



Series: Advent: Season of Hope

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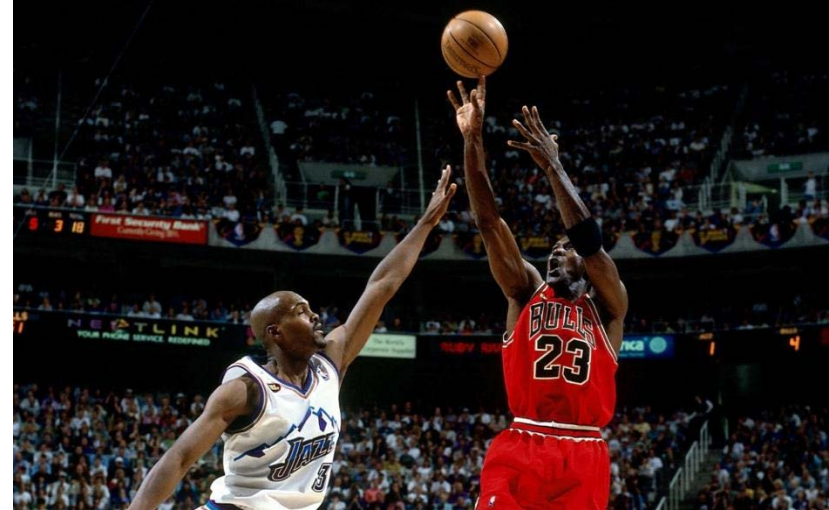
Text: Luke 2:1-7 - Hope Arrives

Well Good Morning, Mercy Church. It's good to be with you all this morning.

If you are worshipping with us for the first time welcome to Mercy Church, we are so glad you're here. You have caught us in the middle of our Advent Sermon series in the Book of Luke.

This morning we are going to continue in our series picking up in Luke chapter 2. If you would take your Bibles and meet with me in the Gospel of Luke chapter 2 verse 1. **When you get there say, "Amen."**

Ladies & Gentleman, I present to you the GOAT:



The year was 1998, June 4th, the Chicago Bulls and Utah Jazz meet up in at the Delta Center in Salt Lake City, Utah. It was Game 6 of the NBA finals. This wasn't just any ordinary game—**it was cited as one of the most intense and iconic games in history. Here's why.** In the Final series, the Jazz won Game 1 and the Bulls won Games 2,3, & 4.

In Game 5, Jordan missed a potential game-winning- 3-point shot at the buzzer leading them to Game 6. So, the stakes were high. Could

the Bulls pull this off? **This was the moment fans were waiting for.**

In the final few seconds of the game, the Bulls were down by one point. With 5.2 seconds left on the clock, 4th quarter, Jordan crosses up Bryon Russel and hits a jump shot putting them up 87-86, giving them their 6th NBA championship. Imagine the crowds. **Shouts of joy erupting all over the stadium with claps of thunder. The feeling of astonishment that everyone had. WOW, what a MOMENT.**

MOMENTS. We all have them. **Brief periods of time in our lives.**

Moments you anticipated and waited for. Like...

- The moment you got engaged.**
- The moment you had a baby.**
- The moment you got your first job.**
- The moment you finally got your driver's license, and your parents didn't have to drive you around anymore.**

But what about those moments that you don't expect? The ones that take you by surprise. The ones that cut deep. That brings with it pain and searing loss.

The ones that leave you scratching your head in confusion, frustration, and anger.

The moment during my wife's pregnancy when the doctors gave us the bad news that our son was anemic in the womb and would need blood transfusions the rest of the pregnancy and after birth. **I remember that moment.** It took my breath away and left me wondering, **"Why God? Why Me? What are you doing?"**

Moments when you question God's hand at work in your life.

We are going to look at a moment in our text this morning. But not just ANY ordinary MOMENT. It was **THE MOMENT—A HOLY MOMENT.**

The moment everyone had been waiting for. The anticipated moment. For years the Messiah had been prophesied as the coming Son of God—the One who would take away the sins of the world. People longed for that moment.

400 years of God being silent between the Old Testament and New Testament and then bursting forth in glorious days, **this Holy Moment arrives.** The moment that changes everything.

But this moment doesn't come like anyone **EXPECTED**. In fact, this holy moment teaches us to

Trust the Heart of God When You Don't Understand the Hand of God.

*I want to set up the scene for you this morning and bring you into some of the details of this **HOLY MOMENT**, and then point out **TWO truths** from our text.*

- Mary is a young girl who is most likely a teenager which is consistent with the typical age of marriage in ancient Israel.
- She is a virgin who is betrothed to a man named Joseph.
- There were three stages to a Jewish wedding during that time. Stage 1 was the engagement (a formal agreement made by the fathers).
- Stage 2 was the betrothal (be tro thal) where mutual promises were made.
- **Stage 3 was the marriage approximately one year later when the bridegroom came for his bride at an UNEXPECTED time.**
- Mary was anticipating the wedding of her dreams. Waiting for her man to come and sweep her up off her feet and marry her.
- She was waiting for something beautiful **but what did she get?**

- She had a visitation from an angel.
- This angel tells her that the Holy Spirit will come upon her, the power of the Most High will overshadow her and she will become pregnant giving birth to the Son of God. **The quite opposite of what she was expecting.**

Trust the heart of God when you don't understand the hand of God.

Mary's pregnant and everything about this is culturally disastrous. A young teen is pregnant and not married. **Not to mention, "Joseph, you are not the father."**

Mary, probably shunned from her community and gripped with shame. Isolated. Perplexed, yet grateful that the Lord chose her.

This is Mary. This is her moment. This moment isn't bad because something good is going to come from it, but it's confusing and hard to grapple with.

Vs. 1 says, **"In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole empire should be registered."**

Other translations say a census had to be taken. A census is the counting of people or groups. We see this in the Old Testament in a variety of ways.

- It was used as a way of ascertaining the military's strength.
- To count the total population
- To count the number of Jacob's family.
- Used for taxation purposes.

A lot can be said about the census but as a result, this decree forced Joseph and his nine-month pregnant fiancée to head back to their hometown.

From Nazareth to Bethlehem was some 70 miles. **On foot.** This walk wasn't some smooth brisk walk down the street to Cookout. It was uphill. It was a grueling trip. It was a long cold trip to Bethlehem most likely in the wintertime with low temperatures. It was said that the trip was so laborious that they most likely had to take it 10 miles per day.

Mary is nine months pregnant on this journey. Many of you moms are thinking right now, **"The devil is a lie. I was so uncomfortable at 9 months pregnant that I could barely walk three miles, let alone 70 miles.**

And to top it all off, Mary who is most likely weary from the journey, when she finally arrives in Bethlehem, The City of David. **THE HOLY MOMENT IS UPON HER. The birth of the Savior of the world.** She gives birth to Jesus **AND** the text says there was no room for her in the Inn.

"Then she gave birth to her firstborn son, and she wrapped him tightly in cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them."

Some scholars say that this meant Mary gave birth in a very poor area in **OPEN AIR** most likely sharing space with animals.

Can you imagine that?

The only thing that she had at her disposal were long strips of cloth that she swaddled Jesus in. She had no bassinet to lay him in, but a manger—**a wood structure that animals feed out of.**

Everything about Jesus' birth points to poverty, rejection, loneliness, and obscurity.

Jesus, the Son of God born in the lowest conditions. **It makes you scratch your head wondering, "God, what are you doing? This doesn't make any sense."**

Church, what do you do when God is orchestrating things in your life that don't make sense?

When the unexpected comes knocking on your door?

When the hand of God seems to be laden with pain and darkness.

When God's will for your life is uncomfortable and inconvenient.

What do you do? Here's what we learn from this text. Two things:

Understand That the Hand of God Is Not Convenient nor Comfortable (vs. 2-4).

Have you ever been running late? You know, you wake up a couple of minutes late and everything after that begins to spiral.

You hop in the car and stop signs become yield signs. ***I may or may not be confessing.***

When every traffic light turns red on you, and you immediately start rebuking the traffic light casting

out the devil. "I bind the devil in this stop light, turn green in Jesus' name."

Maybe you have to drop the kids off at school and the carpool line that day is extra-long and you're just waiting your turn.

Or maybe you have to run a few errands and when you get to the store, all the lines are backed up and you're like, "You people, why are y'all shopping at the Dollar Store on a Tuesday. Don't you have jobs?" I still can't understand that one, **"Go to work people because you are inconveniencing me."**

In those moments your blood is boiling. You're frustrated. Disappointed. Angry. Inconvenienced. Your day has been disrupted and it is NOT going the way you want it to.

*I totally get it. I'm right there with you. But what if in our day-to-day **moments** of inconvenience, waiting, and discomfort, we started to see that God is ordaining all those moments. That nothing in our day-to-day life is outside of the will of God. That daily moments whether big or small are GOD MOMENTS. And God is teaching us something through those moments.*

Life will not go the way we want it to. **And here's why.** You and I are not the author of life. We were created by the Author of Life, Genesis 1:26, with the purpose of glorifying Him and fulfilling His plans, Genesis 1:28. God in His **providence** is fulfilling every single plan that he has set forth from the beginning of time. In your life. In my life. And in the world.

I love how a pastor named John Piper describes the providence of God. He says, "**Absolutely everything that needs to be done to bring about His purposes, God sees to it that it happens.**"

Think about it this way. The hand of God is moving and orchestrating the details of our lives and the world to bring about his ultimate purposes.

And sometimes that means a life of inconvenience and discomfort like Mary and Joseph. Jesus was prophesied about several times in the Old Testament. In **Micah 5:2** it says that Jesus had to be born in Bethlehem. Therefore, God orchestrated a series of events to ensure that **HIS WORD WOULD COME TO PAST. THAT HIS PLAN WOULD PREVAIL.**

Could God have made it easy for Mary and Joseph? **Absolutely.** But God isn't in the business of

making our lives easy. God has never promised us that things will go our way.

In fact, the Bible teaches us that God allows and wills thorns and thistles, pain and suffering, trials, and tribulations of all sorts. He has the right and power to do as He chooses. And this means that life won't be fair. It'll sting in some seasons. It'll hurt you until tears come rolling down your cheeks in exasperation crying, "**Why God, why?**"

Just ask Job. Just ask Paul. Just ask Jesus.

Every one of us in this room has a lot that has been decided upon before the foundations of the universe. **Proverbs 16:33 says, "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord."** And whatever your lot may be, it won't always be as you want it.

But Jesus said, "**In this world you will have trouble, but take heart for I have overcome the world.**" **That in Him you may have peace no matter what the trial is.** John 16:33

Paul said in **Romans 8:28**, "We know that ALL things (somebody say all things), all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose."

Paul would later say in **2 Cor. 12:9** God's grace is sufficient for you, for when you are weak, you are made strong in HIS power.

Ephesians 6:10 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of HIS might.

Job would say in chapter 13 verse 15, "Yet though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."

- So, when the diagnosis comes unexpectedly.
- When the children or grandchildren walk away from the Lord.
- When death comes
- When marriage starts to fail
- When your parents get divorced

We must understand That the Hand of God Is Not Convenient nor Comfortable.

BUT IT IS GOOD!

And as we understand this we must. Point #2

I. Surrender & Trust the Heart of God (vs. 6-7).

Mary had her whole life ahead of her. She could have lived a "normal life" like many other young teens her age. But God had a different plan for

her. A different plan for the world. Called by God to birth the Messiah, Mary had to do the hard work.

She had to throw up her hands and say, "**I surrender all.**"

To surrender means that she had to submit herself to God willingly and freely letting go of her own will.

I remember when God first called me into full-time ministry. I had just finished grad school with a degree in Special Education. I was looking to go back to grad school and get my PHD. I was chasing the American Dream and trying to climb the ladder of success in my career.

God had orchestrated a series of events that led me into a meeting with the college pastor of my church. He offered me a job and looked at me and told me that I would be a college resident and I would have to raise support for my salary.

Support raising—that's hard. You mean I have to raise my own salary? I then take off to Kenya for a few weeks on a mission trip and almost every night, I could hear God whispering into my heart, "**Quit your job. Give it up. I'm calling you.**"

I struggled with this calling. Who would quit their job with a salary and benefits and a family they had to provide for? To raise support. No real man! **God, I cannot do this. This doesn't make sense. This is not how I want to live MY LIFE.**

Well, Jesus said in **Luke 9:23**, ***"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."***

Jesus also when preparing for death on a cross said three times in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Nevertheless, not my will but your will be done."

The verses leading up to this Jesus was asking God to let the cup of wrath pass him by. In other words, Jesus was wrestling with the discomfort of the cross and what was about to happen. Asking God was there another way for sinners to be made right. He throws up his hands and trusts the heart of His Father. That is surrender.

To follow Jesus means we have to surrender. We must let go.

But not let go for the sake of letting go but letting go and then trusting His heart. **We let go AND trust.**

I love how Tim Keller defines trust. He says, ***"Trust is accepting what God sends into your life whether you understand it or not."***

Trust isn't easy. Trust doesn't feel good. In fact, it's not a feeling.

Trust is this deep-down confidence that God is who He says He is. That He is a faithful promise keeper. That He is for you and not against you. ***It says, "God, I don't understand this. It doesn't make sense to me. It hurts, but I know you are in control, and I trust you."***

And in those moments where you are prone to lose trust in God, you look back and remind yourself of God's past faithfulness. ***To remind your heart that He is a good, good Father who loves you. That He will never leave you nor forsake you.***

My son Judah, two months before he was born, the doctors delivered bad news to my wife. Your body is attacking the baby's red blood cells. As soon as he makes them, your body attacks them. We'll need to do intrauterine transfusions.

The doctors decide to take Judah at 37 weeks. My wife delivers and she holds Judah for about 60 seconds before the nurse takes him. The nurse and

I walk down the hall for the Judah's vitals. They notice that he's struggling to breathe and really yellow.

In a moment's time, Judah is taken from us and placed in the NICU. Waiting and waiting wondering what's happening with our newborn son, we get all the reports of bad news. He's transferred to a high-risk hospital for further assessment. He has cytomegalovirus, possibly can't see, the list goes on. The doctors tell us they are going to discharge us, but Judah has to stay. With tears in my wife's eyes, she says, "I want my baby."

What do you do when you are helpless? When you can't even help your wife. When you're speechless. When you are hopeless? Shaking my fist at God crying, "Why us? What have we done? Why didn't you take it away?"

That moment; our moment of confusion, heartache, and pain. We had no choice but to **Trust the Heart of God When We Didn't Understand the Hand of God.**

And as I look back over that moment. I realize that we don't hope alone this morning like an orphan waiting for adoption. We hope with a God who left heaven and earth to be born in a manger so that

he would live a life of rejection, loneliness, suffering, pain, and ultimately death. So that when you walk through the hardest moments of life, you have a Savior who walks beside you and says, ***"I know how you feel, I know what it's like, I've been there, and I am with. I'm working it out for good, trust me I have plan. I am doing something far greater than you; something bigger that your finite mind could never fathom."***

Christmas isn't a time we just put on a happy face and sing carols; it's a time we hope. We hope when we cannot understand the hand of God, but we trust the heart of God. We hope in his future return. At His second coming the King will return to us on the cloud of victory Every pain will lose its truth And the eyes of faith will see

God came because you could never get to Him.