

The way of Jesus sings promise and pardon.

“Many have undertaken to compile a narrative about the events that have been fulfilled among us, 2 just as the original eyewitnesses and servants of the word handed them down to us. 3 So it also seemed good to me, since I have carefully investigated everything from the very first, to write to you in an orderly sequence, most honorable Theophilus, 4 so that you may know the certainty of the things about which you have been instructed.” -- **Luke 1:1-4** (CSB)

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Now that we are closing out the Christmas season, steadily onto our resolutions and dreams of the year to come, it is safe to talk about Christmas music. The soundtrack of the season. Some begin listening in June, others demand healthy boundaries and resist until after Thanksgiving!

When listening, the songs matter. Does “Santa Baby” stay in the rotation or do you focus on songs that get the point?!

One song in particular that each year creates a ruckus is “Mary did you know?” It really riles some folk up, and I won’t settle it today - but people exclaim how Mary did know... but did she really know everything?

In Luke we find out what Mary knew and how she responded and that helps set the soundtrack for the whole study of this Gospel account. There is a song to it that keeps the theme in focus and brightens our hearts when we hear the tune.

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We see this in two songs of praise and prophecy... but first, why Luke?

As Scott and I have been talking about what direction we should head in our teaching, as we have had a steady diet of Old Testament then New, it would be timely to see Jesus up close through his life and ministry, through a Gospel. Where there is a lot of noise in our world about what it means to follow this Savior, we want to see the real Jesus for ourselves. To learn to walk in his way. Live under his rule as our King.

Luke, while not one of the disciples, was a Gentile believer who came to faith in Christ and joined the church in ministry. He was a physician, comes to bear where he spends more time describing birth or ailments of those around Jesus. Traveled with Paul and interviewed those that were with Jesus, who saw and heard his life and ministry.

This book and Acts are written to benefit Theophilus - who we know little about - and it reached a broader audience of Gentile Christians and the expanding church.

“...so that you may know the certainty of the things about which you have been instructed.” --
Luke 1:4 (CSB)

There are other accounts - all worthwhile - and Luke's along with them help us know the certainty of the things we've been told. You don't, and shouldn't, have to just take my word for it. You can take up and read for yourself. That you would meet the real Jesus - understand what he smells like, and hear what he sings over us.

And I think this book will stretch us.

“We learn from this Gospel account that the gospel is multi-faceted and full-orbed. That is, the gospel is explained and applied as being about our whole lives, physically and spiritually, externally and internally, for now and for the future, in our relationship with God and others. The gospel is not simply a message about religion and the “religious” portion of our lives... the gospel of Jesus is about the comprehensive blessedness of God available to us through Jesus Christ.” GTB notes

Luke paints the reality that the gospel is a matter of the heart - an inner work - not merely an external religion. It challenges our assumptions and will continually force us to evaluate everything in the world from God's perspective, not our own.

And it begins with a couple of songs.

An angel, Gabriel, visits two people. Zechariah a priest, righteous, faithful, and old. And Mary, innocent, trusting, and young.

Both are made part of a much larger story - one that will dominate their family stories. You know how it unfolds. Two babies are coming. Both unexpected and improbable. One to prepare the way for the other, a King that will bring salvation to his people.

A voice is silenced for nine months and two pregnant women with jumping babies filled with the Spirit.

These heavy things, these cosmos-altering events, give the characters each a song. And they set the tone for what we will hear ahead.

The Magnificat and Benedictus...

“And Mary said: My soul magnifies the Lord, 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, 48 because he has looked with favor on the humble condition of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed, 49 because the Mighty One has done great things for me, and his name is holy. 50 His mercy is from generation to generation on those who fear him. 51

He has done a mighty deed with his arm; he has scattered the proud because of the thoughts of their hearts; 52 he has toppled the mighty from their thrones and exalted the lowly. 53 He has satisfied the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty. 54 He has helped his servant Israel, remembering his mercy 55 to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he spoke to our ancestors.” -- **Luke 1:46-55** (CSB)

“Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied: 68 Blessed is the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has visited and provided redemption for his people. 69 He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, 70 just as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets in ancient times; 71 salvation from our enemies and from the hand of those who hate us. 72 He has dealt mercifully with our ancestors and remembered his holy covenant — 73 the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant that we, 74 we having been rescued from the hand of our enemies, would serve him without fear 75 in holiness and righteousness in his presence all our days. 76 And you, child, will be called a prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, 77 to give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins. 78 Because of our God’s merciful compassion, the dawn from on high will visit us 79 to shine on those who live in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” -- **Luke 1:67-79** (CSB)

Promise

Both songs make clear that what is happening is to the praise of God, that this is his story. But it’s not new... this has been the story all along. This is where it was always pointing, always heading.

God has always given mercy to those who have faith in him. He has always helped his servant Israel, remembering his promise to Abraham and his descendants forever.

The promised “horn of salvation,” the king in the line of David is coming.

Old prophets voiced the promise - God has dealt mercifully with his people - because of his covenant with them.

We love stories of fulfillment. The old promise made good - sweet stories where it takes a lifetime but that promise is kept. In fact, we generally prefer people that keep their promises.

I think it is baked into us because we long for the promise-giver. Yahweh, the god of Israel.

The way of Jesus is the fulfillment of the ancient promise of a King, a servant, the Son of Man who will take away the sins of the world.

All of that promise, all of those prophetic voices, all the hope that stirred generations of people, is meeting here with a child.

This is tremendous news for us; one, because our participation in this kingdom is not random. We are part of the plan from old. What grace that is. And two, we can see it all more clearly - we can read Moses (all of the Old Testament) and see Jesus! It is what Luke will put before us over and over again, Jesus really is the promise. John really was spoken of by Isaiah to prepare the way. All our hopes, all our longing, all the ache of exiles desiring home is coming to visit and stay with his people.

This was not God rewriting the script because things were messed up. This is not God choosing new people because the old ones were unfaithful. This is the redemptive plan all along. This is the ultimate freedom the Exodus hinted at. This is the once-and-for-all King that David and Solomon imaged. This is the kingdom that settles a people in place and purpose.

This is the show-opening number. This is what breaks the silence of waiting. The fulfillment has come. These two babies will pave the way and a weary world can finally rejoice because the promise was true and evil is being undone.

But these songs sing of more than promise - the promise is the steady beat of our soundtrack and the pardon is the sweet melody.

Pardon

The reason this King is coming is to turn everything upside down and pour out mercy on those we don't expect.

Even in Zechariah and Mary we see this contrast - God uses both the priestly faithful that trust him, and the humble servants that say, "may it be done to me according to your word."

These songs set us up to be confounded by the way of Jesus as he scatters the proud with corrupt hearts and exalts the lowly - satisfies the hungry with far more than food.

Jesus will say the least are my people, the forgotten are first in his mind and his kingdom.

"Mary saw the Lord turning everything upside down: the weak dethrone the mighty, the humble scatter the proud, the nobodies are exalted, the hungry are filled, and the rich end up poor! The grace of God works contrary to the thoughts and ways of this world system." And it is so because the covenant promise delivers forgiveness. Rescue from enemies. The way John prepares for Jesus is to give people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins.

This means we are no longer defined by what you've done, how poor in spirit you are, how broken, the ways you've rejected God... but all of that pardoned by the very blood of this King.

“Because of our God’s merciful compassion, the dawn from on high will visit us to shine on those who live in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” -- **Luke 1:78-79** (CSB)

The light we’ve been waiting for. The King our souls ache for. Forgiveness that guides our feet into the way of peace.

“Now listen: You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. 33 He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will have no end.” -- **Luke 1:31-33** (CSB)

The way of Jesus leads us into this kingdom with no end and its song is promise and pardon.

Results in joy and praise!

How could they not sing... God in his mercy, using one past his prime and another will all of life ahead. To prove his promise and bring redemption. They hint at the depth and fullness of the work of Jesus - giving us a vision of a God that is for us, not merely for an hour on Sundays but for our whole lives - as the focus of all our hopes.

And this is what it works in us when we sing along... enlarging the Lord with our minds and then our lips, but in doing so with the passion of our whole being.

We get hungry for more of him because we know he is the only One who satisfies.

“We taste Thee, O Thou living Bread,
And long to feast upon Thee still;
We drink of Thee, the Fountainhead
And thirst our souls from Thee to fill.” St. Bernard of Clairvaux

The reign of God is here. May we cast ourselves on the arms of him to deliver us and hear his song. That of promise and pardon... a covenant fulfilled and forgiveness given.

Will we cling to this? Will we sing with Mary and Zechariah of the faithful promise keeper? The King who recuses and invites us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness in his presence all of our days.

Believe in this God who visits and stays with his own providing redemption. That Jesus lived his life for you, gave his blood to establish a covenant of forgiveness and grace - that he rescued us from our enemy death by rising on the third day - reigning now as he has ascended to the Father and waits for the feast to come where he will be with you forever.

Be Settled in the way of our King. Know your forgiveness was not at random but on purpose. Live free in Him and lean into the way of peace together. Living like he did, for his glory and the sake of others.

Promise and pardon. I am not sure the musical notes it hits but this is what the way of Jesus sings. May we ever hear this song as the soundtrack of our lives and raise our voices so others will hear it too.