

"PROMISE"

November 30, 2021

Jeremiah 29:10-12
Midweek Advent

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We have all seen it. We have all admired and marveled at its beauty. We may not have seen it fully displayed in all of its magnificent colors, but we still have seen it in the sky when the sun begins to peek through the clouds of a passing rainstorm. That's right! A rainbow! And when you see a rainbow in the sky, especially a full rainbow with all its seven colors, arching from one end of the sky to the other, what do you think of? What comes to mind? A pot of gold at the end of the rainbow according to leprechaun lore. Probably not. Most of the time we marvel at the beauty of God's hand on display. But there is more to it than just that! Each time you see a rainbow in the sky it should remind you of something very important and reassuring. And that is, the promise God made to Noah and to the world after the Flood. And do you remember what that Promise was and still is? God promised Noah, **"THIS IS THE SIGN OF THE COVENANT (that is, promise) BETWEEN ME AND YOU AND EVERY LIVING CREATURE WITH YOU THAT I AM GIVING FOR ALL GENERATIONS TO COME. I HAVE SET MY RAINBOW IN THE CLOUD, AND IT WILL BE THE SIGN OF A COVENANT BETWEEN ME AND THE EARTH ... I WILL REMEMBER MY COVENANT, ... AND THE WATERS WILL NEVER AGAIN BECOME A FLOOD TO DESTROY ALL FLESH."**

So when you see a rainbow, don't just look at its beauty. Look at it and see a sign of God's Promise; knowing that with God a promise made is a promise kept. And we are reminded of this in the words of the prophet Jeremiah before us this evening, and even in our preparations to celebrate Christmas.

The Lord had directed his prophet Jeremiah to write a letter to the people of Israel who were in exile and remind them of the Promise and the Plan he had for them; and that is – **"AFTER SEVENTY YEARS HAVE PASSED IN BABYLON, I WILL COME TO YOU AND FULFILL MY GRACIOUS WORD TO BRING YOU BACK TO THIS PLACE. FOR I KNOW THE PLANS I HAVE FOR YOU, DECLARES THE LORD..."** For seventy years they would remain in captivity but there was an end to it. The time would come when the Lord would carry out his plan and fulfill his promise and bring them back to the land of Israel. They had his Promise. And it was that Promise they were to hold onto. In the meantime, they were to continue to call on the Lord and hold fast to his Promise; knowing that with God a promise made is a promise kept.

And what does all of this have to do with us? What is the season of the church year we are beginning to celebrate? Advent! Advent comes from the Latin word which means, "Coming". And what's coming? For 99.9% of us, what is coming is Christmas. Our children are all excited and they cannot wait for Christmas to come; looking forward to the presents under the Christmas tree; reminding you every day of the promise (**if you made one**) to buy that special present they asked for. You know the one; the present every child wants, thus making it a high-ticket item; the one you hope you will be able to find at the store, but no guarantees because of the supply chain crisis. But remember, no excuses. You promised and your children are counting on you to keep your promise. And whether you will be able to keep your promise or not, only time will tell. But no matter how it goes, we have something far greater to look forward to and to celebrate each Christmas.

Not to minimize the joy of Christmas or to marginalize the importance of celebrating Christmas; but our celebration of Christ's birth should remind us of one very important thing; and that is, God's Promise and the Plan he has for us. Yes, Christmas is the Promise of a Savior. The promise God gave to Adam and Eve in the Garden. The Promise God gave to Mary – **"YOU WILL CONCEIVE AND GIVE BIRTH TO A SON, AND YOU ARE TO NAME HIM JESUS. HE WILL BE GREAT AND WILL BE CALLED THE SON OF THE MOST HIGH..."** and to Joseph – who was reminded by the angel that all that was taking place with Mary was to fulfill what the Lord had promised through his prophet Isaiah – **"LOOK, THE VIRGIN WILL BE WITH CHILD AND WILL GIVE BIRTH TO A SON. AND THEY WILL NAME HIM, IMMANUEL, WHICH MEANS,**

GOD WITH US. And let's not forget about the shepherds, to whom the angel announced – **"FOR BEHOLD, I BRING YOU GOOD NEWS OF GREAT JOY, WHICH WILL BE FOR ALL PEOPLE. TODAY, IN THE TOWN OF DAVID, A SAVIOR WAS BORN FOR YOU. HE IS CHRIST THE LORD."** And that promise carries over to you and me. That is why this time of the year is an exciting time. That is why we joyously celebrate Christmas. Christ is born! God has kept his Promise and carried out his Plan to save the world from sin; and that he has done.

But our focus needs to go beyond the immediate celebration of Christmas. Christmas, even as joyous of a celebration it is; it is a reminder to us that God keeps his promises and there is another Promise he has given us; one far better than our yearly celebration of Christmas; one that is guaranteed because of Christmas; one that we can confidently look forward to because Christ is born; and that is God's Promise of eternal life with him in heaven.

Remember what Advent means – **"COMING"**. And what is coming, as he promised, is Christ's Return, when our Lord and Savior will come and take us to our eternal home in heaven. That is God's Plan and his Promise. Just as he reminded the exiles in Babylon that he would bring them back to Jerusalem, so his plan and promise for us is the time when he will take us to heaven.

Each time we celebrate Christmas we have proof that God keeps his promises. Every time you admire a rainbow in the sky, you see a beautiful display of God keeping his promise. And let's not forget about the cross on Calvary and our Savior's empty tomb. From the very beginning of creation and even before, God had a Plan and he gave Adam and Eve a promise that he would deliver them and the world from sin and its eternal punishment. And that he has done! Everything that took place from that moment on, happened the way it did as part of God's Plan; carried out under his direction and guidance so that his promise of a Savior would be fulfilled. In Christ Jesus we have the fulfillment of God's promise. In Christ Jesus, by faith, we know we have forgiveness, life, and salvation. We have God's promise on this. However, it is a promise Satan does not want you to believe. He will do everything in his power to get you to doubt, to not believe God's promise of forgiveness and life. He even wants you to ignore God's promise to punish unrepentant sin so that you continue to believe that it is okay to live in sin. But don't fall for Satan's lies. Remember God's promise. And to help you remember his promise, he gives you and me his Body and Blood in the Blessed Sacrament of Holy Communion. By eating and drinking Christ's Body and Blood together with the bread and wine, we receive God's fulfilled promise of forgiveness. And as he keeps this promise, will he not also keep his promise of eternal life that awaits us in heaven?

Of course, he will! A promise made by God is a promise kept. God never promised that our life in this world would be trouble free. He never promised that we would never get covid, or cancer, or any other illness. But what he has planned for us; and what he has promised through his Son, our Lord Jesus, is the glory of eternal life in heaven with him. So, as you celebrate Christmas, or Easter, or better yet, as you live each day of your life, do so with the comfort and the assurance of God's Promise, knowing that with our Lord, a promise made, is a promise kept. Amen.