

Joy of God's Plan

The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA

Luke 1:26-38

Nov 27, 2016

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The angel Gabriel greeted Mary and told her not to be afraid. Then he explained God's plan for her life. He said that she was going to have a very special baby in nine months who would be named Jesus. He would be called the Son of the Most High God. He would be a descendent of King David both on his mother's side and on his step-father Joseph's side. God's plan was to give His Son the throne of his ancestor David where he would reign forever.

When Mary humbly asked how that would be possible, since she was a virgin, Gabriel used images from the creation of the universe to describe what would take place. Back when the earth was formless and void and there was only darkness above the swells of dark chaotic waters, the Spirit of God hovered over the water, and God created light, and order, and plants, animals and human life. God would again overshadow Mary in a similar way¹, and create new life within her in Jesus. The child to be born would be both human and divine, the Holy sinless Son of God.

Mary received this honor from God, not because of her own merit or because she had done anything special, but simply because God chose her as part of his plan.

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Mary responded to this change in her plans with grace and humility, saying, “Let it be to me as you have said.” She was willing to cooperate with God, to obey His will, and to go along with His plan. Mary was the kind of person that God unexpectedly chooses to use. She doesn’t complain or argue. She is available, and willing to serve. She received no special training or parenting classes or even a look at the future. Yet she rejoiced in the opportunity to serve and to be part of God’s plan. God’s plan to provide a Savior for His people started thousands of years before Mary. Way, way back when God was creating the world, the first humans doubted God’s goodness and chose to disobey. Their sin broke the face-to-face relationship they had with God, and they were forced to leave the Garden of Eden. That sin was not a surprise to God. Even then, at the beginning of the human race, God had a plan in mind, the perfect way to defeat Satan and to reconcile men and women to himself through the sacrificial death and resurrection of His Son.²

Over the centuries, God revealed more and more bits and pieces of His plan for His people Israel. You can find many of those prophetic verses simply by reading through the Gospel of Matthew. Most Bibles have footnotes referencing the Old Testament verses being quoted. Matthew quoted the Old Testament prophets about 46 times! All these quotes are clues to God’s plan.

For instance: seven centuries before Christ, the prophet Micah said that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem³.

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One of the most familiar prophecies about Jesus is recorded by the prophet Isaiah 9:2-7. READ....

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⁶For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end.

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No mere human being could fulfill titles like these. The child born of the virgin *must* be the promised Messiah who will reign over God's people with a kind of justice and righteousness that no mere *human* descendant of David ever achieved.⁶

Another familiar prophecy about God's plan is found in Isaiah 11:1-4,6,9-10.

11:1 A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. ²The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him— the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD— ³and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.

He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; ⁴but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. ...

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¹⁰In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious.

Jesse was King David's father.⁷ The stump of a tree represents the family and descendants of Jesse. Although the tree itself was dead and gone, the roots of the tree stump were still alive. Although David's dynasty had ended, the one to come would be a fresh new start to the line of David, a new branch from the roots of the old stump of Jesse.

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Did you know that there is a symbolic Jesse tree right in our building! Out in the new wing on the way to the Covenant Center, near the doors to the Memorial Garden, is a special Christmas tree known as a Jesse Tree. The ornaments represent the ancestors and the family tree of **Jesus** the Messiah. There are pictures of Adam and Eve, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, Rahab, Ruth (the grandmother of David), Jesse (David's father), down through the centuries to Mary and Joseph and then to Jesus. On the back of each ornament is the Bible verse that tells about that person.

The Jesse Tree is intended to remind you of God's plan throughout history from Adam and Eve and Abraham on down to Mary and Joseph. The Jesse Tree will remind you of God's faithfulness, grace and loving-kindness. It will remind you that God keeps His promises, and that God has a good plan for his people.

The birth of Jesus to the Virgin Mary was not the end of God's plan, but the culmination of the Old Covenant and the beginning of the New.

Jesus the Messiah lived for approximately 33 years. He traveled, he preached, he taught. He called twelve men as his closest disciples. The Gospel of Luke reports that Jesus "cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind".

John the Baptist sent messengers to ask, "Are you the Messiah, the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?"⁸

Jesus replied giving the evidence of his fulfillment of the ancient prophecies from Isaiah: "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor."⁹

God's plan included the death of Jesus on the cross as the perfect sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin. In his sinlessness he won the battle with Satan and is victorious over sin and death. Jesus the Christ reigns on high over the Kingdom of God.

The fulfillment of God's plan has continued for over 2000 years as the disciples of Jesus have carried out his command to "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you to the very end of the age."¹⁰

This is where you and I come into God's plan. We too, are to make disciples of all nations. We are to intentionally learn to know Christ and then actively make him known to the next generation.

Are you worried about just how you do that?

When the angel Gabriel told Mary about God's plan for her life, *she* asked, "How can this be?" To paraphrase the answer Gabriel gave: "Don't worry, Mary. God knows you are the right one for this responsibility. You are humble, you are willing, you are available. That is enough. God will provide all that you need to fulfill your part of His plan."

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That is God's answer to us as well. He has a grand over-arching plan for all of humanity; He also has a plan for your individual life. Your part is to be humble, willing, and available. God will give you the strength. God will give you guidance. He will equip you. He will provide what you need. He will never leave you or forsake you or abandon you.

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God has said through the prophet Jeremiah: "For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."¹²

This Christmas, may you be blessed by God's special gift of Joy that comes with having a part in God's plan.

Amen.

Benediction: May the Joy of the Lord always be your strength.

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