



## ENTER God's presence

**Sing joyfully to the Lord, you righteous; it is fitting for the upright to praise him. For the word of the Lord is right and true; he is faithful in all he does. By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, the starry host by the breath of his mouth. For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.**

– Psalm 33 (selected verses)

Heavenly Father, your word is powerful and active. When you speak, things happen. Help us to hear you speaking to us through your Word today so that through it, we might be made new and receive the hope and peace that come from being your children. In Jesus name, Amen



## SHARE life together

1. **Share your highs and lows with each other?**
2. **Share how you went with your living purposefully from last time?**
3. **How easily do you make promises? How easily do you break them? Do you think people generally trust your promises?**

Promises. We all make them and mostly with the best intentions. But then life happens. Circumstances change, the schedule gets busy. We give assurances and we don't always follow through. We say we will, and we don't. Pressures, deadlines and fatigue sets in. "I'm too tired to read tonight, tomorrow I'll read you two books instead." Promises turn to "We'll see" or "Tomorrow" or "Maybe later." We can find a myriad of reasons why following through with our promise is too inconvenient or impossible. Is it any wonder then that people have trouble believing God's promises today? For when life is hard and results are long in coming, it's easy to think that somehow God has forgotten or even abandoned his promises despite the best of intentions. But behind every promise God makes is his eternal character and the foundation of a relationship that guarantees that Christmas is more than a promise. We'll explore and experience that today.

Week beginning:  
**Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> December 2020**

Worship series:

**Christmas is more than a...**



**VERSE for the week**  
**Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them.**

Luke 1:68



**REMEMBER this week**

**Christmas is more than a promise. It is a living into the certainty of a new reality - that God is here and on the move to stake his life on our eternity.**



**LISTEN** attentively

**Read Luke 1:5-25**

- 5. What key words/thoughts/ideas/questions arise for you as you hear this text?**
- 6. What do you hear this scripture saying to you right now?**
- 7. How do you think Zechariah's reaction to being visited by an angel is similar or different to what your reaction would be if you were visited by an angel with a message from God?**

God's word is full of promises but even more importantly, it is full of accounts in which he keeps and fulfils his promises. He makes a promise with Noah to never again destroy the whole earth with a flood, and he has kept that promise. He made and kept a promise to Abraham and Sarah that they would have a son and that God would make of them a great nation and bring blessing to all people. God made a promise with Moses and the Israelites that he would be their God and they would be his people, and even in their disobedience and in their exile in Babylon he was still their God and they were still his people. God promised King David that from his descendants, God would raise up a king who would establish an eternal kingdom. All of these promises, God fulfilled. All of these things came to pass. They may not have happened in the way the people involved might have liked. They may have taken longer than anyone but God might have expected, but God made good on all his promises. So what makes it so hard for Zechariah, to believe the message of the angel? Why are we so reluctant to place our trust in God's promises?

- 8. How often have you been let down or disappointed by people not coming through on their promises?**
- 9. Sometimes we can feel as though God doesn't come through for us when we experience difficult situations in our lives. Can you recall a time when you have felt like this? Share.**

One of the things that can be challenging for us when we try to trust God and his promises, is that he often goes about fulfilling them in unexpected ways. Abraham and Sarah were well beyond child bearing years yet God promised to give them a son. This was so unexpected and ridiculous an idea for Sarah, that she laughed at the prospect. God used the treachery of Joseph's brothers to provide safety and security for the descendants of Abraham by placing Joseph in a position to provide them with food from Egypt during the famine. God used Moses, a Hebrew, raised as an Egyptian, to lead his people out of Egypt and he made them wander in the desert for 40 years before leading them into the land which he had promised to their ancestors. God took 42 generations (see Matthew 1:1-17) to ultimately fulfil his promise of blessing all the world through Abraham's lineage through the birth of Jesus the Messiah. None of these approaches could be called conventional and in most cases, those to whom the promises were made were not alive to see their fulfillment.

I am sure that being visited by an angel of God was not a regular or expected thing for Zechariah. At this point in time it had been about 400 years since the people of Israel had heard from God at all. No prophets, no judges, no supernatural encounters with God's presence like there had been in the desert. Now poor Zechariah gets a visit from an angel. Surely he is within his rights to ask how he can be sure of what the angel has said?

- 10. How do you feel about the consequences of Zechariah's doubt? What consequences do you think may result from our lack of trust in God's faithfulness and promises today?**
- 11. Despite Zechariah's doubt, despite the rebellion and sinfulness of the Israelites, God still delivered on his side of all his promises. How does this fact bring you peace and hope in your life today?**



**Read Luke 1:57-80**

Zechariah initially had trouble believing the message of the angel, but it would appear that as things progressed and the promises seemed to be working towards their fulfillment, Zechariah came to accept the message and believe that God would indeed bless him and his wife with a son. When Zechariah shows acceptance and obedience by calling the baby John as the angel had told him, his voice is restored and he is filled with the Holy Spirit and begins to sing God's praise and to prophesy about the child. God did not wait for Zechariah to believe and accept the promise before he started to bring it to fulfillment. In fact, it was in God fulfilling his promise that Zechariah was able to trust what the angel had said. Not only that, in verses 67-75, Zechariah seems to be recalling and seeing fulfilled all the promises that God had made to Israel.

**12. What are some of the 'smaller' ways that you have seen God keep his promises to you in your life? How have they helped you to trust God's 'bigger' promises of forgiveness and eternal life in Jesus?**



The process of learning to trust someone's promises can be a long one, especially if you have been let down by them in the past. Zechariah was an Israelite, he knew the history of God's fulfillment of promises to his people, yet even he had trouble accepting the wonderful promise which the angel delivered to him. When people around us feel like God has let them down in their lives, it can be a long journey before they are prepared to trust God again. Learning to see God fulfilling his promises of grace and provision on a daily basis, and being able to help others identify God's faithfulness to them in their own lives is a powerful way to help people learn to trust God. As God's representatives and image bearers here on earth how we go about keeping our promises is also important.

**Read Matthew 5:33-37**

- 13. How do your actions line up with your words? If you give a 'yes' does it always mean 'yes'? Why?**
- 14. God's promises are not like a bad cheque, something you have to hope for, they are a certainty, something you can bank on. How might the certainty of God's promises, change the way you do things this week?**



- Praise God for the gift of his son, Jesus
- Thank Jesus for the hope, joy, love and peace that the story of his birth brings to our world.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to give you peace and confidence in all the promises of God.



You might like to address one person in your group and make the sign of the cross in the air as you say...

**[Name], may the peace of Christ fill your Christmas with so much more. Amen.**