

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Second Sunday after Christmas
January 5, 2025
Sermon by Pastor Gary A. Pufahl
The waiting was over; the promise was kept

But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son to be born of a woman, so that he would be born under the law, ⁵ in order to redeem those under the law, so that we would be adopted as sons. ⁶ And because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts to shout, “Abba, Father!” ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but a son. And if you are a son, then you are also an heir of God through Christ.

—Galatians 4:4-7 EHV

It's at this time of year that many people make New Year's Resolutions. These are promises that people make to themselves or to others that things are going to be different in the New Year. Maybe you have some promises that you have all lined up for the New Year. Promises of eating better, exercising more. Maybe you have promises of being a better friend, a better husband, a better mother, a better son. Maybe you are determined to increase your offerings in the New Year. Or maybe you are ready to make some promises that you are going to attend church more often or get involved in a Bible study with your fellow Christians. They are promises, aren't they?

You and I make promises regularly, sometimes without even thinking through them. And, let the truth be told, there are times when we do not come through on those promises, right? I just found out this year that the second Friday after the New Year is called “Quitters day.” People just quit on the promises and resolutions they made.

Why is it that we can make promises so easily and so quickly, but just as easily and just as quickly we can break them? I'm sure there are a number of different reasons. Maybe we forget. It's easy to forget about a promise that we made. Sometimes parents make a promise to a child just to stop him from being annoying. The parent may forget, but the child won't. Maybe we break our promises because they were too hard to keep. It was too much work, and you weren't ready to put the effort and the work in to keep it. I think a lot of people break their marriage promises because they don't want to work for their marriage. They aren't willing to go through the pain and hardship of making their relationship flourish. Maybe some people break promises because the circumstances have changed. Most of the time, a promise deals with things in the future, and, well, we know how quickly circumstances in the future can change. You and I make promises regularly, and for whatever reason, there are times when we cannot make good on our promises.

My friends, what if that's how it was with God? God has made some pretty incredible promises, hasn't he? What if his promises were just empty? What if his promises were just cheap talk? I'm sure you have considered this, but do you realize how much we depend on God for promises he has made and the only thing that we have to go on with those promises is what we find in ink on a page? Just think about some of these promises that God has written down in his Bible. “You are my son or daughter. I have made you a part of my family. Your home is with me in heaven. Through your baptism and the promises that I have connected to that water, I have made you holy in my sight. You are the heir of everything that is mine, and, of course, since everything is mine, everything is yours.”

Those are some incredible promises. And I'm going to guess that more often than not, you have felt more like a pauper instead of a prince or princess. “Where are the riches? If I am an heir of everything that is God's, why am I struggling so much to pay for the bills? If God has given us peace, like he promises, then why am I so restless? Why am I so stressed out?” Are those just empty words?

We come to worship, and we are here bowing down before God praying, “Lord, have mercy on me. Forgive me my sins. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.” And God comes to us and says, “Done! I promise that your sins have been washed away and you are clean.” And yet you look at your life and you still sin, right? You think to yourself, “So what has changed? Why am I not clean? Why do I still feel dirty? Was that just talk? Why don't I feel different?”

And many people have walked away from the church because it seems as though God doesn't make good on his promises. And what happens? Your faith gets challenged, right? Your confidence in God's ability to deliver on his promises is being squeezed all the time.

I get that. I understand that. I can relate to that. So many of God's promises are in ink on a page. They're written in that book we call “The Bible.” But we haven't seen the full manifestation of him making good on his promises. The full manifestation of his promises will, of course, come when we are taken to heaven. But once again, those are words, aren't they? It's easy to say. How do we know it's really going to happen that way? How do we even know there is a heaven? I mean, sure God has promised it. But I haven't met anybody personally who has actually seen heaven and can verify that it's real. Have you?

And the truth is that some of us in this church are probably going to leave this Earth in the New Year. Some of us are going to die in 2025. How can you trust in God to keep his promises and make good on his promises, especially when we find it so difficult to keep our promises?

Well, this isn't blind faith. It never has been. It never will be. You and I can be most confident in our God that he always keeps his promises as we take inventory of the past. We look *back* to promises kept as we look *forward* to promises made.

The text that is before us today is one that we can go to again and again to remind ourselves that God always keeps his promises. Let's ponder these words from Galatians 4. Paul says, "**But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son...**" And right there is evidence of a God who keeps his promises. Ever since Adam and Eve messed up their own lives and the lives of all people, God made a promise. "I'm going to send a Savior for you." Adam and Eve lived some 4000 years before Jesus came to this earth. But God promised that he would come.

Did God forget that he made the promise? Oh, from a human perspective people may have wondered: "Is God going to keep his promise?" But again and again throughout the Old Testament pages, he reiterated the same promise. "A Messiah, a Savior, is coming." You remember the promise that was given to Abraham. A man who was 99 years old and childless, whose wife was way past the age of bearing children, received a promise from God. God did make a promise that we too difficult to keep. "**You will be the father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant, (my promise), as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.**"

God had promised to Abraham that through his descendants a Savior would come. Abraham lived around 2000 years before Jesus came to this earth. It was still a long time coming, from a human perspective. And yet you can see again and again in ink the promises of God. A Savior is coming! A Savior is coming! God knew the exact time in the future when he would keep his promise.

"**And when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son...**" *The waiting was over; the promise was kept!* God kept his promise! He promised that the Savior would be born in Bethlehem. He promised that he would have to flee to Egypt. He promised that the Savior would grow up in Nazareth. And so "**when the set time had fully come,**" there was a virgin who was pledged to be married, who was living in Nazareth, and she became pregnant. Not by Joseph. But by a miracle of God. Promise kept!

And "**when the set time had fully come,**" Caesar Augustus made a law that everybody needed to return to their homeland so that a proper census could be taken, and so this family of a man and a pregnant virgin traveled to *Bethlehem*. Promise kept!

And "**when the set time had fully come,**" a ruler by the name of Herod set out to kill every boy under the age of 2, and so this family of a man, a woman, and a child traveled down to Egypt to flee from the pending death threat. Promise kept!

And "**when the set time had fully come,**" when Herod had died, this family then moved from Egypt to Nazareth, the place where Jesus would grow up. Promise kept. God kept every single promise, even the most minute details of those promises.

We could spend the entire day talking about these Old Testament promises, couldn't we? God promised through Isaiah that this Savior would be pierced for our transgressions. And look at who is the military force at the time of Jesus: the Romans, the government that had a brutal, powerful form of capital punishment called crucifixion. That Savior would grow up to be pierced, not for his own sins, but he would have his hands, feet, head, and side pierced for our sins.

"**When the set time had fully come, God sent his Son...**" Not only because of the great roads that the Romans built so that the word of a Savior could easily and peacefully be spread, but because everything was set in place for him to keep his promises. A Savior was coming who would come to redeem, to ransom us, to save us from sin, death, the devil, and hell.

And he did that in the only way he could, just as he promised: "**He sent his Son to be born of a woman.**" This wasn't some hidden mission. He promised Adam and Eve all the way back in the Garden of Eden that someone would come from the offspring of the woman. And so God made good on his promise. God sent his Son. He entered our planet the same way you and I did... through the agonizing trauma of the natural birth process, minus the epidural, of course. And he came into this world through a woman, a poor woman, and in a dark barn. That's how he came to save you.

And not only that. "**God sent his Son to be born of a woman so that he would be born under the law.**" Why did he have to do that? Because that's how you and I are. There are certain laws that you and I live under. There are the

laws of the government. We have to keep those, don't we? If you speed on the-202, you will have to pay a hefty ticket. We have laws of the government that we need to keep, and at times we have broken.

Well, Jesus was born under Caesar's law, and he kept that law perfectly as a good citizen because of the times when we haven't. He was born under all God's Old Testament laws, all the laws that dictated how a person was to worship. He kept those laws perfectly once and for all. But he was also placed under God's moral law, his timeless laws of human behavior. We summarize them with the 10 Commandments. And Jesus kept all those laws perfectly as well so that he could bring pardon to the human race who has broken them thousands and thousands of times.

And what is the result? **"In order to redeem those under the law, so that we would be adopted as sons... So you are no longer a slave, but a son. And if you are a son, then you are also an heir of God through Christ."** You are all sons of God, heirs of eternal life. You are not slaves to your sin. It does not own you. It doesn't hang over your head. Many times that's what sin does, doesn't it? If you receive a speeding ticket, it just looms over head and you feel so miserable because of it. If you hurt another person, you can carry that guilty with you everywhere you go. But the result of Jesus keeping God's laws perfectly in your place is that you are not slaves to those sins. They do not own you. They are gone, no longer your sins! Jesus took them away from you.

And because of that, you belong to God, but not just as his slave where he tells you to do something and you simply respond, "Yes, sir." No, he makes you a part of his family, but not just any part of his family. You are a part of his family that receives his full inheritance. Really? Has he really done that for us? Can a sinful fool like me really be a holy heir of God? Yes, that's what God promises. And as we can see from the pages of history and from the pages of Scripture, not only has God written those promises with the ink of a pen, he has written those promises with the blood of his Son. Right there, as you see a baby born in a manger, a baby who grows up to die on a cross, right there is where you can see the most vivid and clear display that God keeps his promises.

Now what does that mean for you as you head into this New Year? Well, it means a lot of things, but let me just give you one major encouragement. When you are feeling down in the dumps, when life just has you dragging, feeling lonely and guilty, God has given you a promise. He has not promised that he will take all your hardships and struggles away. No, he hasn't promised that until you go home to heaven. But while you struggle he has given you an incredible promise. You can go to your Father in heaven as a little child confidently goes to his loving Daddy. Or as Paul puts it, **"Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts to shout, "Abba, Father!"** You can talk to him. You can pray to him. And he will be there for you. He will strengthen you. He will equip you. Because as you face whatever challenges you may face, you will never face them alone. Oh, yes, we wait right now for the full culmination of those blessings. But the waiting will be over. How do I know that? Because God has promised. Amen.