent him to the person

God had sovereignly chosen this girl who in the eyes of the world was a nobody from nowhere but God chose her to help carry out his redemptive purposes in the most extraordinary way seeing that Mary was still stunned by his appearance and greeting verses 30 through 33 say 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 which means Yahweh saves he will be great and he 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 now the angel's greeting was perplexing enough imagine how mystifying now his message must have been to

[29 : 38] Mary Mary would have been familiar with the language Gabriel used to describe this son whom she would bear no doubt she had read about and she had heard a lot about the promised Messiah and the angel was telling her now that that long promised long awaited Messiah was coming and he would come through her now I think that as amazing as that was she could grasp that but there is one thing about the angel's message that Mary couldn't grasp the concept of a pregnant virgin Mary knew something about conception and human biology so the idea of a pregnant virgin was not only a contradiction of terms but it was inconceivable it seemed impossible how could such a thing be verse 34 and

Mary said to the angel how will this be since I am a virgin now there's there's something here that you need to understand about Mary's question and that's her attitude the attitude with which she expressed this question when Gabriel told Zacharias that he would conceive a child who would be John the Baptist the forerunner of Jesus Christ with his wife Elizabeth and that would be achieved naturally Zacharias responded in this way in Luke 1 18 through 20 now this is again before Gabriel appears to Mary Zacharias said to the angel how shall I know this for I am an old man my wife has advanced in years and the angel answered him I am Gabriel I stand in the presence of God and I was to speak to you and to bring to you this good news and behold you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled!

in their time so Zacharias was unable to speak until the birth of John the Baptist and his question to Gabriel expressed doubt now he understood something of biology too but unlike Mary his question was asked with skepticism instead of faith Zacharias was a priest he knew the scriptures he knew how God had blessed barren couples with children in their old age and he shouldn't then have placed any kind of limitations on what he believed God was still able to do in the present through him but his question expressed skepticism and doubt Mary's question unlike his didn't express doubt not them with an attitude that believes as we proceed in faith though we're not quite sure how this thing that

God has put on our heart to do is going to be done Hebrews 11 is full of examples of people who did that verse one of that chapter defines what faith is now faith is the assurance of things hoped for the conviction of things not seen true faith is not based on empirical evidence but trust in God and his plan it's a willingness to submit to God's will no matter how strange it might sound no matter how foolish you might look to others in obeying the Lord when I did finally decide to pursue ministry I knew that that would involve me going to seminary and I had a Sunday school teacher who knew me pretty well and

I told him that I was going to go to seminary and his reply to me was you barely got through college what makes you think that you're going to get through seminary the first pastor that I served under he knew how nervous I got whenever I spoke to a large group of people and one time laughingly he told me I don't know how you're ever going to preach they were right to be concerned I was a bad student I was nervous to speak in front of people but I knew I had no other choice I had no other choice if I was going to obey God and if I was going to be obedient to his will I had to do these things and I don't share that with you in any way to pat myself on the back I know more than anyone how little

[35 : 46] God has to work with me but I share it with you because there are always going to be people like that in your life and you might be one of those people who will cast doubt on God's will

God's ability God's plan for your life and discourage your faith but listen you listen to God you don't listen to other people you listen to God you don't listen to other people like Mary it's okay to ask your questions but do so in a way that doesn't limit who God is and what God is able to do it's a good thing to know how weak and ordinary you are because then there can be no doubt that whatever God accomplishes through you that he is the one who has done it and we'll get the glory for it verse 35 the angel answered her the

Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the most high will overshadow you therefore the child will be called holy the son of God again Mary's knowledge of God's word would have informed her understanding of who the child was that she would bear she understood this is the Messiah that's amazing and again with her God this is the same imagery that Gabriel used when he said the power of the most high will overshadow you

God will cause his presence to dwell within you and through that miraculously she would conceive a male child in her womb and while the child would be human in every respect he would not have a human father his father quite literally be God the father God himself and this child would be holy completely without sin in his conception completely without sin in his life and he would be the sinless sacrifice through which our sins would be forgiven Mary was no different from us in that like us she needed a savior too Jesus came in an unexpected way truly God and truly human to live sinlessly to die sacrificially and to rise victoriously to save us from our sins

Christmas is about the creator of the universe who is not part of the universe moving himself in the person of his son into the universe that he made to save those who were and who are in active rebellion against him one of the clearest statements in all of the Bible is 1 Timothy 1 15 the saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners sinners Christmas is God ordained and it is God initiated through Jesus it is possible for sinful people to have peace with God and access to their holy creator do you know that do you believe that this is the message it's unexpected but it's fantastic without Christ you and I would be completely without hope this is who God is this is what God has done he broke into his creation to save sinners the son of David the son of God a human to identify with every human but as God able to bear our burdens on the cross to atone for them to remove them that whoever believes in him whoever lays down their arms of rebellion against him and swears allegiance to the king of kings shall not perish but have everlasting life if you come to him you will find rest if you trust in him you will have peace and joy and hope forever forever now Mary didn't ask for proof but the angel gave her some anyway in verses 36 through 37 behold your relative

Elizabeth in her old age has conceived a son and this is the sixth month with her who is called barren and I love this part underline it in your Bible memorize it for nothing will be impossible with God Christmas is a reminder that God is able to achieve what is humanly impossible as it pertains to salvation only God by sending his son Jesus could bridge the divide could bridge the gap between sinful people and their holy creator and save them and give them eternal life only he could do that as it pertains to our sanctification the process through which we are being made more like Jesus Christ this means again don't put limitations on who God is and what God is able to do and his desire and his ability to use you to do extraordinary things one of the most extraordinary things ever done for me was a man who I barely knew who died when I was maybe one two or three years old maybe a little bit older

[42 : 39] I don't remember I barely barely remember this man but he was a Christian man who was in a hospital when my parents were in the hospital with my older brother and he was very sick and he got to know my dad he got his phone number and he said I'm going to be praying for you and I go to a church for people who pray for things like this can we pray for you and he would check on my dad weekly to see how my brother was doing and when my brother did die this man invited my parents and my oldest sister to church church that they still attend today this man you don't know his name unless you've heard me share this testimony before his name is Gail Milhoff to you somebody you know nothing of to me an ordinary man who through God's obedience has done an extraordinary thing

I thank God for that man an ordinary guy who was obedient to the Lord and saw a family suffering and committed to pray for them and to invite them to church his ordinary act has had an eternal impact on my family you're ordinary I'm ordinary that's okay but God does extraordinary things through ordinary people to have an eternal impact and you know what as you do that ordinary thing you're not going to get your name's not going to be put in the headlines headline news people aren't

going to know a lot of people aren't going to know but you know who will know God will know and what more could you want than for

God to use you and your ordinary obedience to do an extraordinary thing and if God knows who cares if nobody else ever does verse 38 Mary said behold I am the servant of the Lord let it be according to your word and the angel departed from her this is how we should adjust our lives according to this text have faith in God's plan and submit to his will no matter how strange no matter how foolish no matter how much you might think you can't do it you have faith in God's plan and you submit to his will now look Mary understood what this news would mean for her Gabriel wasn't going to go from house to house in the town of Nazareth and explain to all of her neighbors now listen

I want you to know that Mary has been chosen by God to be the mother of the Messiah and it's going to be this miraculous conception I want you to know that so don't give her a hard time this is what's happened he didn't do that and so Mary understood that people in her community were going to talk they were going to do the math they were going to assume things about her that weren't true that the child was illegitimate that Joseph and Mary had sinned before they were to come together as husband and wife and she would be the subject of gossip dirty looks and cruel words she understood that that would come with her obedience and she chose to be obedient anyway she would be seen as the bearer of an illegitimate child people wouldn't understand but she didn't care about people's approval and neither should we she surrendered instead to the calling that God had given to her will you will you haven't had an angel bring you a message and you're probably not going to have an angel bring you a message like he did to

Mary but guess what you do have that Mary didn't have the complete word of God it's here it's for you you can read it you want to know what God's will is here it is for you and as you read it as you study it the Holy Spirit will open things to your eyes and to your mind to your heart you'll know what God's will is for you will you obey it or not and here is another hopeful truth from our text to be reminded of and encouraged by this morning Mary again in the eyes of the world was a nobody from nowhere few people knew her but guess who did know her God knew her God knew her God had a plan for her and so don't ever think that you know

[48 : 20] God is too big or too distant or too far or too great that he doesn't know you or care about you yeah right we have an example of that right here brother sister God knows you and he knows your name and he cares about you and he loves you and he has a plan and a purpose for your life and if anything that should give you great encouragement this morning he knows who you are our great big uncontainable omnipotent omnipresent omniscient God knows who you are and he cares about you you aren't a nobody to him so serve him well and do it gladly you an ordinary person

God can use to do extraordinary things three application questions for you to look at later today hopefully this week as I pray you go back and look on this text and be reminded of the awesome truths contained within it question number one two and what unexpected or overwhelming circumstance have you experienced God's faithfulness and favor I just encourage you to think back on your life and just be reminded of how God has in your past shown to you how great he is how faithful he is to show you favor question number two how does remembering God's word help you to trust him in the present and in the future Mary knew some of God's word the Old Testament and that helped her in the present to understand what she could understand but how does remembering God's word help you to trust him in the present and the future and then finally are you living your life in submission to God's will right now are you living your life in submission to God's will right now as an unbeliever you are not living your life in submission to God's word right now and he's calling to you today through his word come come be healed be forgiven be saved receive a life that has purpose and hope and blessing and favor through Jesus

Christ and I pray that today you will come to him and you will be saved believer what is it that God has put on your heart to do are you doing it now are you willing to say yes or have you said no will you are you living your life in submission to God's will I'm going to pray and again like we did during communion I'm going to give you time you pray and I encourage you to ask this question of God am I living my life in submission to your will and I encourage you to ask Lord reveal your will to me and whatever it is you ask me to do I'll say yes let's pray Lord as we pray we've been reminded of your word that you use ordinary people to do extraordinary things

Lord we see in the incarnation of our savior your desire to use ordinary people as a part of your redemptive plan Lord I pray that in this time of quiet Holy Spirit again you would reveal to us

whether or not we are living our lives in submission to your will in your grace show us how we are not and your love encourage us to do what we've avoided doing and God for those who are unsure I pray that in this moment you would begin to reveal to them what that is and that for all of us at Highland Park Baptist Church our answer to you would be yes thank you Lord for this opportunity to gather and worship you thank you Lord for what you've done for us thank you for Christmas for what it means for the hope that you've given us through Jesus Christ your son in whose name we pray amen