

**Luke 1:26-33** The story of Jesus birth is not the beginning, but for many the salvation experience begins here. The promised Savior came. Do we miss the significance of why He came? It can become focused on "me." This scripture falls in the middle of the story of redemption - from Genesis to Revelation. So for the story of Christmas, we begin in **Genesis 1:1-2** *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness covered the surface of the watery depths, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.* **Verse 26** *Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth."* **Verse 31** *God saw all that he had made, and it was very good indeed. Evening came and then morning: the sixth day.*

We begin with God speaking into the darkness and making us in His image. Adam and Eve fall into sin and are removed from the Garden and experience consequences. **Genesis 6:6-7** *the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and he was deeply grieved. Then the Lord said, "I will wipe mankind, whom I created, off the face of the earth, together with the animals, creatures that crawl, and birds of the sky—for I regret that I made them."*

If we relate to God as a dictator, then we hear God's disappointment in humanity, destruction, and the starting over. But if we have a relationship with the Father, then we see His broken-heartedness at what His children have done. People are His creation and He is full of sorrow at what they had become. **Genesis 6:8** *Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.* The ark was built and it's the first shadow of Jesus and God's plan for redemption. The Old Testament is full of shadows - it speaks of what God is going to do but yet not fully experienced or realized. Noah was not perfect but found favor. They built the ark as a saving place for sinners in the same way Jesus is a saving place for us. God gave instructions to Noah on how to do it. God gives us instructions on how to be saved. If God cares how a boat is built, then He cares how our lives are lived. Noah had to make a decision to go into the ark. Salvation is the same for us as we make a decision to come to Jesus. For Noah, as the rains came, time was running out. For us, we don't know the day or hour that Jesus will come, so be ready as many will be unaware.

The Old Testament is full of shadows for our redemption and hope. Humans are hard-wired for hope. Hope based on any other than Jesus Christ will let us down. Jesus is our hope and this hope is significant.

Israel had given up hope in God and blamed God for their situation. They felt like God didn't hear them. Are you the same? Israel couldn't admit that they were the problem. The Prophet Isaiah gives a prophecy from the Lord to Israel. **Isaiah 59:1** *Behold, the Lord's hand is not so short that it cannot save; nor is His ear so dull that it cannot hear.* Real hope must be able to fix what is broken. Israel was at that point. If we put our hope in anything other than Jesus Christ, then our problems will not be fixed. Fixing another won't fix our problems. Changing circumstances won't fix our problems. We need to humble ourselves before God and see that God wants to change us.

**Isaiah 59:2** *But your iniquities are separating you from your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not listen.* **Iniquity** is moral uncleanness, not having purity. We must have moral and spiritual purity in our lives.

**Transgression** is rebellion against His commands. What is our favorite sin? Do we make excuses like..."it is how I was raised," "compared to so and so," "we always did that, it's just who I am." We know we aren't living right but find excuses to not change. **Sin** is falling short of God's mark - not measuring up.

**Isaiah 59:9-12** *Therefore justice is far from us, and righteousness does not reach us. We hope for light, but there is darkness; for brightness, but we live in the night. We grope along a wall like the blind; we grope like those without eyes. We stumble at noon as though it were twilight; we are like the dead among those who are healthy. We all growl like bears and moan like doves. We hope for justice, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far from us. For our transgressions have multiplied before you, and our sins testify against us. For our transgressions are with us, and we know our iniquities.*

Over and over Israel failed to follow God. God would punish them with severe mercy. Mercy directed them away from their path and although painful, it led them back to God. **Isaiah 59:15-16** *The Lord saw that there was no justice, and He was offended. He saw that there was no man—He was amazed that there was no one interceding; so His own arm brought salvation...* The arm of God is always a picture of God reaching to Earth, to man, a shadow of Christ coming. No matter where we've been or where we are at, the long arm of salvation reaches from Heaven to us. Our hope is not found in our circumstances. Our hope is found in the one who reaches down for us.

**Isaiah 59:16-20**...*and his own righteousness supported him. He put on righteousness as body armor, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and he wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak. So he will repay according to their deeds: fury to his enemies, retribution to his foes, and he will repay the coasts and islands. They will fear the name of the Lord in the west and his glory in the east; for he will come like a rushing stream driven by the wind of the Lord. "The Redeemer will come to Zion, and to those in Jacob who turn from transgression." This is the Lord's declaration.*

Jesus takes vengeance against sin so that it doesn't have the last word. He is adamant about redeeming us, and about becoming our hope. It's a beautiful image of God reaching down, sending Jesus, born of the virgin Mary, living a sinless life, submitting to the cross, unto death, to be raised in victory for our salvation.

This is what the message of Christmas is about - not just a baby born - but a Father who wants to redeem us unto Himself. It is so much bigger than a moment in history. God wants relationship with us. In our brokenness, in our loss, in our lack, in our fear, hope has come and His name is Jesus. That is what Christmas is all about. He made a way for us to have relationship with Him. Jesus provides hope through His life, death, and resurrection.

No matter how messy things are with each of us, we can find hope in Christ. Admit we can't do it on our own, let others pray with us, and surrender to Jesus.