

Advent 2021—AWAITING OUR TRUE KING
Jesus is Our King of Hope
Luke 1
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Do you remember earlier this year, after Easter, our church began an 8-week series titled, *“We have this hope?”* In addition to preaching on hope, we provided a daily devotional resource and encouraged people to connect in small groups. Our theme verse was Hebrews chapter 6 verse 19, *“We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.”* Hebrews 6:19 Our staff planned this series, because hope seemed especially important (and elusive) during COVID due to the fears it sparked and the widespread disruption the pandemic caused. But the need for hope isn’t limited to pandemics. Like the air we breathe, we need hope to live. Without hope we’ll shrivel up and die.

As Christ followers, Jesus is our hope. That’s true in a big-picture sense—we have hope because Jesus is always with us and, we have confidence that when we die, we’ll spend eternity with Him—but hope is also important in the daily grind of life. I want to encourage you to quiet your mind and heart to reflect on the question, *“What am I hoping for right now?”* I’m guessing many thoughts passed through your mind, but as you quickly sift through them, I’d like you to pinpoint, *“What is it that you’re most hoping for at this point in time?”*

If we were in a small group setting, at a retreat or in one of our Bible Fellowship Groups, I’d give people an opportunity to share how they answered that question. That’s not practical in our setting this morning, but I’m guessing that among us hopes were identified for relationship challenges, job situations, health concerns, financial needs, and burdens were carrying for family members. As we’ve identified things we’re hoping for, I encourage you to hold your palms open before God as I pray his blessing over us.

Lord, you are our hope! Thank you for the hope we have in you. In the words of the psalmist, *“May your unfailing love be with us, Lord, even as we put our hope in you.”* Psalm 33:22 Hear our prayer, Lord, and meet our needs. AMEN.

We just completed a series called, “The Frailty of Human Kings,” in which we explored Israel’s demand for a king and the flawed kingships of Saul, David and Solomon. Throughout that series, I emphasized that one of the prominent themes of the Old Testament is that the problems of life can’t be fixed with human solutions. During Advent followers of Jesus remember and celebrate Jesus’ coming as a baby—our Messiah—and amidst the sin, brokenness and pain all around us, we await the coming of our King for his Church.

I want to ask you to transport yourself back 2,000 years and put yourselves in the shoes of a devout Jew in rural Judah. Life is hard for rural, 1st Century, Jewish families and in addition to the normal difficulties of life—family concerns, weather related difficulties in a farming community, basic needs like food, health and finances—you carry the weight of being an oppressed people. For centuries, since the days of your forefather, Moses, your people have been God’s chosen people. God delivered your people from Egypt and brought them into a Promised Land. He gave you the Law and provided you with priests and prophets and judges and kings to lead you. God blessed your people in many ways, but your ancestors frequently turned away from Him, pursuing the ways of the nations around you. Your people’s history has been a roller coaster of highs and lows—highs when they followed God’s ways and lows when they turned away from God to pursue other ways.

But through all the ups and downs, God kept pointing to the coming of a Messiah, a savior, a deliverer who would reestablish God’s rule, bringing peace and justice and restoring hope. The Prophet, Isaiah spoke often about the coming of the Messiah. When the ancient Israelites heard Isaiah prophesy, they could almost envision the Messiah in their presence, and when you read Isaiah’s prophecies, they seem so real. But Isaiah prophesied 700 years ago. For 7 centuries your people have been waiting and hoping for the coming of a true king, but little has changed. At times, people have stepped forth claiming to be the Messiah and hope flickered, but they all proved to be imposters. Things haven’t improved since Isaiah—they’ve become noticeably worse. Under the rule of the hated Romans with their emperors who claim to be deities, Israel has experienced famine, drought, economic hardship and difficulty as an oppressed people. Devout Jews throughout Judea awaiting their true King—the promised

Messiah—can't help but wonder, *"Where is God? Has He forgotten us? Has our sin led Him to turn away from us permanently? What are we to believe about the promises He made to us?"*

The stage is now set for Luke chapter 1. I'll begin reading at verse 5...

In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.

Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.

Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. Luke 1:5-15

With the benefit of hindsight, we know that this miraculous child was John the Baptist, the forerunner to Jesus, but all Zechariah knew was that God was doing something amazing. Listen to the words the angel spoke describing John's ministry, and think about these words in the context of the Jews' despair and what God was promising.

He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." Luke 1:16 & 17

I won't read it now, but I encourage you to read verses 18-25 of Luke 1 for the rest of Zechariah's story.

Fast forward 6 months, and Zechariah and Elizabeth's relative, a young woman named Mary, had a similar angelic encounter. God was clearly working in some profound ways. I'll read Luke chapter 1 verses 26-38.

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The

Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail."

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her. Luke 1:26-38

After the angel, Gabriel, appeared to her and spoke of what was happening inside her and in her relative, Elizabeth, Mary did the only thing she could think to do—she hurried to the hill country where Elizabeth and Zechariah lived. When Mary arrived at Elizabeth's and called out to her, the baby inside Elizabeth leaped and under the Holy Spirit's power, Elizabeth uttered these prophetic words,

"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!" Luke 1:42-45

As I read Luke chapter 1 and think about what God was doing in orchestrating miraculous births through Elizabeth and Mary, I'm reminded of the Chronicles of Narnia story The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe. In the C.S. Lewis story, the lion, Aslan, is a symbol for Jesus. When a string of unusual events begin occurring, one of the characters in the story—Mr. Beaver—declares, "*Aslan is on the move.*" Zechariah and Elizabeth and Mary didn't understand exactly what was unfolding, but they knew God was on the move.

The unfolding of these events we know now were the precursor to John the Baptist's and Jesus' birth and to their subsequent ministry, but what did Zechariah and Elizabeth and Joseph and Mary understand at that time? They knew God was on the move and that gave them hope. At the end of Luke chapter 1, Luke records songs from Mary and from Zechariah. They're essentially poems that express their gratitude for what God is doing and the hope that they have in God. I encourage you to listen to these songs in two ways: think about them in the context of 1st Century Jews awaiting the arrival of their Messiah and think about the

implications these words of promise hold for us as we await our True King in the midst of the pain, brokenness, sin and hurt all around us.

Mary's Song is recorded in verses 46-55 of Luke chapter 1.

And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.

From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name.

His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.

He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.

He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors. Luke 1:46-55

3-4 months later, after John was born, his father, Zechariah spoke these words,

Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them.

He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us—to show mercy to our ancestors and to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father Abraham: to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace. Luke 1:67-79

The words of prophecy Mary and Zechariah spoke are filled with hope. They looked back to God's promises and look forward to what the fulfillment of those promises mean for them and for their people. And in the midst of our human frailty, these words speak hope to us as well. Our King of Hope has come. Our King of Hope is here with us. Our King of Hope is coming.

That my friends is the message of Advent. Jesus has come as a baby. Jesus is with us and live in us now. And Jesus will come again and make all things right.

As we prepare our hearts for Communion this morning, receive these words of hope and claim them as declarations of your hope in Jesus.

Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God. Psalm 43:5

I wait for the LORD, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope. Psalm 130:5

But the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love. Psalm 33:18

Those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. Isaiah 40:31

Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord. Psalm 31:24