

## **The Faithfulness of God**

### **2 Timothy 2:13**

#### **DT- Put your faith in the one who is always faithful.**

Good morning church. It's good to be back with you. I want to thank Mitch for filling in for me last week as he kicked off our Christmas Advent sermon series. Last week's candle represented hope and this week's candle of course represents faith. Specifically, I want us to focus on the faithfulness of God. How do we see the faithfulness of God in the birth of Jesus, and how should we respond to his faithfulness? Let's pray and we will get started.

#### **PRAY**

The word advent comes from the Latin word *adventus* and it means arrival. For us the season of advent is anticipation of the arrival of Jesus. There's a lot of anticipation that goes into the Christmas season. We anticipate good times with family and friends. We anticipate the traditions we all have each Christmas, and we may even anticipate making new traditions. Our kids and grandkids have the anticipation of the gift giving portion of Christmas. Maybe some of you anticipate the food and treats of Christmas.

For Mary and Joseph, Zechariah and Elizabeth they were anticipating the birth of a son. One being John the Baptist and one being Jesus the long awaited and anticipated Messiah. There's lots of anticipation that goes into this advent season, but the reason we have anticipation is because of the faithfulness of God. Mary and Elizabeth both anticipated who their boys would become because of the faithfulness of God. Your own kids and grandkids anticipate what they might receive for Christmas because you have proven yourself faithful to provide gifts for them in the past. Without faithfulness there is no anticipation.

This is the season of anticipation, the season of expectant hope, the season of a long-awaited arrival, but it is none of those things without the faithfulness of a holy God. I want to point out 2 demonstrations of God's faithfulness surrounding the events of the birth of Jesus. First we will see God's faithful preparation.

#### **1. Faithful preparation.**

Part of the reason we have such anticipation during both Thanksgiving and Christmas is because of all the preparation that takes place. At Thanksgiving there is the preparation of the food. First you prepare by shopping for the food, and then comes the preparation of the food itself. The smell of turkey and stuffing and rolls and sweet potatoes and pumpkin pie. Anybody hungry yet? The preparation of the food fills the house with this wonderful smell, and it fills the house with anticipation of having a great meal with family followed by people falling asleep in awkward positions and places.

The preparation for Christmas brings the same anticipation. The decorations come out, and the tree goes up, and the stockings are hung. The ladies decorated the church yesterday and did a great job of preparing the building for Christmas. Even before that happened, preparation was done to go through the decorations and get rid of the things that are broken or have gone unused for years.

Soon you will begin the preparation of wrapping presents; making that new pair of socks and underwear for your husband look stunning in its wrapped box under the tree. The presents begin to accumulate under the tree as more and more family shows up. If your kids and grandkids are like mine they might begin to shake those presents in anticipation. Some of you prepare for the Christmas parties that you host or attend. Some of you have to mentally prepare yourself to visit the in-laws. You anticipate whether the neighbor around the corner has added to his Clark Griswold light display this year. I could go on from so many different angles; but we all know just how much preparation goes into the Christmas season which in turn creates anticipation.

God's faithful preparation for the birth and life of Jesus brings that same kind of anticipation but for a much more important reason. We see God's faithful preparation in many ways but let me point out 2 that stand out in scripture the most. First is something that Mitch already talked about last week so I won't spend too much time on it, but the Law and the Prophets prepare us.

#### **- The Law and the Prophets prepare us.**

God used the OT and especially the prophets to prepare us for the arrival of Jesus. There are many Messianic prophecies I could point us towards but let me give you just a couple that are probably very familiar. The first one comes from Micah and tells us where Jesus would be born. Micah 5:2 says, "But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, are only a small village among all the people of Judah. Yet a ruler of Israel whose origins are in the distant past, will come from you on my behalf."

Years before Mary would be visited by the angel Gabriel to tell her that she would be giving birth to the Messiah, God was in faithful preparation, telling us exactly where his son would be born. In Isaiah we have half a chapter describing the hope of a coming Messiah. Ever since the fall, God has been in preparation for the coming of his son and Isaiah 9 describes his arrival and his ministry as well. The chapter begins with a reminder that this time of darkness and despair will not go on forever. In the future Galilee will be filled with glory, the place where Jesus is raised.

God tells us through Isaiah that the people who walk in darkness will see a great light. People will rejoice like they do during the harvest. Then Isaiah 9:6-7 says, "For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His government and its peace will never end. He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David for all eternity. The passionate commitment of the Lord of Heaven's Armies will make this happen!"

Church you understand that for years God had been preparing hearts and minds for the coming of his son. How will we know that he is here? He'll be born in Bethlehem. His peace will never end, in fact he will be called the prince of peace. God's faithful preparation in the OT created the anticipation for the Messiah to be born. But God's preparation isn't relegated to just the OT. As Mathew and Luke describe the birth of Jesus we see God's faithful preparation continue through another birth that comes just before Jesus. John the Baptist prepares us as well.

#### **- John the Baptist prepares us.**

John gets the hearts and the minds of the people of Israel ready for the life and ministry of Jesus. He is the voice in the wilderness shouting and clearing the way for the Lord's coming. God uses John to faithfully prepare his people for the coming of Jesus. The angel told John's father Zechariah in Luke 1 that he would have great joy and gladness because of John and that many people would rejoice at his birth. In Luke 1:15-17 the angel says, "He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even before his birth. And he will turn many Israelites to the Lord their God. He will be a man with the spirit and power of Elijah. He will prepare the people for the coming of the Lord."

John grew up knowing exactly what his purpose was. He called people to repentance; he turned hearts back towards God. His job was simple, prepare as many people as he could for the ministry of Jesus. Then when Jesus showed up he stepped aside. John's disciples were a little confused with that. In John 3:26 his disciples come to him and say, "Rabbi, the man you met on the other side of the Jordan River, the one you identified as the Messiah, is also baptizing people. And everybody is going to him instead of coming to us."

John's response is, "Okay, why is that a problem." He says very clearly in John 3:28, "I am not the Messiah. I am only here to prepare the way for him.' It is the bridegroom who marries the bride, and the bridegroom's friend is simply glad to stand with him and hear his vows. Therefore, I am filled with joy at his success. He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less."

John knew why he was there, preparation. God has been so faithful to us. Throughout the OT he gives us reminders, short prophecies that prepare us for the coming of Jesus. Then just before Jesus is born John is born and he does the will of God by being the one who prepares the people for the ministry of Jesus, and then he steps aside with joy as he watches the success of Jesus ministry.

How do we see the faithfulness of God in the birth of Jesus? Through God's faithful preparation. But there's another demonstration of God's faithfulness in the birth of Jesus, but this demonstration happens in the spiritual realm of things. We see it played out in the physical world a little bit in the gospel of Matthew, but the best description of this faithfulness is in Revelation 12. We have seen God's faithful preparation but in Matthew 2 and Revelation 12 we see God's faithful preservation.

## **2. Faithful preservation.**

When we think of preservation we might think of food. Our refrigerators and freezers preserve our food for much longer than if we just let that food sit out on the counter. You might think of house construction or restoration. We put oils and varnish and paint on different things in and outside our homes to preserve them and keep them looking good and doing the jobs they were designed to do.

Preservation is those things, but preservation is also the act or process of keeping something in existence. That's the kind of preservation God displays in Matthew and Revelation. There are 2 things that God preserved in the birth of Jesus. First God preserves his promise.

### **- God preserves his promise.**

God's promise that he would send the Messiah is preserved. Jesus is born as promised. Luke 2:4-7 says, "And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child. And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them."

All that faithful preparation on God's part did not go to waste, the promised Messiah was born. We serve a God who keeps his promises. From the very begin to today he keeps his promises. Joshua 21:45 says, "Not a single one of all the good promises the Lord had given to the family of Israel was left unfulfilled; everything he had spoken came true."

It's no different when you step into the NT period either, 2 Corinthians 1:20 says, "For all of God's promises have been fulfilled in Christ with a resounding "Yes!"

You can count on God to keep and preserve his promises. In the birth of Jesus though it's not just his promise that he preserves. Because of his great faithfulness God preserves the Promised One.

### **- God preserves the Promised One.**

We see that play out right before our eyes in Matthew 2. Mathew tells us that Jesus was born during the reign of Herod. About the time of Jesus birth some wisemen or magi show up from the east asking Herod where the newborn king of the Jews had been born. They had come to worship him. The text tells us that Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard about the birth of Jesus. He got together with his religious leaders, and they told him where the Messiah was going to be born, Bethlehem.

Herod relays that to the wisemen and asks them to politely come back and tell him where he can find the Messiah because he would like to worship him as well. Of course, that was a lie. God went to work to preserve the Promised One so Matthew 2:12 says, "When it was time to leave, they returned to their own country by another route, for God had warned them in a dream not to return to Herod."

That's how God preserved the life of an infant Jesus in the physical realm of things. In the spiritual realm God had to preserve the life of Jesus the Promised One from the attack of Satan. John describes that scene in Revelation 12 through a vision that God gives him. Many of you are familiar with this picture from pervious sermons. What John describes at the beginning of Revelation 12 seems to be this picture of Jesus birth. It is a picture of what was happening behind the veil in the spiritual realm. In that realm it wasn't such a silent night.

Listen to how John describes it in Revelation 12:1-4, "A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born."

On some level this woman represents Mary. Which means the child she is about to give birth to is Jesus. In fact, verse 5 is perhaps the shortest description of Jesus birth, ministry, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. Listen to how John describes all of that in Revelation 12:5, "She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne."

The beginning of Revelation 12 is a picture of what was going on behind the veil when Jesus was born. Satan tried to devour him. Literally he tried to devour him? No. Then how did he try to devour him? By using Herod who wanted the magi, the wisemen, to tell him where the baby was because he wanted to "worship" him. In Revelation worship means war. Herod wanted to kill Jesus not worship him. But we serve a faithful God who preserved the life of the Promised One by giving the wisemen a dream, telling them not to return to Herod.

Herod doesn't give up though. Once he realized the wisemen weren't coming back the text tells us that he sent his soldiers to Bethlehem to kill all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were 2 years old and under. If you haven't figured it out by now God is pretty faithful and he preserves his promise and the Promised One, so he sends another angel to Joseph to warn him of Herod's plan. Matthew 2:13 says, "After the wise men were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up! Flee to Egypt with the child and his mother," the angel said. "Stay there until I tell you to return, because Herod is going to search for the child to kill him." Joseph and Mary and Jesus left that night.

We worship such a faithful God who preserves and protects us in the physical realm but there is so much preservation that happens in the spiritual realm that we have no idea about. How do we respond to the faithfulness of God? With thanks, with honor, with praise? How do we respond? Put your faith in the one who is always faithful, that's how you and I respond. 2 Timothy 2:13 says, "If we are unfaithful, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny who he is."

I want to be sure that you understand Herod is not the dragon of Revelation 12. Satan is the dragon. Verse 9 of Revelation 12 makes that crystal clear. Herod personifies evil, but he's not the dragon, he just gets used by the dragon. The point that John may be trying to make in Revelation 12 is that if the unseen enemy, the dragon, Satan, the one who leads the whole world astray; if that enemy attempted to destroy the promise of God and the Promised One of God then he will do all he can to disrupt our faith as well.

Which makes our response to God's faithfulness that much more important. We have to put our faith in the one who is always faithful. In the rest of Revelation 12 the dragon and his angels fight against Michael and his angels, but the dragon loses quickly and is hurled down to earth. In the text it describes how Satan pursued the woman but twice God preserved her life. Finally, Revelation 12:17 says, "Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring—those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus."

John warns us. The dragon is coming after us. In the beginning of the next chapter there's this ominous scene. Revelation 13:1 says, "And the dragon stood on the shore of the sea."

It's almost as if Satan the dragon is standing there contemplating his failures. He knows he needs help to conquer our faith or subvert it. He was unsuccessful in attacking God's promise and the Promised One. Now his attention is turned towards the church and in chapter 13 two beasts show up to help the dragon. That forms the unholy trinity of Revelation. In John's day those beasts represent the government and false religion.

In John's day Satan used those 2 entities to try and crush the faith of Christians. Does he still do that today? For those who allow him to gain a foothold yes. John will go on to describe the destruction of Satan forever in Revelation 20 but that hasn't happened yet. Which means these words of John are a warning and a reminder for us. The reminder is that God is always faithful. The faithfulness of God is seen throughout all of scripture, and we've seen today his faithful preparation and preservation surrounding the birth of Jesus. Along with that reminder comes the warning. The warning that Satan is after us. An unholy trinity exists to crush our faith. John's cyclical plea throughout Revelation is to hold on tight through this attack, to patiently endure, and to put your faith in the one who is always faithful.

Just before Thanksgiving our youngest son Maddox was not feeling well so Abby stay home with him for a couple of days. I took the two older boys to school on Monday and Tuesday of Thanksgiving week. I had told them to be quiet since Abby and Maddox were still sleeping. They got a little loud one morning, so we had a chat on our way into town that day. I explained to them why I came down on them about being loud while their brother and mother were sleeping.

I said it may seem like I'm being unnecessarily hard on you about this but it's my job to teach you how to be faithful with the small things. If I can trust you to be quiet while they sleep I can trust you with something a little more important and the builds on itself as you grow. I explained how scripture tells us that if we are faithful in the small things that God gives us, he can begin to trust us with even bigger things. I'm sure it's wonderful being the preachers son, but I'm not just raising young boys, I'm raising future kingdom workers and kingdom warriors and kingdom leaders. I don't have time or the luxury to be apathetic or lazy about who they will become. It's my job to teach them to be faithful to the one who is always faithful.

Church the Christmas season brings celebration, joy, and anticipation of the arrival of the King of Kings, Lord of Lords, the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God. But we can't forget that the only reason we have that anticipation is because of the faithfulness of God. Maybe we don't always want to think about what goes on in the spiritual realm of things, just like the boys don't always want to hear their father use scripture to admonish them. Yet we need to know and teach others what goes on in the spiritual realm of things when they are mature enough in their faith to understand it. The birth narrative of Jesus that John tells in Revelation 12 forces us to peak behind that spiritual veil.

It shouldn't scare us, or confuse us, or lessen the celebration and joy we experience around Christmas and the anticipation of our coming king. What it should do is remind us. Remind us that even in the most silent of nights the dragon still lurks. It should remind you that the war is already won, but if you want to win some battles there's one thing you must always do. Put your faith in the one who is always faithful.