

INCREDIBLE PROMISES

It's that special time of year. Even for non-Christians or cultural Christians-in-name-only, the Christmas season evokes powerful emotions. Many are happy, warm, even joyful. Some are cold and dark. Some people experience both great happiness and great sadness.

What carries people through this emotional season? It's a matter of promises. Promises made, promises hoped for, promises kept. This was the case for Mary and Joseph too.

INTERRUPTION - The angel's message broke four hundred years of God's prophetic silence. As old Zechariah went about his priestly duties, an angel spoke unbelievable things. He and his barren wife Elizabeth would bear a son, to be named John, who would fulfill the prophecies of the forerunner of the promised Christ. And it came to pass, as recorded in Luke 1:1-25, 57-80.

Elizabeth's cousin Mary heard even more astounding news from the angel Gabriel. Mary, a virgin betrothed to Joseph, would also bear a son, miraculously conceived by the Holy Spirit. She was to call His name Jesus, which means "*Jehovah God is salvation*." It's recorded in Luke 1:26-56.

INTERDICTION - Matthew 1:18-25 records how Joseph also heard from an angel about Mary's child, to call His name Jesus, "*for He will save His people from their sins*." All this was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet 700 years before (Isaiah 7:14), "*behold the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us*."

We know Mary and Joseph were sustained by God's promises, because of their response of obedience. Matthew says Joseph "*did as the Lord commanded him*." And Luke records Mary saying "*Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word*." They received incredible promises, but Joseph and Mary trusted and obeyed the Lord.

INTERSECTION - With this incredible news, Mary and Joseph experienced great loss too. They lost their reputations as God-fearing people, intent on living according to Scripture. They were pure in their betrothal, but it looked like they had broken God's laws. They persevered in faith, not yielding to fear or discouragement. They trusted the promises of Almighty God.

As the pregnancy advanced, it seemed a blessing to leave their own community. The emperor's census required Joseph to register for taxes. Perhaps they recalled the prophecy of Micah 5:2-5. Hundreds of years before, it pointed to Bethlehem as the place of the birth of the Christ, the anointed one, the promised Messiah who would deliver Israel.

INTERREGNUM - Joseph and Mary had to travel some ninety miles away to Bethlehem, since Joseph was of the house and lineage of David. He was the king to whom in 2Samuel 7, God promised an offspring who would reign forever. It's the same promise in Isaiah 9:1-7:

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder, 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 with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this."

INTERVENTION - Luke 2:1-21 records the fulfillment. When Jesus was born, the angels spoke to nearby shepherds, "*Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord*."

God often declared, as in Isaiah 43, "*I, I am the Lord, and besides Me there is no Savior*." God promised Abraham in Genesis 12 and 18 that his offspring would bless all nations. And in Genesis 3:15 God promised that an offspring of Eve would deliver the human race from sin.

INVERSION - God's promised Deliverer came in unexpected ways. He was now with His people. God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, came to earth in human form. He came in a cradle to go to the cross. Laid at birth in a stone manger, He was destined for a stone tomb at death.

But Jesus was also predestined for resurrection, ascension and eternal reign. He fulfills God's promises. And He promises that everyone who in repentance and faith believes in Him, receives forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and the indwelling Holy Spirit. "God with us" becomes "God within you" as you are reborn by the Holy Spirit and put all your trust in Jesus the Christ! ☐