

## HOPE: GOD IS AHEAD OF US!

Scripture used [Luke 1:35-37, NLT](#)

### OVERVIEW

In this Christmas season, we are reminded that the hope that we have is in Jesus' name, Emmanuel, meaning God with us. And truly, our hope does come from God walking with us step by step. In addition, however, we also find hope in the promise that God goes *ahead of us*. This is the promise for God's people from [Deuteronomy 31:8 NIV](#), as well as Jesus' own reminder to his disciples in [Mark 16:7](#), that no matter what we face in this life, and even when we are confronted with the reality of our own inadequacies or shortcomings, that God is already ahead of us with His grace, His strength, His forgiveness, and His continued calling. In this message, we explore how we can continue to find hope in the reality that God is not only with us, but ahead of us in all the things we face in life.

### KEY POINTS

- 1) Last week we looked at the truth that God is with us, and the hope that we have from this reality.**  
We were challenged to spend some extra time this advent period (the period leading up to Christmas), to take the "Advent Challenge" with others at the New Beginnings Community, to seek to spend 30 minutes each day reading 1 chapter of Luke, reflecting on what we read, and praying for God's hope in our lives.
- 2) In the Christmas story, God shows in all sorts of ways that He is ahead of Mary and Joseph in the challenges that they face.** In [Luke 1](#), we often notice all the ways that Mary would have been overwhelmed by God calling her to bring Jesus into the world as an unmarried, engaged teen girl. She would have feared abandonment by Joseph and judgment from her family and community. But remarkably, God caused Mary's pregnancy to be preceded by six months by her first cousin Elizabeth's miraculous pregnancy, and God went ahead of Mary in ensuring that He was also communicating to Joseph, communicating with Elizabeth, and ensuring that Mary had the support that she needed to fulfill God's calling.
- 3) Mary models for us how God doesn't call us to be perfect, we just need to be "imperfectly available."** We see this in Mary's response to the angel in [Luke 1:38](#), and also in Mary's song in [Luke 1:47](#), where she acknowledges her own need for a savior, and her gratitude to God that God has chosen her to bring Jesus to the world. When we have the firm hope that God is with us and ahead of us, we too can be imperfectly available to fulfill God's calling and His plan and purpose for our lives.
- 4) God's promise to be ahead of us often shows up in our relationships with people, often people who are very different from us.** Consider all the people who show up in the Christmas story in [Luke 1-2](#) who were strangers to Mary! The angels speak to her, a nameless person provides a shelter for her in Bethlehem, the shepherds from the fields arrive at Jesus' birth to praise God, and Anna and Simeon at the temple affirm the purpose of Jesus' birth and life. This pandemic season has caused us to narrow our circles and many of us often feel isolated, but the Christmas story reminds us that God's work in our lives calls us to expand our circles and to be open to how God might move through relationships with those who are different from us. This is especially a part of the redemptive work of New Beginnings in the ways God has created us to demonstrate to the world the ways that His heart brings people together from different backgrounds and stories to follow God together and transform the world together.

### DISCUSSION

- 1) HEAR** - Have you ever had an experience where you realized that God is "ahead of you" in providing what you needed at a particular moment, whether a relationship, a source of provision, or a circumstantial blessing?
- 2) UNDERSTAND** - Consider the angel's encounter with Mary in [Luke 1:26-38](#). Reflect on this passage through the lens of Mary being "imperfectly available." When God calls us to be a part of His plan and purpose, we will often feel overwhelmed or underqualified. Have you had this experience? What can we learn about a posture of faith from Mary? What questions did she ask? What answers did she get? How is the way she moved forward an example for how we can move forward with our own calling?
- 3) DO** - Keep going with the Advent Challenge. If you haven't been able to keep up a daily reading and prayer, don't beat yourself up - God is ahead of us in knowing our shortcomings, and we should be encouraged to try again and choose for the blessing of time with God. Join us for our Christmas celebrations on Thursday, Dec 23 in RWC or Friday, Dec 24 in San Jose, or online!