

**SERMON:** God Keeps His Promises: *Promises Made.*

Rev. Geoff Ross Sunday, January 3, 2021 St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church.

*[Luke passage/Favourite passage – Mother's/Father's days – should be a Grandparents Day! Simeon/Anna elderly/waiting in hope/faith of God's promises would be fulfilled – and they were! Promises made/fulfilled!]*

And, this is what we heard during Advent: Promises were made – all earth waited, longing to hear from God. Then, when hope had been exhausted, God broke heaven's silence and entered our world in the darkness of a winter's night. Promises were/had been made: the people waited – and then God responded. On Christmas Eve this is what we celebrate. Yes, God's Love came to earth in the form/being of Jesus; but that's not the full story! That's what happened, but the real story/behind the events at Christmas – is that God keeps His promises!

*[Have you ever wondered how anyone could know for sure that God keeps his promises? Think about it: is there a way to find out? Isn't that what we all want: Proof? Wouldn't that help? Jortberg: "Faith&Doubt", says 'proof' kills faith – faith/hope about something more/transcendent/beyond what we can see/hold/touch. Paul/Romans – hope "whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope." This is our hope in God/God's promises – believed/hope that doesn't disappoint/not seen but waited on....]*

And, this is a good way to start off a New Year; examining/reviewing/reminding ourselves of God's promises – what they were/ why they were made/how they were/will be fulfilled. And the best way to do this is to do what people of faith have done since OT times: Go to the source/Biblical record of God's Word/Promises – the text that bears witness to God's plan/purpose for us/you/me. The OT is a document of a time of Prophets/Promises – made by God through the Prophets to/for a people in need of hope. It was a time of waiting/anticipating/longing for what was to come/filled with doubts BUT also hope. Peter/additional reading wrote of "the prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours/ours" – a prophecy/promise made for us/you/me about the "Gospel" of God's promised Messiah. (1Pet 1:10-12)

*[Advent/waiting: heard OT prophecies/promises told to a people in darkness/yearning/hoping/waiting – a 'coming Messiah'/'Prince of peace'/'a Light to the world'. Like them we wait/earn for a sign/long for God's promises/Word to be fulfilled – only now it's for another coming.]*

With Christmas we mark the coming of the One promised/promised One – Emmanuel/God with-us/God's "only Son." Christmas celebrates the incarnation of God into human form/to be-with us/live as-us/die for-us/save us. It is also/both the fulfillment of God's promise and the start of the clock to the full-fulfillment of the whole of God's saving plan/purpose for creation. The NT celebrates the fulfilled promise. But, just as the promise of the coming Messiah was fulfilled in Jesus Christ, so also His coming again is a promise that will be kept. But, like the OT Prophets, our view of the future is obscure: we

cannot know when/how He/Christ will return/just know it'll happen in God's good time – as God promised it would.

The truth is, right now is about waiting: We're in the time in-between the promise of Emmanuel – God with-us – and the promised return of the Son of God to usher in the New Heaven/Earth/return to restored full relationship with God. This is what a life lived in faith means: the promise is all we have and even if we have to wait/know what to expect/will happen, we're to be witnesses/heralds to/of the promise. The OT Prophets knew God's promises that the Messiah would come/that the *“days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made”* (Jeremiah 33:14): they knew God would keep His promise – they just didn't know when. They lived only by faith/trust in the promise. It is the same for us: we're to wait in the certain hope that God will fulfill His every Word/the day will come.

*[Advent/waiting: But waiting hurts/the promise doesn't bring comfort/assurance we want/expected – cried like the Psalmist: “Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord: I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope” (Ps 130:1,5) – we may not experience it/but God's promise will include us: despite everything/We/you/me/we belong to God. Ironic/Christmas=depression/loneliness/sadness-more so with COVID19: but God's promise will wipe all that away/Jeremiah reading.]*

Sometimes all we have is the promise, and a God who fulfills His promises. This is what we celebrate at Christmas: the fulfillment of God's promise – *“when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son ...in order to redeem”* those waiting/hoping/longing for God's Word/promise to be realized. (Gal 4:4) In the midst of our waiting, God came to us as Emmanuel/God with-us/to be-with/guide/love/return us into His presence/and to raise us up/redeem us – all in the form/being of Jesus. This is the story of our life in God/it's the story of Simeon/Anna – a life spent waiting/doubting/suffering/wondering, a life of trust/hope/faith – **confirmed/validated/fulfilled/proven**. Yes, these are hard/trying times/we're waiting/doubting/longing: Like for Simeon/Anna before us, this Epiphany may God reveal to us the Good News of His Gospel – that God keeps His promises. Amen.