



St. Stephen's Traditional Episcopal Church

11856 Mays Chapel Rd., Timonium, MD 21093

The Second Sunday After Christmas, January 3rd, 2010

**✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son
and of The Holy Ghost. Amen. ✠**

Harold Wilson was one of the most devious of Britain's Prime Ministers. (That's saying a good deal because, on the whole, they've been a notably devious bunch.) In any event, his motto was: "A week is a long time in politics."

It was a cynical affirmation of the fact that human beings in general – and politicians in particular – seldom feel compelled to keep their promises for very long.

And when one looks back over the course one's own life, one can see the appalling truth of his observation – a long trail littered with promises casually made and just as casually broken. In fact, it is not unreasonable to conclude from that the only promises human beings ever take seriously are promises made by other people.

But it would be entirely wrong to conclude that if human beings experience great difficulty keeping their promises, God has the same trouble. This is not at all the case. God always keeps his Word. In fact, one of the most important lessons to be learned from the Bible is that God invariably keeps the promises he makes to us -- even when we don't keep the promises we make to him.

This is exactly the thing that we celebrate at Christmastide: The beginning of the fulfillment of the most important promise God has ever made to the human race -- a promise that was given to save us from the consequences of our failure to keep our promises to him.

The Bible also teaches, however, that although a week might be a very long time for human beings, it is a mere blink of an eye to God. Holy Scripture demonstrates that God always keeps his word even though thousands upon thousands of years pass between the making of that promise and the date of delivery.

That was certainly the case with the first Christmas. Jesus came to us in fulfillment of a promise made to Adam and Eve, thousands upon thousands of years before. It was made by God – in the 15th Verse of the Third Chapter of Genesis – when he comforted Eve with the assurance that one of her descendents would redeem the human race from the consequences of her and her husband's disobedience.

It was also the fulfillment of another of God's promises – this time to Abraham and

Sarah. He'd promised them that the whole human race would be blessed through them. It also saw the fulfillment of his promises delivered by the prophets – Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah, Daniel – to the despairing Jews carried away captive to Babylon and the fulfillment of promises made though Holy Scripture to the Jewish people, living in Judea at the time of Jesus' birth.

Human beings find it hard to grasp why God takes so long to keep his promises. Humans, after all, are into instant gratification. History, if anything, teaches that human enterprise and endeavor is largely dedicated to eliminating the need for the cultivation of the virtue of patience. We want things. We want them now. And we see no advantage whatsoever in being kept waiting.

But God knows us far better than we know ourselves. He knows the rapidity with which we acquire knowledge vastly outstrips the rate at which we accumulate the wisdom required to use it.

Consider our advances in science, technology and medicine: Ask yourselves if the world is a safer and happier place as a result of the discoveries we have recently made. Even in the relatively benign field of medicine, our technical wizardry often far outstrips our ability to apply it wisely.

Because of this unfortunate aspect of the human character, God takes his time to fulfill his promises in order to give us the time to develop the wisdom to take full advantage of them. There was, for instance, no point in immediately freeing Adam and Eve from the consequences of their sin. They would simply have interpreted it as an invitation to sin whenever they felt so inclined.

There was no point in sending Christ to

Abraham because he was the only human being who had grasped the fact there is only one God and God is love. Actually, there was no point in sending Christ until humans understood that, no matter how good we try to be, we are incapable of saving ourselves, by our own efforts, from the consequences of our sins. For it is only when we are reduced to this level of despair that we are willing to accept the help God freely offers us.

It is, lamentably, a lesson that we have been forced to learn over and over and over again. Indeed, we still seem to find it hard to grasp that God does things His way, not our way. And because God doesn't do things our way, we are still inclined eventually come to believe that He isn't going to do them at all.

Many folk back in First Century Judea found it impossible to believe God would come to redeem his people as a tiny, vulnerable baby. They found it impossible to believe he would choose to save us from the consequences of the sins we commit against him by paying the full cost himself. Left up to humans, Jesus would have come as wily politician or a general the head of an all-conquering army.

But, then, we human beings have always found it hard to come to terms with the fact that God loves us infinitely more than we love him.

In fact, the nearest we ever seem to come to it is when we celebrate Christmas – when we once again relive the joy of the simple country people who welcomed Jesus after his birth in that lowly stable in the obscure town of Bethlehem. *AMEN.*

**To the Only Wise God, Our Saviour, be
Glory and Majesty, Dominion and Power,
Both Now and Forever. *AMEN.***