

Good morning, Moon Valley!

Sometimes the Christmas story we've heard repeatedly over the years becomes so familiar to us that it is easy to miss some important things that are in the biblical account. And even when we do read the biblical account, we tend to skim through certain parts that seem insignificant or hard to understand.

But sometimes, the part we miss or skim can make all the difference. It can be the difference between apathetic and astonished. It can be the difference between helpless and hopeful. It can be the difference between glum and glistening.

We are continuing our Christmas sermon series titled, □ "So You Can Know For Sure." It is a study through the gospel of Luke.

Our text for today is □ Luke 1:26-56. This text contains a beginning part of the Christmas story that is likely familiar to you. In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy with John the Baptist, an angel is going to appear to a young virgin named Mary to announce that she is going to have a special child named Jesus.

The story begins in □ verses 26 and 27, where it says,

ESV Luke 1:26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, 27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary.

One detail that is easy to skim over is that Joseph was □ "of the house of David." That means that Joseph was a descendant of David.

Who cares?

Apparently, the angel Gabriel cares enough to mention it. And Luke cares enough to record it for us.

And that's not the only mention of David in our text. Let's pick it up in verse 28.

ESV Luke 1:28 And he [Gabriel] came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!"

ESV Luke 1:29 But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.

ESV Luke 1:30 And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God."

ESV Luke 1:31 "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus."

ESV Luke 1:32 "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. . . ."

You've probably heard this before. It's familiar.

Now, the angel Gabriel brings up David again in verses 32 and 33, saying,

ESV Luke 1:32 ". . . And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

These verses raise all kinds of questions.

Like what is this throne of David? And how can David be Jesus's father? And what is the "house of Jacob"?

If we're fuzzy on the answers to these questions, then we're going to be fuzzy on the full significance of Christmas.

The □ "house of Jacob" is another name for the people of Israel. □ Jacob was the son of Isaac, who was the son of Abraham, who is the founding patriarch of the Jews. Abraham lived nearly 1,000 years before David.

According to Genesis 12:1-3, God made some important promises to Abraham that we call the Abrahamic Covenant. For one thing, God promised to make from Abraham a great nation, and that nation is the nation of Israel, also called the house of Jacob. Our text says that Jesus will one day reign over the house of Jacob.

By the way, as part of the Abrahamic Covenant, God also promised that through Abraham—that is, through a descendant of Abraham—all the families of the earth will be blessed. Save that to your mental desktop because we are going to come back to it.

Now, what about □ David? The nature and significance of David's fatherhood and throne and can be traced back about 1,000 years before the birth of Jesus.

David had become king of Israel, the house of Jacob. And he had a mind to build a temple for God, and one day David mentioned his intentions to the prophet Nathan. That same night, the Lord gave a message to the prophet Nathan that he was to forward to king David. An excerpt from God's message to David through Nathan holds a key to David's importance and the significance of Christmas.

Second □ Samuel 7:8-16 is not on anybody's list of most popular Christmas Scriptures. But unless you understand this text, you will not fully understand the significance of the newborn king. This passage lays out the stipulations of something called the Davidic Covenant. And it is crucial to the Christmas story.

In □ verse 8, God says to Nathan:

ESV 2 Samuel 7:8 “Now, therefore, thus you shall say to my servant David, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel.’”

This is an allusion to David's growing up as a shepherd and his ascent to the throne of Israel, succeeding King Saul. Verse □ 9 continues:

ESV 2 Samuel 7:9 ““And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth.””

God had been instrumental in David's military successes and will see to it that David's name becomes great. Verses □ 10 and 11 continue:

ESV 2 Samuel 7:10 ““And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, □ 11 from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. . . .””

You can imagine how these promises relating to the people of Israel—their homeland and their peace—would be so important to the Jews. The last part of □ verse 11 continues:

ESV 2 Samuel 7:11 “. . . Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house.”

When the Lord says he will make David a house, it is a figure of speech meaning that the Lord will provide David with descendants who will continue the royal line or dynasty. Verse □ 12 continues:

ESV 2 Samuel 7:12 “When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.”

This refers specifically to David’s yet-to-be-born son, Solomon, who would succeed David as king. Verse □ 13 continues:

ESV 2 Samuel 7:13 “He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.”

This indicates what we know to be true from Scripture: David’s son Solomon would be the one to build a temple for God, and the royal line from David and Solomon would be forever. Verses □ 14 and 15 continue:

ESV 2 Samuel 7:14 “I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, □ 15 but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you.”

This indicates that Solomon will not be perfect; he will commit sins for which the Lord will discipline him. But these sins will not nullify God’s promises. God’s love for Solomon will continue as will the royal lineage.

Now we finally come to □ verse 16. It contains an important summary of some promises from God to David. God says to David,

ESV 2 Samuel 7:16 ““And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.””

This one verse presents three important elements of the Davidic Covenant. And the three elements are represented by □ three words: house, kingdom, and throne.

As mentioned previously, the term “house” refers to physical descendants from the line of David who will continue the royal dynasty.

The term, “kingdom” refers to the people or nation over whom the royal descendants of David will reign.

The term, “throne” refers to the right or authority to rule given by God to David’s royal line.

And one word mentioned twice conveys the everlasting nature of this Davidic covenant. It’s the word □ “forever.” David’s house, kingdom, and throne will last forever.

This text is the initial and primary place in the Hebrew Scriptures where the Davidic Covenant is given, but it is also mentioned elsewhere. For example, in □ Psalm 89:3-4, the Lord says,

ESV Psalm 89:3 . . . “I have made a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn to David my servant: 4 ‘I will establish your offspring forever, and build your throne for all generations.’”

This affirms the everlasting nature of the covenant. And later in the psalm, God's words also indicate that this is an unconditional covenant. So, the Davidic Covenant is everlasting *and* unconditional.

Only one problem. It had not been completely fulfilled in the thousand years between the giving of the Davidic Covenant and the coming of Christ. The homeland God promised had never been fully possessed by Israel. The nation of Israel had never experienced the peace described in the covenant. And since the days of Solomon, there had been no succession of kings in the line of David ruling over Israel. Instead, there had been deportations and captivity, and when Jesus arrived, Israel was ruled by the Roman Empire, not a Davidic king.

This does not mean that God broke his promise. It simply means that God's promise had not yet been fulfilled. God never promised that the Davidic throne over Israel would be occupied continuously without interruption from the time of David onward. He merely promised that the lineage of David would never be lost and the right to rule would never be nullified. Therefore, as long as the prerogatives of the Davidic throne remained intact, God could raise up a Davidic king, a savior, the Messiah at any time to establish the kingdom and fulfill God's promises.

Indeed, that was the hope of Israel that carried into the first century when Jesus arrived. Jews were awaiting a king, a savior, a Messiah who would arise from the house of David who would deliver Israel from their oppressors and usher in the fulfillment of God's promises to David and establish his kingdom on earth.

Knowing this historical context sheds a whole new light on our text. Let's return to □ Luke 1:32-33.

Notice in particular Gabriel's mention of David along with the three key terms: throne, house, and kingdom. Do these terms sound familiar?

These are the elements of the Davidic Covenant. And notice the □ forever nature of the covenant is affirmed by the words, “there will be no end.”

The point is: As a descendant of his ancestral father, David, Jesus is the Messiah who will fulfill the promises of the Davidic Covenant.

The young Jewish virgin Mary understands this. And it explains why she finds Gabriel’s Christmas narrative so astonishing. Her wonderment is reflected in her dialogue with Gabriel, beginning in □ verse 34.

ESV Luke 1:34 And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” □ 35 And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. □ 36 And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. □ 37 For nothing will be impossible with God.” □ 38 And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

Mary then seeks out the companionship of the only human she knows who can relate to the astonishing things that have happened: her relative Elizabeth, who is miraculously pregnant with the forerunner of Jesus, John the Baptist. The story takes up in □ verse 39, where we see Elizabeth’s astonishment added to Mary’s.

ESV Luke 1:39 In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, 40 and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. □ 41 And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, 42 and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your

womb! □ 43 And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? □ 44 For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. □ 45 And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”

Elizabeth’s adulation elicits still more astonishment and worship from Mary. Mary’s response, which has been dubbed the Magnificat, is commonly arranged like poetry for two reasons. First, the Greek text appears to be hymnic or poetic. Second, Mary’s response is chock full of quotations from the Hebrew Scriptures, including prophecy and allusions to messianic psalms which are themselves poetic.¹ The Magnificat begins in □ verse 46. As I read, notice that Mary does not venerate herself, but God.

ESV Luke 1:46 And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, 48 for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. □ For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; 49 for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. □ 50 And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. □ 51 He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; 52 he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; □ 53 he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. □ 54 He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, 55 as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”

Having delivered this beautiful song, Mary stays with Elizabeth a while before returning home. Verse □ 56 explains,

¹ Swindoll, 50.

ESV Luke 1:56 And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.

I want to rewind a bit to focus on the very last part of Mary's Magnificat in □ verses 54 and 55. I want to show you that Mary is linking the birth of Jesus with the fulfillment of God's covenant promises to the people of Israel.

In recording Mary's specific words, □ "He has helped his servant Israel," Luke uses a verb tense known as the prophetic aorist. Although it is translated here as though it were a past action, it actually pictures what God will do for Israel: He will provide help through Jesus.²

This help for Israel grows out of God's □ "remembrance of his mercy." That is to say, the help springs from God's remembrance of his covenant promises spoken in mercy and loyal love.

When Mary says, □ "as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever," she is saying these covenant promises were spoken to the fathers of Israel. These fathers include first and foremost Abraham. But they also include David, to whom promises were also made.

The point is this: Mary sees the birth of Jesus as a fulfillment of covenants relating to Israel, including the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants.

And this points up a great irony that you may not have considered: Christmas is thoroughly Jewish.

² Bock, 158.

Christmas is linked with the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant. And so, Christmas is actually a Jewish holiday celebrating Jesus as the newborn Davidic King. Whether you receive or reject Jesus as the true Davidic King, the idea of Christmas is still rooted in Jewish history and in the Jewish Davidic Covenant.

This raises at least two questions.

First, □ if Christmas is so Jewish, why didn't many more Jews believe in Jesus as the Messiah and Davidic king?

The main reason is that Jesus did not fulfill their expectations of a Davidic King based on their assumptions concerning the Davidic Covenant.

They were expecting Jesus as the Davidic King to overthrow the Roman government and triumphantly establish his kingdom on earth right away. But he didn't.

Nobody expected the King to be a humble, homeless, wandering preacher who showed no interest in overthrowing Israel's oppressors, but hung out with socially undesirable people instead. And certainly, nobody expected the King to be crucified without lifting a finger in resistance.

Their expectations were based not on the specific promises of God but on their presumptions about how and when the promises would be fulfilled.

The Davidic Covenant did not specify that the Davidic King would immediately upon his appearance take up the throne of his father David to reign over the house of Jacob and thus establish his kingdom. They just presumed he would.

According to God's sovereign plan, Jesus would not set up his kingdom on his first advent. Instead, he will do it on his second, when he comes again.

The Davidic King has come. That was the first advent. Immanuel. God with us. The first advent is what we celebrate at Christmas.

But there will be a second advent. The King is coming again. Those who have received the King by faith look forward to the day when the King will come again to fulfill all of God's promises in God's timing.

So, we are now living between the two advents. The first was the King's incarnation; the second will be his coronation.

That brings us to the second question: □ If Christmas is so Jewish, how did Gentiles get involved?

Remember earlier in the sermon, when I asked you to save to your mental desktop something about the Abrahamic Covenant? As part of the Abrahamic Covenant, God promised that through Abraham—that is, through a descendant of Abraham—all the families of the earth will be blessed. Not just Jews, Gentiles also.

Jesus is that promised descendant who blesses the world.

In retrospect, we can see, and the New Testament explains, that the coming and the crucifixion of Jesus were all part of God's plan to atone for the sins of the world, that Jesus might offer the free gift of eternal life to all who believe. And in that way, Jesus fulfills blessing-to-the-world part of the Abrahamic Covenant.

Between the advents, instead of establishing his earthly kingdom, Jesus is offering eternal life to all who will simply believe in him for it, including Gentiles. That's how Gentiles got in on Christmas.

If it all seems so astonishing, it's because it is. To be sure, Jesus blew away the expectations of a lot of people, including his own original Jewish disciples who were left disillusioned immediately after his crucifixion.

But then Jesus did a little something to authenticate his claim to be the Davidic King: He rose from the dead. And this is not a fanciful figment; it's a historical fact for those willing to follow wherever the evidence leads. Easter authenticates Christmas.

And if all this is true, then it gives us great hope in a dark, stressful time in human history.

The big idea is this: □ Focus not on the problems we see but on the promises we trust.

The problems we see today are many.

Perhaps more than any other time in my lifetime, the world is on edge. There is a pervasive sense of evil and foreboding. Along with it, there is a growing feeling of helplessness and hopelessness.

How are we to make sense of the atrocities of the Hamas-Israel war, or the injustices of the Russia-Ukraine war, or the absurdities of our current political season in America?

If we have lost our common sense of what is true and false, what is good and evil, what is male and female, what is right and wrong, how

can we agree on anything? How can any problems be solved? How can we get along?

And who will lead us? Where are we going? Where are the righteous rulers in the world?

If we focus only on the problems we see, it can be depressing.

But if we think deeply about the full Christmas story, it reminds us of the promises we trust—the promises God has given.

In the original Christmas story, in keeping with God's promises, the Davidic King came the first time to pay for our sins and to offer us eternal life through faith in him.

In Christmas Part Two, in keeping with God's promises, the very same King will be coming a second time to take up his throne and to establish his kingdom in which he will rule with perfect justice and infinite wisdom and endless love. Evil will be vanquished. Righteousness will prevail. Because Jesus will reign. Forever.

And that is astonishingly good news that puts the Merry back in Christmas.

Focus not on the problems we see but on the promises we trust.

Let's pray. Lord, thank you that Christmas is not just a figment of someone's imagination, but is grounded in human history and the fulfillment of divine promises that give us hope and peace. Come, Lord Jesus, come. Amen.