

A Promised Son- the Promised Saviour

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[0 : 00] Oh man. Well, I don't know if any of you had a significant birthday this year, or perhaps more excitingly, whether you have a significant birthday coming up next year. Birthdays are big, aren't they, in our culture? Probably the biggest giveaway is that the highest figure in our country has not one but two birthdays. The Queen was born on the 21st of April, but her birthday is celebrated on the second Saturday in June. There's hardly a greater honour than being given a second birthday. But the Gospel writers go one better even than that, because how many people on earth ever have had their conception celebrated? We are glad not only that you were born, but that you exist, the very beginning, that you came into being. It's something we can glance over, isn't it? We know the story so well, that part of what is so special about Jesus coming, is that he came so secretly, so silently. A cell, a bundle of cells, brainwaves, a beating heart, fingers, fingers, toes. The wonder that the heart that pumped the blood that would be poured out for our forgiveness began beating in the womb. That the hands that would do such wonderful things would give life and one day be nailed to the cross were formed by God in the darkness.

They pressed against Mary's bump. The voice that gives life that one day will raise us from the dead was first heard in his newborn cries. The wonder and mystery of his coming is not so much his virgin birth as his virgin conception that resulted nine months later in a totally normal birth.

Who is this baby, this high and honored person that at his point of human origin, the very beginning of his life in this world, is such good news? More than that, who is he that the news of his coming 2,000 plus years ago is still celebrated by billions of people around the world in hundreds of languages? Who is he that if we threw a party for him, it would be the biggest party ever thrown? Who is this whose very existence is celebrated today more than any other human being ever in the history of the world? And why is his coming into the world so important for us to know about? Well, it is because this good news is about the promised Son of God, who has come to bring his saving reign on earth. Listen again to the angel's words in verse 31.

[3 : 21] And this evening, Luke simply wants us to see who it is that has come and why it is he is so worth celebrating. So firstly, then, we see the one who has come is God's promised Son. But before we get there, it's important for us, isn't it, to see how the circumstances of his birth are so integral to this story. There's so much here, isn't there, that is honestly strange. Perhaps we've become immune to that over the years, but think about these few sentences from verse 26. In the sixth month of

Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, greetings, you who are highly favoured. The Lord is with you. An angel, a virgin, a man descended from King David, a hearty greeting. It's no wonder, is it, that verse 29, Mary was greatly troubled at these words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. You know, if the Bible is new to you, or you're just hearing this for the first time, perhaps you wonder whether this kind of thing happens all the time in the Bible. But even for the Bible, this is not normal. Angels are not flying across every page. Virgins don't normally have babies. Perhaps most striking of all, the family of King

David has been lost for generations. Centuries have seen his descendants slide into obscurity and darkness. And it's out of that darkness that the multicolored fairy lights are suddenly strobing. It's all happening, isn't it? All the threads are being pulled together because, verse 26, God is doing something. God sent an angel. This young girl, Mary, has been graced by God. Luke doesn't let us forget who is orchestrating all of this. And so the question then is, what is God getting ready to do? Well, the angel said to Mary, verse 30, do not be afraid, Mary. You have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son. You are to call him Jesus. He will reign forever.

[6 : 22] God is getting ready to do something again with the royal lion of David. Now, whenever we read about David or David's lineage in the Bible, it's speaking about what we would call the royal family.

God put David on the throne of his kingdom, and he made a promise to him and his family in 2 Samuel chapter 7, your house and your kingdom will stand forever before me.

So God had promised the royal house of David would sit forever on the throne. But at this point, the question is, where had that promise gone? See, when the angel came to Mary, the Roman Empire was in full swing, ruling and conquering the known world, and God's kingdom was nowhere to be seen.

But God had not forgotten that promise. At the start of our service, we read, words of God's promise that were confirmed by the prophet Isaiah when it was all going wrong.

To us, a child is born. To us, a son is given. The government will be on his shoulders. Of the greatness of his government and of peace, there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom. One child, one son would be given to be the righteous and rightful king. And now at last, says God, that son is given. The great good news that the great king is to sit again on the throne of his kingdom. Great David's greater son will be conceived, will be born, will reign. And this time, verse 33, his kingdom will never end. Mary will carry and give birth to the forever king of God's forever kingdom. I don't know if you're familiar with the world of J.R.R. Tolkien, but he captures so neatly what God is doing at this point in the story in a wee poem.

[8 : 30] From the ashes, a fire shall be woken. A light from the shadows shall spring. Renewed shall be blade that was broken. The crownless again shall be king. This is an earth-shattering, an eternity-shaping scene in the Bible. That is why the circumstances are so strange, because it signals to us that nothing like this has happened before or since. God's promised son is coming to rule rightly forever.

And who he is explains why he comes in such a unique way. If you struggle with the idea of a virgin becoming pregnant and giving birth, well, you should know that you are not the first person to struggle with that. Because she found it hard to believe herself, didn't she? Look at her question, verse 34, how will this be? Mary asked the angel, since I am a virgin. See, the problem with God's plan is the embarrassingly obvious one. Some writers point out that the word in Greek can also mean young woman, to try and get around this question. But then if Mary was not a virgin, then her question doesn't make too much sense, does it? The reason she has to ask how is because it's not the obvious answer.

The real answer is simply incredible. The angel answers her, verse 35, the Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. And so the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God. This baby would not only be a royal son from a human dynasty, but he would himself be the divine Son of God. The angel clearly tells Mary her son would not have a human father. He would be conceived by God, the Holy Spirit, under the sovereign power of God the Father. And in this way, God's eternal Son, he who is God and has forever been with God, who is rightly worshipped by heaven and earth, this truly divine Son of God would come to be conceived truly human. See, it's not that a baby was conceived and at some point God came to dwell in him. Rather, that baby that was conceived was truly divine and truly human from the very first cell. To tweak some words of a well-known carol, our God, heaven cannot hold him, nor the earth sustain. Heaven and earth shall flee away when he comes to reign.

In the bleak midwinter, an ultrasound sufficed for the Lord God Almighty, Jesus Christ.

Friends, let it blow you away that when God himself came to reign on earth to save us, this is how he did it. Some of you might have apps on your phones that have tracked the development of your babies over the weeks of pregnancy. Week one, a cell. Week four, three layers of cells. Week six, brainwaves. Week seven, a heartbeat. Week 12, fingerprints. That is how the Son of God came into the world.

[12 : 15] And the very fact that he did, the very thought of his incarnation, well, it should bring us to our knees in awe of him. How can that be? Well, nothing is impossible with God. For, verse 37, no word of God will ever fail. The Holy One, he was born, was and is the promised Son of God come to bring his saving reign into the world. And the wonder of this passage, the good news of the Bible, the good news of the Bible is simply that that is true.

That he did come, that he was conceived by the Spirit, that he was born of a virgin, that he did live and die and rise again to bring his kingdom. That he is tonight seated on the throne of the universe,

ruling all things for his precious people. That he is God's forever king, and his name is Jesus. And because he came and he lives and reigns, we can celebrate with all heaven and earth that that is so. So secondly then, we see God's Son is worth celebrating.

Faithful Mary takes God at his word, no doubt with a thousand questions. The angel goes away, and understandably, and understandably, Mary goes straight away to see her relatives, Zechariah and Elizabeth. For one thing, Aunt Elizabeth was six months pregnant, but everyone thought that that time was long gone. But perhaps that news from the angel, there was a sense of hope.

If Elizabeth herself was expecting, then she could believe what the angel had told her. She wasn't imagining what she had heard. And indeed, when Mary gets to Elizabeth, the news turns out to be true. At that time, Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea. There she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. See, as Mary enters the room, a wonderful celebration breaks loose, doesn't it? Elizabeth's unborn baby leaps for joy. Elizabeth herself cannot contain her joy. And soon, Mary will start singing tea. Why? Well, of course, because of who it is that Mary is carrying. Look what Elizabeth proclaims in the power of the Spirit, verse 42.

Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear. But why am I so favored that the mother of my Lord should come to me? Not the mother of my nephew, the mother of my Lord? How did Elizabeth know that? Well, the Lord God himself had just entered the room, united now with his embryonic human nature.

[15:16] And the Holy Spirit gives Elizabeth and her unborn baby John eyes to see, as it were, who it is who is growing behind the bump, my Lord and my God. And Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, therefore blesses Mary, doesn't she? Verse 42, blessed are you among women. Verse 45, blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promise to her. You, centuries of controversy have probably caused this to be lost on us, but it's obvious, isn't it? That there has been no woman in history so blessed by God than Mary. She was, as a later church council would call her, the God-bearer.

As Calvin writes, it cannot be denied that God, in choosing and destining Mary to be the mother of his son, granted her the highest honour. Humanly speaking, it doesn't get bigger than this.

It was to be bitter, as Simeon would tell her in chapter 2. A sword would pierce her soul, as her son would suffer and die for the sins of the world. Mary would suffer uniquely for her part in the story. But when Mary herself starts singing, it becomes clear that what honour and blessing she had is not found in who she is, or what she had done, but in what God had done for her. From now on, all generations will call me blessed, she sings, for, verse 48, the Mighty One has done great things for me.

That is why she is remembered. Indeed, when the angel says Mary has found favour with God, the word is literally grace. God has shown her unparalleled grace in bringing her into the story in this way. So while Mary was uniquely blessed in that sense, she's not in a separate or different category from me or you. She sinned, she fell short, she needed a saviour, but that is why she says she is celebrating. My spirit rejoices in God, my saviour. And so Mary, Elizabeth, and unborn John together, they celebrate the coming of their saviour and king into the world. The first Christmas party was thrown to honour and celebrate only, only the Lord Jesus. And that is only right, isn't it? Just look what his coming rule and reign would mean for the world. Three things to celebrate as we close.

[18:04] Firstly, that in and through Jesus, God's mercy comes to all who respond rightly to him for all time. Verse 51, his mercy extends to those who fear him from generation to generation. Now, the kind of fear that Mary is singing about isn't the same as being scared, that Christianity isn't about living in fear of what God thinks of me or what he feels about me or what he might do to me. See, Mary is singing, isn't she, about God's incredible grace towards her, remembering the humble state of his servant and in his kindness and power, lifting her into a place of honour. And faced with this kind of God, the right response is not terror, but love or adoration. Fear and love sound like opposites, don't they? But in this context, they both line up perfectly. I had lecturers once, not at ETS, but at Edinburgh Uni, who were so loved by the students that it came out in the kind of shyness. You could hang off what they said for an hour in the lecture theatre, but should they say anything to you in the corridor while you just wouldn't know what to say back. You could call that fear, or you could call it love. It's a kind of hero worship. But that's getting close to what Mary is

singing about. It is the heart response of awe, worship before something great and glorious and holy that belongs only and supremely and ultimately to one being, to God alone. And Mary is telling us that in Jesus, God's mercy comes to all who respond to his glory and holiness and grace in that way. Loving him, trusting him, worshipping him, setting him apart as holy, honouring him, because he has come to rescue us from our sin.

Secondly, we can celebrate that in the coming of Jesus, the world is turned on its head. Notice that in verse 52, that he has brought down rulers from their thrones, but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things, but has sent the rich away empty. Mary is singing that the way God has dealt with her will be the way that God deals with the world now that his king has come. He gives grace to the humble, but he opposes the proud, and that means the end of the world as we know it.

Read Jesus' manifesto in Matthew chapter 5, the Beatitudes. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

He is blessed and lifted up in God's kingdom under King Jesus, not the rich in spirit, but the poor in spirit. Not the mighty, but the meek, not the powerful, but the persecuted.

[21 : 27] The people of the first century would rightly say if the fledgling church, these men have turned the world upside down, saying that there is another king, Jesus. Because King Jesus rules like nothing this world has ever seen.

He raises up the humble, those who wait for him, those who suffer for him, those who cry to him out of spiritual poverty and knowing the poorness of our hearts before him, seeking his grace.

And instead, he brings down the proud, those who don't wait for him, those who inflict suffering on his people, those who go on living off spiritual credit, not thinking they need to come to him for forgiveness.

Friends, that is not how our world operates this evening, is it? The powerful are often rewarded, the humble are often overlooked. Perhaps you feel that. Perhaps the boss who makes living for Christ at work really hard.

Perhaps the relative, the friend who looks down on celebrating Christ at this time of year. Of course, in other parts of our world tonight, the faithful poor are trampled by the powers that be.

[22 : 49] What good news then that the true and righteous king has come to bring an end to that and to bring his righteous rule in its place. And so we can celebrate that kingdom, this promise and hope and pray with our brothers and sisters around the world for his kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven.

And we can do so with joy, for he is seated on the throne and his kingdom will never end. And finally, we can celebrate his coming because in him, God has proved his faithfulness forever.

Verse 54, he has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors.

God does not forget his promises. And even if his people had forgotten the promise of a glorious and gracious king to save them, well, God had not forgotten.

And in sending his son born of a woman born under the law, he redeemed those under the law so that we might instead be adopted as his sons.

[24 : 03] And that promise and his faithfulness remains for us this evening. Christ was given for us in answer to all God's promises so that we would be set free from spiritual slavery and be welcomed into his family.

And because he lives, because he was conceived, because he was born, because he died and rose again, because he is seated on the throne in glory, we know, we know that his promises will never come to an end, that his faithfulness lasts a lifetime and for eternity.

God's promised son, our promised savior has come. And so we, his people celebrate with great joy. He is the one we worship, we love, we fear, we trust and hope in.

Oh, come, let us adore him. Christ the Lord. Let's pray together. Amen. How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is given.

Our Father, how we thank you for the coming of our Lord Jesus into our world. How we thank you that he, he is himself in very nature God, left behind the riches and glory of his heavenly throne, to be conceived and born a helpless baby.

[25 : 40] How we praise you that he submitted to suffering, that he obeyed you to the point of his death, and even death on the cross, that he might be raised to reign eternally over all things.

And we thank you that because he came, we can rejoice, Lord, that you have not come to condemn us, but to save us through him. So give us hearts, we pray, to trust him, to love him, to adore him. Lord, give us eyes to see him afresh, we pray, that at the very sound of his voice, at the very thought of his coming, Lord, we would leap for joy. Lord, help those, we pray, who do not as yet know him, to know him, Lord, that on hearing this wonderful news, they too would come and join the celebration of the reigning king.

For we praise you and thank you in his great name. Amen.