

A Blue Christmas
Luke 1:26-38

Brothers and sisters, so much of our experience of the Christmas season and all its requisite celebrations depends on how we FEEL about it... doesn't it?

And how we are feeling about it usually manifests itself as the month of November draws to a close and we begin to see the telltale signs of the approaching Christmas season looming on the horizon.

Some of us feel a spark of excitement at that first glimpse of the holiday decorations showing up in the mall... a tinge of anticipation from the smell of fresh cut evergreen wreaths stacked up outside the Superstore... a flicker of expectancy when the first house in the neighborhood puts up the Christmas lights...

And some of us feel a surge of irritation when we start to hear George Michael crooning about Last Christmas, there is a flash of annoyance in seeing that elf-on-the-shelf peeking out as us

with that stupid grin on his face, and any relief we feel over the demise of pumpkin-spiced everything season is short-lived as it is quickly replaced by overly saccharine advertisements of polar bears drinking Coca-Cola.

You see – its all about how we are FEELING about things.

And our emotional reactions to the arrival of the Christmas – even, and perhaps especially the negative ones - are actually an important part of the whole Christmas experience.

After all can you imagine a Christmas without the kind of transformation and change of heart that occurs in such characters as the Grinch and Ebenezer Scrooge?

There is something pure and good in the spirit of Christmas that gets expressed during the season that eventually breaks down the walls of the mean-spirited kill-joy Grinch and allows him to experience the happiness and joy that Christmas brings.

For Scrooge the Christmas spirits of past, present and future give him a cold hard encounter with his own misery and selfishness showing him where it eventually leads. This realization shakes him out of his self-absorption and he is filled with gratitude that his future is not yet sealed if he will but change his miserable ways and be gracious and charitable to his fellow human beings.

So there is a significant part of the celebration of Christmas that acknowledges and almost expects that as the season progresses throughout the month of December we will be transformed from feeling grumpy and irritated and put-upon by all the expectations of the season to being filled with love and joy and peace and feeling “Christmassy.”

And when this happens brothers and sisters - we say that we have caught the Christmas spirit.

Now in our 3 Colors of Christmas series, where we are looking at the different ways that God reveals himself to us in the birth of Christ and all the celebrations of Christ’s birth -

experiencing this kind of transformation at Christmas is what we call a Blue Christmas.

Now I know that’s a bit ironic because in popular conversation a “blue christmas” is what people refer to when they can’t seem to catch the Christmas spirit for various reasons.

Sometimes it’s because they are struggling with the loss of a loved one, unemployment, they suffer from depression or mental illness and the fact that other people are so happy at Christmas only accentuates what they are missing out on due to their personal circumstances – so the Christmas season can be a very difficult time emotionally for them.

But brothers and sisters let me say that even in such difficult and challenging circumstances at Christmas – God can reveal himself to us – through His Holy Spirit and a blue christmas can become a Blue Christmas because the Holy Spirit meets us in the midst of challenges and our feelings and brings the presence of God to us and transforms us.

Through the work and the power of the Holy Spirit God reveals himself to us as a transforming and life-giving God and we see this illustrated in scripture in Luke 2 where Mary is told that she will become the mother of Jesus Christ.

So turn with me in your bibles to Luke 2 and let's take a closer look at the passage this morning.

Now, if you were to ask someone whether they prefer the New Testament or the Old Testament – I think most people would say New Testament hands down, especially around Christmas time because the New Testament introduces us to baby Jesus; who not only saves us from our sins and gives us eternal life but also exempts us from having to observe the Old Testament Mosaic Law.

But – there are all sorts of Old Testament connections in this New Testament passage, and Luke (who was not a Jew but a Gentile) wants to show us that Jesus doesn't replace the O.T. but rather he fulfills it and this fulfillment or transformation is brought about by God the Holy Spirit.

So the first OT connection is the reference that Elizabeth is six months pregnant, and the subsequent reference in vs. 36 we find out that her pregnancy is a miracle because she was quite old and past child bearing age.

Does that not remind you of some other miraculous pregnancies in the O.T.? Like Abraham and Sarah having a son Isaac when they were near 100 years old.

Well Luke wants us to remember that specific story because in vs. 37 he uses the exact phrase from the Greek version of the OT where God said to Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 18 “ἀδυνατεῖ παρὰ τῷ θεῷ ῥῆμα” for the Angel's reassurance to Mary which the NIV translates as “*no word from God will ever fail*”

And Luke is referencing the amazing miracle of the birth of Isaac here because he wants us to connect Jesus to Isaac – who was the child of the promise – so that we understand Jesus is now the child of fulfillment for everything that was promised in the O.T.

Remember how God promised that Abraham would become a great nation, and have descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and that He would give them the promised land? Yet for a long time Abraham had no children – and eventually he and Sarah passed the natural age to bear children and so God’s promise seemed to go unfulfilled.

But in God’s time – God kept the promise in a way that shows how God brings life where no life seems possible.

And we’re not the only ones who need to hear this and know this and believe this. Mary needs to be reminded of this because of what God has chosen for her... and how it seems impossible because she is not yet married.

How can she conceive a child outside of marriage? Well actually... she knows full well how that can happen, which is why she uses the word virgin to describe herself.

Because brothers and sisters if all that God is promising to achieve through this child is to occur, if the child is to be called

THE Son of the Most High God then surely he must not be conceived in a manner that is disobedient to God’s own Law.

And If God is to give this child the throne of his father King David – then surely, this child must not be conceived in a manner reminiscent of King David’s sin of adultery...

So Mary asks “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” To which the angel explains that the child will be conceived by the Holy Spirit. You see God is revealing Himself to be a God who can bring life where no life seems possible, where the required partner for creating life is not and can not be present.

Brothers and sisters no word of God will ever fail.

But what of the word that God spoke to King David? In 2 Samuel 7:13-14 God says to David *“I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.”*

Has God's word failed here brothers and sisters? There was no descendent on the throne of David – in fact after King Solomon the Kingdom of Israel was split in two, it was a house divided against itself.

And the Kings of Judah and the Kings of the Northern Kingdom of Israel were not faithful in leading God's people be to obedient to the Law of Moses – well... to be fair there were some Kings who were very faithful in that but it wasn't enough - overall the descendants of King David lead the people away from covenant faithfulness to God into idolatry and disobedience.

And as we learned last month in our Breakfast theatre presentation of Daniel – eventually this led to both Kingdoms of Israel and Judah being conquered and sent out of the Promised Land into exile in Babylon.

And although there was a small remnant who were eventually allowed to return and rebuild Jerusalem and the temple – no one from the line of David ever ruled over the nation of Israel

again and the Promised Land was continually occupied by the great empires of History - Babylon, Persia, Greece and now Rome.

And from this scripture passage we see that King David's line had been reduced to someone like Joseph, a nobody who lived in an unimportant town – Nazareth... in the backwater region of Galilee – a hick town in hillbilly country.

So what about God's word to David about a throne for his descendants that would last forever?

No word of God will ever fail... but it sure looks like it had, as David's line has all but died out.

But brothers and sisters let me ask you – did God's word fail? Or did David's line prove itself to be spiritually impotent?

The reality was that King David's descendants revealed the spiritual impotency of our human nature to biologically produce an heir who could faithfully fulfill the spiritual and

covenant responsibilities of being Israel's King and lead the nation to stay faithful to their Covenant with Yahweh.

Brothers and sisters this is what led to the Covenant consequences for disobedience being enacted against God's people and their kings.

So God's word has not failed – but rather it has revealed the failure brought about by the sin that is affecting our human nature – but now... because God's word will not fail... it will bring about faithfulness where faithfulness had failed because of sin.

Or rather we should say that God the Holy Spirit is going to produce an heir to David's throne who is spiritually alive, unaffected by sin and fully capable of being faithful as the King of Israel.

Now – if you are alert and astute and paying attention – at this point you might be thinking *“wait a minute... Jesus is going to be conceived by God the Holy Spirit not by Joseph – so how is*

Jesus going to be an heir to the throne and have David considered to be his father as the angel says??? Mary is not related to David... so how does this work?”

Brothers and sisters I'm so glad you asked – let me explain it to you.

What's going on here is that God the Holy Spirit is stepping into David's family tree to play the role of the Kinsmen Redeemer.

This was a provision that God had made in the law of Moses (Deut 25:5-10) for widows whose deceased husbands had left them no son, or their sons had also died – so there was no male heir to carry on the family ownership of their land, to protect and provide for the family in the absence of the father.

In such circumstances the man's brother had the duty to have a child – a son - with his brother's widow, and this son would

be considered legally to be the heir of the man who had died and would be able to carry on his line and continue the family.

Now because Mary was betrothed to Joseph, there was a legal marital relationship between them – even though they had not yet consummated their marriage.

So, even though Jesus is not biologically descended from Joseph and receives His humanity from Mary, because of the betrothal Jesus can legally and covenantally be considered Joseph's son and thus King David's son and therefore the rightful heir to the throne of Israel who will reign over Jacob descendants in a kingdom that will never end.

For no word of God will ever fail!

So, God the Holy Spirit reveals himself in this action as the God who transformed unfaithfulness into faithfulness, and again in bringing about biological life where it seems impossible - also brings about spiritual life where it should not be possible. Jesus is born a human but with no sin!

And there are other O.T. connections in this passage that highlight significant events in Israel's past where God brings about transformation.

Luke actually calls Mary "Miriam" in the Greek to evoke memories of baby Moses and his later role in Israel's deliverance from slavery in Egypt... God at work transforming Israel from a people of slaves into a Royal Priesthood and a Holy Nation – and this gets transferred on to Jesus here.

When the angel says that the child shall be called Jesus – remember that "*Jesus*" in Greek is the same name as "*Joshua*" in Hebrew – God himself is naming this child after the man who lead Israel into the Promised Land... recalling how God was at work transforming Israel from wandering nomads into a settled nation – receiving their promised inheritance- and this also gets transferred on to Jesus.

Brothers and sisters, I hope you can see from this scripture passage how God is at work as God the Holy Spirit, in the very

conception of Jesus Christ, to reveal himself as a God at work bringing about transformation.

I hope you can see how that transformation involves the fulfillment of His word so that everything that was spoken and promised as part of the Covenant in the O.T. will come to pass in and through Jesus Christ in the N.T.

And that you understand and believe and have faith that Jesus is the New way of fulfilling the Covenant because the Old way where it was our responsibility was doomed to fail.

And brothers and sisters – at Christmas time God the Holy Spirit is still at work bringing about that fulfillment of Jesus Christ in our lives and causing transformation to take place.

That's why we expect to experience a change of heart as the Christmas season progresses so that we are more willing to be kind and generous and forgiving as we catch the Christmas spirit – as we learned last week that's God working in a Green way, general revelation, to let us know what He is up to...

But now that we've seen specifically from scripture – special revelation - how God as the Holy Spirit is bringing about transformation (in a Blue way) we ought to move from a general expectation of transformation to a specific cooperation.

And we can do that by responding as Mary did and saying to the Holy Spirit this Christmas – *“I am the Lord's Servant, may your Word to me be fulfilled!”*

And brothers and sisters, can I suggest that not only can we cooperate with the Holy Spirit for a Blue Christmas by allowing ourselves to catch the Christmas spirit

But we ought to cooperate with the Holy Spirit wherever we feel gumpy or irritated or annoyed or hesitant or fearful or ashamed or resistant in our relationship with Jesus.

Why not allow yourself to be fully drawn by the Holy Spirit into the joy and enthusiasm of praising Jesus in singing and clapping and dancing!?

Why not allow yourself to be used by the Holy Spirit to share the name of Jesus with an unbeliever with confidence and boldness?

Why not allow yourself to receive the power and the gifts the Holy Spirit is eager to give you to equip you for ministry to build up Jesus' body?

But perhaps most applicable for all of us brothers and sisters is to cooperate with the Holy Spirit as He seeks to not only apply Jesus' forgiveness to our sin – but as He works to transform us in breaking sin's power over us.

And to help us conceive of how the Holy Spirit might do that – consider how we've learned about the transformation that takes place for the sin of Anger to become restored to Justice, how the sin of Lust becomes transformed to Intimacy.

How sinful Pride is turned into Power, the sin of Envy is reformed into Identity, Sloth becomes Renewal, Gluttony is recycled into Pleasure and the sin of Greed is transformed into

Sustenance - so... in this way the power of sin in our lives is being broken as the Holy Spirit does His transforming work.

Are we willing to co-operate with the Holy Spirit this Christmas brothers and sisters? Do we want to experience His transformation?

Then one final encouragement for us is this – stop attempting to transform yourself all by yourself. Instead allow the Holy Spirit to minister His transformation in you through those He has called and gifted for that ministry in the Church.

As James reminds us – the Holy Spirit's transforming work comes through the ministering relationships that the Lord Jesus gives us in His body.

James writes "Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person

well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed” (James 5:13-16)

This is especially important for us to remember and put into practice for those whose circumstances make it difficult for them to feel the joy and happiness of the Christmas season.

Sharing their burdens and understanding their grief and praying with them allows the Holy Spirit – and not us – to meet them in their circumstances and to do the work of bringing about the transformation that restores life where life seems impossible.

So brothers and sisters – how are you feeling about all this?

I pray that however you feel, whatever your circumstances may be, that the Holy Spirit will visit you this Christmas season and the power of the Most High will overshadow you – and that the new life of Jesus Christ will be conceived in your spirit and transform you.

Brothers and sisters – may you have a Blue Christmas. Amen