

'The Prime Minister has my full support' Words guaranteed to send a chill down the spine of any Australian Prime Minister. Despite compelling evidence against him the NSW Opposition leader denies allegations of sexual harassment. Australian cricketers deny ball tampering until their guilt stares them in the face. Trustworthy words, rare as one and two cent coins. A crisis of truth causing immense damage. Cynicism about what others say deeply ingrained even in our youth. Reliable words, sure promises: the rock on which healthy relationships grow no longer solid ground. Respect for authority central to stability in society trashed by lies, half-truths, fake news. Anchor points in people's lives as solid as ice cubes on a hot summer day. Living in the midst of this catastrophe we are unmoved by its consequences. How do we speak the truth with any confidence others understand the concept of truth? Truth no longer recognizable. The chaos sown by the devil the father of lies sees to that. Brothers and sisters, there is hope in this chaos. Good news, truthful news revealed in the midst of fake news. The never failing word spoken in the darkness. By the trustworthy God, the Creator of the world. By his unique son, Jesus, the Christ. The one Dr Luke presents to us after careful investigation. Never failing words. Spoken, fulfilled, reliable, trustworthy. God makes a claim through his messenger, the angel Gabriel. *'For no word from God will ever fail.'* **v37** Backed up by events not easily explained away by creative human minds. Such as the pregnancy of an old, infertile woman named Elizabeth. *'Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month.'* **v36** Reinforced in today's and next week's reading. The testimony of the central character. A teenage girl named Mary. Shared with Dr Luke as part of his careful investigation of a dramatic period of history. The authenticity of Mary's testimony backed up by its unlikely context. The logical way for God to announce to the Jews the coming of their Messiah. In Judea, in the temple in Jerusalem. Mary's testimony: God's angel appears in Galilee a place of contempt for the Jews. With its mixed race population. In Nazareth a small shoddy community overrun by Gentiles and Roman soldiers. In a lowly house where a peasant teenage girl lived with her parents. Dr Luke's investigation reveals these unlikely circumstances precisely the means by which God affirms his never failing word. What is promised happens. Today's passage reveals the never failing word promised; the real Jesus; right response. **First**, the promise. In a nutshell. A virgin birth. The meaning

of **v35**, *'The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.'* The promised baby not conceived by usual biological means. Conception takes place through God's powerful overshadowing. A conscious experience of God's presence. Miraculous, unexplainable. The outcome: new life growing in Mary's womb. Sharing her DNA. A baby boy bearing some of his mum's facial features. Believe it or not; a virgin birth is being described here. **Second**, the real Jesus revealed. Summed up in the angel Gabriel's words to Mary, *'You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.'* **v31-33** God's unique Son, Saviour and Lord, King of an everlasting kingdom. The long promised Messiah. Fulfilling a number of Old Testament prophecies about the promised Messiah. Further proof God's word a never failing word. **Third**, right response. Pictured movingly in Mary. Unique Mary. Out of billions of women God chose her to be the mother of Jesus. Just like us Mary. A sinful human being with choices about God's never failing word. Her choice, a model for those who experience the spiritual birth of the Saviour in their lives. For Christians. Mary's response: submission, obedience. Recognising the truth of the never failing word. Accepting its implications, willing to allow her life to be shaped and guided by that word. *"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.* **v38** Submission; not unquestioning, mindless following. Mary wonders, contemplates, questions, thinks, weighs up. *'Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.'* **v29** Open not cynical wondering and contemplation. Genuine desire to understand so her obedience flows from growing faith. Her question of **v34** a biological question. Not from doubt. A question of how conception is possible given her virginity. Mary's obedience makes her both the mother and disciple of Christ. Sisters and brothers are you captive to cynicism about truth? Doubtful finding and embracing truth is really possible. Is this hindering openness to God's word? Whose words are you trusting? In teaching our children truth and truth telling are we teaching them the never failing word of God? In this information overload age I fear we have cast aside the practice of reflection, of meditation on words. Especially on God's word. Either through cynicism about truth or laziness. We're poorer for it. Depriving ourselves of a relationship with the faithful, truthful God. Opening ourselves to painful crises of faith

because we lack confidence that God's word never fails. Please make time in your week to sit with the word of God. In the words of an Anglican prayer, read, mark and inwardly digest it. As we submit to the never failing word of God let us do so in fellowship with one another. Right understanding of God's word grows faith. This right understanding enhanced by mutual learning. Protecting each other from embracing false teaching while seeking to fully obey God. Protecting one another from the painful, spiritually damaging impact of trusting in what you believe are God's promises, when in fact they aren't. In a previous parish my predecessor died of cancer. There was much prayer for his physical healing. Many convinced God promised to do so in the Scriptures. When their much loved Rector died godly faithful parishioners spiritually struggled with their faith. Brothers and sisters, what will submission to God's never failing word look like in your life? The submission modelled by Mary has many faces. Marzieh, an Iranian Christian imprisoned for her faith. With fellow Christians visiting other prisoners, writing God's never failing words on cell walls. Using fragments of plaster as chalk. Juliette, a Malaysian berry picker reading the Bible despite the anger of her housemates. Fellow Christians trusting God's goodness, provision and promises in the face of crippling drought, tragic loss of loved ones, grim medical diagnosis, unemployment, lost dreams and cruel disappointment. The life of Mary shows God has the power to keep his word. That God will keep his word. The crisis of truth will not cease this side of Jesus return. The never failing word of God spoken through the Apostle Peter makes clear our confidence in it is well placed. *'For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For, "All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever." And this is the word that was preached to you. 1 Peter 1:23-25* Sisters and brothers, we have the word of the Lord that endures forever. Submit to it, trust it, share it, teach it, speak it into people's lives. Rejoice in the fruit it bears, Praise God that one day the truth will prevail forever.