



Birthing a Promise

December 21 • 2008

Focus Scripture Luke 1:26–38

Additional Scriptures

2 Samuel 7:1–11, 16
Luke 1:47–55 or Psalm
89:1–4, 19–26
Romans 16:25–27

Alpha and Omega,
we long for reas-
surance of your
presence among
us. Open our
hearts and minds
to rejoice again in
the announcement
of Jesus' coming.
Send your Spirit
to make us bold
witnesses of this
good news of your
faithfulness. Amen.

Scripture bears witness to God's activity among humankind. To Mary, to David, to Paul, assurance of God's presence is clear. As we ground ourselves in the story of God's faithfulness, we join them in awe and wonder, rejoicing that God continues to give birth to grace, hope, new possibilities, and salvation for everyone.

Focus Scripture: Luke 1:26–38

In **Luke 1:26–38**, it is clear that God's purpose is unfolding in ways that people in Luke's time, and in ours, might not expect. The young woman, Mary, receives news that she is to play an important role in God's purpose for the world. The angel Gabriel tells Mary what Jesus' life will mean for God's people: Jesus will be a great ruler, like King David; Jesus' reign will last forever; Jesus will be known as God's child. Luke's description of Mary as a virgin emphasizes the significance of Jesus from the moment of conception. Mary's response and affirmation of her role challenges modern readers to imagine how we might live with such confidence in God's faithfulness.

Luke is one of four gospels, a particular kind of story that contains history, yet focuses more on the meaning of God's word and God's reign than on historical facts. Luke uses historical information to set Jesus' birth in political time – Jesus was born when Herod the Great was King of Judea and Augustus was Emperor. The birth also is set in relative time. Six months after Elizabeth and Zechariah have been told that they will be parents, the angel who brought this good news to them appears to Mary. After establishing the timing within the political context as well as the timing relative to God's people, Luke explores the significance of Jesus' life.

No historical records of the type to which we're accustomed today exist to give details of time, place, and circumstances surrounding Jesus' birth. Perhaps, for Luke, such details were secondary to the fact that Jesus was born to a young Galilean woman named Mary – living in a country occupied by the army of the Roman Empire – as part of God's plan of salvation for God's people.

In **Luke 1:47–55** we hear Mary's song of rejoicing as she responds to her part in the ongoing work of God's purpose. The Magnificat, as Mary's song is called, may take the place of a reading from Psalms for today. With the psalmist who sings of God's steadfast love and faithfulness for all generations in **Psalm 89:1–4, 19–26**, Mary praises God's promise of saving love and care for all time.

Gabriel's announcement to Mary confirms the greatness of the "house of David." In **2 Samuel 7:1–11, 16**, King David, having united the people of Israel, celebrates by bringing the Ark of the Covenant (an ornate box said to contain the stone tablets with God's law and other religious items) into Jerusalem. The prophet Nathan brings word to King David that God does not want a structural house for the Ark, and that God will make David's "house" – descendants – part of God's promise and faithfulness.

Reflecting on God's purpose revealed in Jesus, the concluding verses in Paul's letter to the church in Rome, **Romans 16:25–27**, praise God's purpose in Christ. Many scholars believe that a later writer added these verses – perhaps they are an endorsement of Paul's message by a later generation of Christians. Whatever the source, these verses are a fitting summary of the gospel message: in the Christ, God's promise for all is birthed.



Our rejoicing this Advent season expresses confidence that God continues to make things happen – a confidence in God's promise to reshape and restore in unexpected ways. We respond with faith and praise, as did Mary, David, and Paul. How will you respond to God's promise that continues to be born among us this Advent season?

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