

A Savior is Born

The Miracle of the Incarnation, the Glory of God, and Perfect Peace

December 23, 2018

Luke 2:1-20

1 Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth.

2 This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria.

3 And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city.

4 Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David,

5 in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child.

6 While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth.

7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

8 In the same region there were *some* shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night.

9 And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened.

10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people;

11 for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

12 "This *will be* a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

13 And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

14 "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased."

15 When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds

began saying to one another, "Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us."

16 So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger.

17 When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child.

18 And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds.

19 But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart.

20 The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.

To the Glory of God

The season that we call "Christmas" doesn't really have anything to do with all the hustle and bustle, and the trees, and the cookies, and all the parties, and all the extra pounds that we are going to promise to lose as soon as the new year starts. What this is really all about is a *remembrance* of the greatest Miracle in the History of the world. It is a *rejoicing*, an *exultation*, a *celebration* of the moment when the Owner and Creator of the Universe *inserted* Himself into His Own Creation and took on human flesh and became Man.

And the "fleshing" of God is a glorious Fact that is too often neglected, or forgotten, amidst all the gifts, and get-togethers, and pageants, and presents. Therefore, we would do well to think deeply about the Incarnation, especially on this day. So, to help you do that, here are five biblical Truths about the Incarnation:

1. The Incarnation Was Not the Beginning of the Divine Son

The virgin conception and birth in Bethlehem does *not* mark the beginning of the Son of God. Rather, it marks the moment when the eternal Son physically *entered* into our world and became one of us. The great Reformed Theologian of the last century, John Murray, wrote:

"The Doctrine of the Incarnation is *vitiated* [diminished in importance] if it is conceived of as the beginning to be of the Person of Christ. The

Incarnation means that He Who never began to be in His specific Identity as Son of God, began to be what He eternally was not”¹

... so, God the Son “always was”, “is now”;, and “always will be”. The Apostle John was “moved along” by God the Holy Spirit to write:

John 1:1, 2, & 14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

... and ...

1 John 1:1&2

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life — and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us —

... so, even though John was very “matter of fact” about Jesus’ “dual Nature” as both “fully God” and “fully Man”, just *trying* to comprehend a Being that is both “with” God and that “is” God, and that “became flesh and dwelt among us”, staggers our finite minds.

The Bible tells us that Jesus, the Christ, was born in Bethlehem during the reign of Caesar Augustus. And History tells us that He was born at some point between 6-4 BC. Dr. Luke gives us some very precise details about the time when Jesus was born like:

This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria

... which are very easy to validate. So, we can pen down the approximate time-frame when God took on flesh and became a part of His Own Creation. And this has powerful implications because the one, true, and living God, Who is revealed all through Creation, and on the pages of the 66 Books of Scripture, is “Holy”. And that word means that

¹ quoted in John Frame, *Systematic Theology*, p. 883

God is *unlike* anything that He made. God is *separate, distinct, and different* from anything and everything that exists. So, normally God operates *outside* of His Creation. But the Bible tells us that on a particular day, at a particular time in History, and in a particular city, to a particular woman, a virgin named "Mary", God Almighty "took on flesh" and became Man. So, for the first time in all of Existence, God became a part of all that He had made.

But just about the time we try to wrap our heads around that, the Bible goes on to say that "God the Son" *always* existed in Eternity. And that means that the Birth of Jesus, from the virgin Mary, in the City of David, during the first census, carried out while Quirinius was the Governor of Syria, was *not* the *beginning* of the Divine Son.

Now we are those who make the claim that the 66 Books of the Holy Bible are the *inspired, inerrant, and infallible* Word of the living God. And so, as we struggle to comprehend Jesus, in all of the particular Attributes and Qualities that the Bible assigns to Him, we are careful not to *diminish* Who He really is, simply because our minds struggle to fathom His *Immenseness*.

Rather we take the mysterious Truths of the Bible that obviously *transcend* what we have learned over the last 6,000 years in Science and Biology and Physics, and we use the fantastic claims of the Bible surrounding the Birth of Jesus as just one more reason to be in awe of Him and worship Him.

But we must know that we are not the first group of believers who have struggled to understand the Miracle of the "ever- living, never created Son, Who was born of a virgin at a particular time in History". The fourth Century Church Father, John Chrysostom, who was called "the golden tongued orator" during his day, said that Jesus was:

...fully God and fully Man in the same body at the same time, without conflict of contradiction".

... so, we wonder. And we stand in awe. But as we do that, we also worship and adore this Jesus Who was born. Because He is also fully God, and thus *entitled* to both our allegiance and obedience.

2. The Incarnation Shows Jesus's Humility

Now Jesus is no typical king. Unlike all the other human kings of the earth, Jesus did *not* come to "be served". The scribe commissioned by the Apostle Peter to pen down one of the four Gospel Records, John Mark, quoted Jesus as saying:

Mark 10:45

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.

... so unlike the other human kings, and unlike all of the other false "gods" of the world's man-made religions, Jesus came "to serve". His amazing Humility was on full display from the very beginning, right to the last moment, from Bethlehem all the way to Golgotha. The Apostle Paul glories in the Humility of Christ when he wrote:

Philippians 2:6-8

Who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

3. The Incarnation Fulfills Prophecy

The Incarnation wasn't random or accidental. It is NOT that Jesus was born and then somebody *backdated* the record to try to prove that it was prophesied earlier. The "fleshing of God" was predicted in the Old Testament in very specific detail, hundreds of years earlier, in accordance with God's Eternal Plan that God designed before He made anything.

But we have to understand that the 39 Books of the Old Testament were in print and copies had been circulated as far East as India, and as far West as England, 200 years before Jesus was born. *Thousands* of commentaries and *thousands* of copies of each of the 39 OT Books have been discovered and examined, and there is no variation from the English Bible that you hold in your hand this morning.

Perhaps the two clearest OT texts predicting that the Messiah would be both Human and God were written some 700 years before Jesus was born and say:

Isaiah 7:14

Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.

... and ...

Isaiah 9:6

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

His Name. The *Child's* Name. The virgin- born *Son's* Name will be...

- ✓ Immanuel (God with us)
- ✓ Wonderful Counselor
- ✓ Mighty God
- ✓ Eternal Father
- ✓ Prince of Peace

Seven centuries before Mary and Joseph made the journey to Bethlehem, God the Spirit "moved along" the Prophet Isaiah to describe a human being, a Child, a Son, Who was indeed "born" just like any other child is born. So, Isaiah re-enforces the Reality that Jesus is "fully Human". Yet even in His Humanity, this Child, this Son, is different in that He was born from a "virgin".

But then all of the extraordinary Names that Isaiah was led to attach to this fully human Son, like "Immanuel", and "Wonderful Counselor", and "Mighty God", and "Everlasting Father", and "Prince of Peace", describe His full Deity. And taken together, the Son being born, and all His Names, point clearly to Jesus being the God-Man, the most unique Being in all the Universe.

4. The Incarnation Is Mysterious

The Scriptures do not give us answers to all of our questions. Some things remain mysterious and unknown. Moses understood that what God has chosen to reveal to us is not all there is, when he said:

Deuteronomy 29:29

The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever...

Now there are some who have taken the fact that God has not chosen to reveal everything to us and used that as an excuse to not believe at all. And that is tragic, since what God has revealed is more than we can comprehend in a single lifetime. So, never allow anyone to tell you that we do not have enough information to believe. Because, we do.

But answering how it could be that one Person could be both fully God and fully Man is simply *not* a Question that the Scriptures focus on. And the early Church Fathers wisely *preserved* this Mystery at the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.) when they wrote that Jesus is:

“Recognized in two natures [God and man], without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ.”

We must understand that the main Cause of unbelief is a dark heart, *not* a lack of information. So, the deep and profound Mysteries that the Bible unapologetically and repeatedly proclaim are *not* the reason people don't see and don't hear and refuse to trust. Refusing to believe is the normal “default setting” for *all* the sons and daughters of Adam in their fallen State. It is the Grace of God that opens the eyes and unstops the ears and softens the heart, and it is God's Mercy that grants the Gift of Faith. And that Miracle occurs to every elected sinner when the Gospel is preached.

5. The Incarnation Is Necessary for Salvation

The Incarnation of Jesus does not save by itself, but it is an essential Link in God's Plan of Redemption. John Murray explains:

“[T]he Blood of Jesus is Blood that has the requisite Efficacy and Virtue only by reason of the fact that He Who is the Son, the *effulgence* [brilliance] of the Father's Glory and the express Image of His Substance, became Himself also partaker of flesh and blood and thus was able by one Sacrifice to perfect all those who are sanctified”²

... and the writer of the **Epistle to the Hebrews**, likewise, writes that Jesus:

Hebrews 2:17

... had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

The Incarnation displays the Greatness of God. Our God is the *eternal* God Who was born in a stable, not some *distant, withdrawn* god. Our God is a *humble and giving* God, not a selfish, grabbing god. Our God is a *purposeful and planning* God, not some random, reactionary god. Our God is a God Who is far above us, and whose Ways are not our ways, not a god we can put in a box and control. Our God is a God Who redeems us by His Own Blood, not a god who leaves us in our own sin. Our God is great indeed!

Now there are a number of ways to try to discuss this amazing moment when God became a Man. But let's focus on verse 14:

Luke 2:14

Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased."

Now the good doctor is here quoting what a multitude of the Heavenly Host said when they appeared with the angel that was already talking to the shepherds. And as we discovered when we were

² *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*; p.14

in our "journey" through this magnificent Gospel Record, the reason that these shepherds were here near to Jerusalem in the first place was no doubt because they had been hired to raise the animals, who were going to be used for sacrifices.

And as these shepherds were with their flocks on just another normal evening, Luke tells us:

An angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened.

... and then this frightening, shining angel began to speak to the shepherds, and said:

Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. This *will be* a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

... so even though the angel had been dispatched from Heaven and was not human, he spoke to these men in a language they could understand. And as they were trying to take in all that this immortal being was saying to them, Luke says:

... and suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased."

Now for most of my entire life, this Heavenly Exclamation was usually quoted as being:

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

... which is how the translators of the King James rendered it back in 1611. But that isn't what the Heavenly Host said. The literal Greek here reads:

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace toward men good will.

The Latin Vulgate (4th Century) *incorrectly* rendered the phrase to say, “*peace to men of good will*”, which is simply *not* what was said, and gives the wrong impression. Others *incorrectly* teach that the Heavenly Host said:

“Peace and good will toward men”

... as if this was an exhortation for us all to *embrace* the Grace of Godm which isn't any better.

Now it is true that the “Peace” that the Lord offers us takes effect only when we actually “receive it”. But this phrase is not uncommon in the NT. And it is best understood in connection to the Hebrew. What the Heavenly Host said has nothing to do with us *accepting* God's Grace. The Host was speaking about the *Source* of Grace, and was proclaiming that “Peace” is a “free gift” that flows out from the pure Mercy of God.

So, this phrase is best understood as being,

... On earth, Peace among those with whom God is pleased.

... or

... On earth, Peace among those with whom God has caused to be favored.

So, the Heavenly Host was proclaiming that, with this Child Who was born that day in Bethlehem, God will now bring “Peace” to those chosen ones with whom God has purposefully and powerfully placed His Favor or His “Good Will” or His Grace.

Now the “Peace” referred to here is not the “absence of war”, or the “cessation of trouble”, or the “end of hostility” in the earth, that is so commonly thought. This has nothing to do with people being more kind to one another. This is very narrowly referring to a “Peace with God”. The Heavenly Host was saying that this Son, Who has been born that day in the City of David, is the One Who will bring an end to the Wrath of God that is against all of Humanity because of the Sin of Adam, and the individual acts of Rebellion and Treason against God that all of us have engaged in during our lives. Now look again at verse 11:

For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

Dr. Luke tells us that all this happened on a particular day in history. So, this is not some day in a mythological, imaginary story, but a very specific day when:

“Caesar Augustus was the emperor of Rome and Quirinius was governor of Syria.”

... which are historically verified people and events. Now, as I said, because the calendar was later changed, we can narrow *this* “day” down to sometime between 6-4 BC. But we also need to remember that this was also a day that was planned in Eternity before the Creation of the world. Indeed, the whole Universe, with untold light-years of space and billions of galaxies, was created and made glorious for *this* particular day and what it meant for human history. The Apostle Paul said:

Colossians 1:16

For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities — all things have been created through Him and for Him.

... For Him! For His Appearance! For this day of His Appearing!

Galatians 4:4&5

But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

... so, this happened on a day. The perfect day. In the “fullness of time”. The perfect time appointed by God before the foundation of the world. “For unto you is born *this day!*”

“... in the city of David.”

God also took on flesh in a particular city. Not in “Narnia”. Not in “Middle Earth”. Not in “never, never- land”. Not in a “galaxy far, far away”. It happened in a city about 7,000 miles from Gulfport. And that

city still exists today. There are people there this morning. This city is real. And the city's name is Bethlehem.

And Bethlehem is about six miles from Jerusalem. Bethlehem is the city where Jesse lived, the father of David, the great king of Israel. Bethlehem is the city that, 700 years earlier, the Prophet Micah wrote about,:

Micah 5:2

But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, *Too* little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity.

“... a Savior ...”

“For unto you is born this day in the city of David *a Savior*.” A Savior. If you have ever sinned against God, even just once, then your *greatest* need, the paramount *urgency* that you have is *not* more money, or *better* health, or even a more pleasant disposition. No, your *greatest* need is Forgiveness. Because, without Forgiveness, you are eternally doomed. The angel said to Joseph:

Matthew 1:20b&21

... do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.

... *not* the elimination of Poverty, *not* the removal of disease, *not* a fix for the unequal distribution of wealth, *not* a solution for the inherent unfairness that humans perpetrate on one another. All of those things and more will be adjudicated in the next life. And it is Good that we work toward those things now. But, very narrowly, *this* Son, at *that* time, born to *that* virgin, in *that* city, at *that* point in History, when God took on flesh and became Man, it was so that guilty sinners could find Forgiveness for their sins and find Peace with God. And, until *that* Good News is preached and taught and believed, the Great Commission is *not* being carried out.

But unlike any other religion or human philosophy, before or since, the Forgiveness that Jesus gives is based on what *He alone* did for us, and *not* on what we have done.

Christianity alone boldly proclaims that earthly rebels are forgiven and made Righteous by what we *believe in*, what we *trust in*, and what we *confess*, and *not* by what we “do”. Now take heed that you understand that believers are *absolutely* commanded to “go” and “do” a lot. In fact, the Bible is clear that those who do not “do” after they are saved are not really saved at all, and are simply *deceived* about what they think they have believed in. But all of the “doing” of Christians is simply a loving and humble *response* to the Work of Salvation that God has already finished in us. Our “doing” is *not* and *cannot be* the *Cause* of our Salvation.

But we must know that only God can forgive those sins that are against God. And all of our sins have *insulted and offended* God. All of our sins have *belittled* God's Glory. And so, unless we receive Forgiveness of sins from God, we are eternally doomed. And *that* is why God sent the eternal Son of God into the world, because that Son is God. And God is a forgiving God, by His very Nature. So, it is *not* true, as some claim, that the God of the Old Testament was a violent, brutal, unforgiving Deity, while the God of the New Testament is a gentle and loving Savior. That is simply not what the Bible teaches. God is the same. And that's why Jesus said:

Luke 5:24b

... the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins

... so, *more* than a Teacher, *more* than an Example, *more* than a Prophet. The Son, Who was born on *that* day in *that* city, is a *Savior!*

“... *who is Christ* ...”

“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, *who is Christ.*”

Now from the time a Jew was old enough to think, he was taught that God was going to send a *Messiah*, the “Anointed One”. But the longer they waited, the more the understanding of the “Anointed One” was *warped* and *perverted* and *twisted*. So, by the time that God actually sent the Messiah, the very people, who should have welcomed Him the most and the easiest, called Him “Beelzebul” (devil), and rejected Him and called for His execution.

The Jews of the 1st Century weren't looking for a Savior, Who would save them from their own individual sins. They were looking for a "Warrior-King", who would raise an indestructible army that would utterly annihilate the pagan Romans and bring back the Glory of Israel that they enjoyed under King David. This Warrior-King would then march, triumphantly, down main street in Jerusalem, and sit down in the Throne of David, and rule the world with a rod of iron, as the Prophets foretold.

So, when the "Son of Joseph" stood before them and told them to forgive their enemies, and turn the other cheek, and to do good to the very ones who were persecuting them, the most religious people on earth knew that this Man was a fraud and an imposter, and could never "fit the bill" of being the true Messiah. So, they cried for Him to die.

But after this Anointed One rose from the dead, and the Gospel began to go into Jerusalem and into Judea and into Samaria and then into the utter most parts of the world, the pagan Gentile world began to hear that even *their* sins could be forgiven by this same One. But these people were not raised under the Law of God, and the customs and terms that were paramount to the Jew, meant nothing to them. And, very soon, it became apparent to the Apostles that term "Messiah" meant nothing to the Gentiles.

So, God used the Apostle Paul to coin *another* term "Christ", which comes from the Greek word *Christos*, which means "Anointed One". So, even though the Gentiles had no knowledge of a *Messiah* that was supposed to come, they could relate to the One Who was anointed above all others to save *them* from *their* sins!

So, yes, Jesus was the final anointed King of Israel. Yes, He was the final anointed Prophet. Yes, He was the final anointed Priest. Yes, in Jesus, all the Promises of God found in the Old Testament are "Yes!" And, yes, Jesus alone would fulfill all the hopes and dreams of godly Israel. But Jesus was even greater than that. Because all of the fears and all of the hopes of all the pagans of the entire world, who were steeped in barbaric customs and false religions, and who knew nothing of the Old Covenant, would also come together in this one single Man. Because more than simply "Savior", this one Man, born on *that* day in *that* City, is also . . .

“. . . *the Lord.*”

“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ *the Lord.*” Jesus is much *more* than merely a “Savior”. He is also the “Ruler”, the “Master”, the “Sovereign”, the “Mighty God”, the “Everlasting Father”, and the “Lord of the whole Universe”! There is not one inch or ounce of matter that exists, anywhere in any galaxy, that Jesus does not look at and say, *“That’s Mine!”* The Apostle John said that Jesus was:

The Revelation 19:16b

... KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

... so, even when Jesus comes back, there will be “kings” on the earth. And everywhere there are earthly “kings”, there are earthly “lords” who serve under those kings. But Jesus will be a great King over all the other earthly kings, and Jesus will be a great Lord over all the other earthly lords. And that means that...

- On a particular day in real history
- In a particular city in a real world
- A particular Child, a particular Son
- The Savior, Who would take away all our guilt
- The Christ, Who would fulfill all our hopes
- The Lord, Who would defeat all our enemies, and make us safe and bring us the fullness of Joy forever

... was born. To a virgin. So, Jesus was fully Man. But He was also fully God. And we are fully guilty. And He is our Savior, Who will fully forgive anyone, no matter how bad they have been, who is granted with the power and the desire to trust in Him and in His finished Work. So, this Child, this Son, this Jesus, will grant all those, to whom God has placed His Grace and Favor on, the most important commodity in all the Universe, Forgiveness of sins and Peace with God.

But He is also fully Lord, Who will sovereignly keep all those who trust in Him. And He will powerfully vanquish all His enemies. And He will come back to put an end to all Injustice and all Selfishness, and all Violence and all Evil. And this Savior and Lord and Christ will do that by defeating all unrepentant sinners and casting them into

everlasting Damnation in Hell, because they refused to believe, and they found pleasure in unrighteousness rather than in Him.

But He will wondrously receive all those who fear Him, and all those who tremble at His Word, and all those who have been graciously allowed to possess the Gift of Faith unto Himself. And this Son, this Child, this virgin born, ever-living, never created, always faithful Savior and Lord, Jesus the Christ, the God-Man, the incarnate God, will grant us unimaginable Pleasure and Joy, by His Side, forever!

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Covenant of Peace Church 13600 John Clark Road Gulfport, Mississippi 39503 228.832.7729; www.covenantofpeace.net
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