

# Vulnerable

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 31 December 2023

Preacher: Paul Hay

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Christmas has always been a special time of year for me. I've got a nativity scene in our front lawn and lots of lights and the trees in front. And I've got a few nativity scenes scattered throughout the house, counted.

All told, we have ten nativity scenes in our house. Let's know what I think of Christmas. I think it's a great time of the year. Now, of course, I also know that it's highly unlikely that Jesus was born on December 25th.

Probably he was born in the springs, and that's when the time with the lambs would be born. And so that's when the shepherds would be out watching their flocks by night. But it's December 25th, a special time of the year anyway, because our granddaughter Julia was born on December 25th. And for those of you who remember, that's also the day that our prime minister was also born, December 25th. Now, you can decide which of those is more important to you.

But it's a great time of the year, and we celebrate in great ways. How many of you believe that Jesus came as a baby boy to Bethlehem?

[ 1 : 1 8 ] What if I told you that that's not entirely accurate? And that's not what Scripture says. I'm going to read a Scripture that shows this. Luke 1, 26 to 45 reads this way.

In the six months 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 are highly favored. The Lord is with you. Mary was greatly troubled at his words. I wonder what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, Do not be afraid.

Mary, you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and 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. How will this be, Mary? Asked the angel, said to my virgin. The angel answered, The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.

[ 2 : 2 5 ] So the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth, your relative, is going to have a child in her old age. And she was said to be unable to conceive as in her sixth month.

May your word to me be fulfilled. Mary answered, Then the angel left her. At that time, Mary got ready and hurried to her town in hill country of Judea, where she entered Zachariah's house and was greeted by Elizabeth.

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed, Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear.

Why am I so favored that the mother of my Lord should come to be? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb bleeped for joy. Blessed is the one. Blessed is she who believed that the Lord would fill his promises to her.

See, Jesus didn't come to earth as a baby boy. He came to earth as an embryo. That small.

[ 3 : 3 2 ] That small. Even in the first few stages of pregnancy, the embryo is not even called, a fetus is called a zygote. It goes from that. Embryo to zygote to fetus.

And about the time that Mary greeted Elizabeth, probably about a week after she conceived, and Jesus would have been about the size of a pinprick at that time. Think of the vulnerability.

The son of God who created the entire universe was now above the size of a pinprick. How vulnerable is that? What I think was so great about the Christmas story, it's a marvelous mixture of

the miraculous and the mundane, of the heavenly and the earthly.

And the miraculous was that Jesus was conceived as a virgin. A virgin with miraculous birth, but a miraculous conception, but an ordinary birth.

And in keeping with the tone of mixing miraculous and mundane, today I'm going to mix up some prose and some poetry. And one of the things, years back, I wrote a poem about the meeting of Zachariah, no, sorry, meeting of Elizabeth and Mary.

[ 4 : 55 ] It's called When Two Miracles Meet. It's called, For This Christmas Season, Let Me Give You a Special Treat. Let me tell you about time when two miracles meet. Zachariah and Elizabeth were both very old, yet their love for their heavenly father had not grown cold.

Zachariah was busy in the temple burning incense. When an angel came with a story that did not make sense, how could he and Elizabeth have a son in their old age? That this would be impossible, anyone would surely gauge.

The same angel, Gabriel, came to a very young woman. The angel greeting to Mary would startle any woman. She was nothing special, so how could she be so highly favored? Yet Gabriel's promise to her was one that she would save her.

She was chosen to bear a miraculous child. For some reason, she was the one whom God had smiled. His promise was that a virgin was going to give birth. Isn't that one of the greatest miracles on earth?

Mary asked the angel how could she possibly have a son. So he tells her that God's blessings have only begun. Her relative Elizabeth would also have a son, and Mary's son Jesus would run over everyone.

[ 6 : 01 ] So Mary got ready and hurried to town in the hills. So there she was greeted by someone who shared her thrill. Elizabeth exclaimed that Mary was especially blessed, that she would bear the Messiah who would have guessed.

The baby that Elizabeth bears in her womb leaps for joy. Even he knows that Mary's child is no ornery boy, though neither of the women have yet given birth.

Both of them know that their sons are destined to have great worth. In their excitement, both women burst into song for the fulfillment of God's promises they've waited long.

Who would refuse to sing boldly when two miracles meet? This is a blessed time that God would never repeat. How honorable was Jesus? I looked at the stats.

Today, one in four pregnancies ended miscarriage. One in four. I have no idea what the stats would have been at the time of Jesus, but it doesn't have been any better.

[ 7 : 05 ] That's why a lot of women, when they find out they're pregnant, don't tell anyone, because they're afraid the baby won't come to full term. So when the miscarriage comes, they share that pain alone, because they've never told anyone.

And it's a horrible time. But that's one of the things that Jesus was subjected to. He was so vulnerable, the size of a pinprick.

So vulnerable. Another way that Jesus could have met an early death was that Mary was betrothed to Joseph at that time.

And yeah, engagement today is not that big a deal. Well, it's a big deal, but you can break off an engagement with little or no legal implications.

It's not that horrendous. I've heard one where they broke off the engagement the day before the wedding. Kind of a mess, but there's no financial problems with that, no legal problems.

[ 8 : 11 ] But betrothal then was as binding as marriage. It was considered to be marriage in a lot of ways. So an unfaithfulness was considered to be adultery.

So Joseph, as is right, as a betrothed spouse of Mary, could have had her stoned for adultery. I'm sure you've heard of the story of the woman who's been caught in adultery and brought before Jesus, and the leaders who brought the woman said, you know, shouldn't she be stoned?

That's what the Bible says. And of course, she wasn't, but Leviticus 20 verse 10 says, if a man commits adultery with a woman, both he and she should be stoned.

And of course, if Mary was stoned to death, Jesus would have died as well, but it didn't happen.

God was protecting the very vulnerable, Jesus in the womb.

Another instance recalls how Jesus was vulnerable at the time. It's recorded in Matthew chapter 2.

And of course, it's a familiar story. Well, Jesus and being born, and then the magi hear the story.

[ 9 : 35 ] They follow the star, and they come to Herod, and they say, where's the man who's been born? Boy, boy, he's been born king of the Jews. And Herod is so frightened by this, he doesn't know what to do.

And he finds out that, from the religious leaders, that it's going to be born. The Messiah is supposed to be born in Bethlehem. And then he says, well, go and make a careful search and find the baby, and then I can worship him too.

Of course, he had no intentions of worshiping at all. He wanted to kill that, being with so threat to his authority. It's interesting.

Herod was so afraid of his authority that he killed one of his wives and two of his sons. The emperor Augustus is supposed to have said, it was safer to be Herod's pig than Herod's son.

Because Herod was a Jew, and Jews don't eat pork. So Herod would never kill his pig, but he would kill his son. But, and Herod, even eventually, he found out that the Magi had not told them, not come back and told them where the baby was born.

[ 10 : 50 ] So he ordered all the boys in Bethlehem, two years old and under, killed. And of course, if Joseph had not been warned in a dream, Jesus would have been one of those.

Jesus was vulnerable to a very early death. Could have died in pregnancy, could have died as a young baby boy.

And then the tragic thing is he actually did die an early death. Jesus was about 33 years old when he passed away. Not passed away, was crucified.

How many of you are over 33? Oh, think about that. I think about what would my ministry have been like if I'd cut off at the age of 33?

I wouldn't have any real legacy at all. 33. Jesus was vulnerable to an early death. Jesus was also vulnerable to shame and disgrace.

[ 12 : 01 ] Joseph had the right to have Mary Stone, but he didn't want to do that to her. He also had the right to publicly divorce her, but he didn't want to do that to her.

That was just something he just wouldn't, didn't want to do. He decided he'd divorce her quietly. It's an interesting thing when Matthew talks about that Mary was found to be a child by the Holy Spirit. It doesn't say how Joseph found out. It's one of the things in the Bible that we don't know. Maybe he noticed that she was getting big. I don't know. Somehow he found out.

Think about how he must have felt. Remember, betrothal was just as binding as marriage. So the woman that he was betrothed to was pregnant and it wasn't his child.

Think of how he must have felt at that time. Betrayed because she'd obviously been unfaithful to him. It seemed so abundantly obvious. But he still didn't want to shame her.

[ 13 : 11 ] So he decided to divorce her quietly. Fulfill the law, but shame her as little as possible. But then he had a dream. And the dream in the dream, he was told to take Mary home as his wife.

Think about that. No one did Mary have to believe that she would have a child even though she was a virgin. Joseph had to believe it as well.

Would have been even harder for him because Mary would know she's not a virgin. But how would Joseph know? Joseph had to believe in a dream. That unprecedented miracle in all of history had happened at that time.

I'd like to have a few words from another poem I wrote about Christmas. Joseph the carpenter is a righteous man. To stop Mary's disgrace he will do what he can.

Suddenly an angel comes to him in a dream. This child is not as impossible as it seems. Shepherds in their fields are startled at night. These humble people witness a glorious sight. Angel choirs sing about a humble birth.

[ 14 : 25 ] They say the Son of God is coming to earth. The true light has come into the world of sin. Into our life the Son of God enters in. Though few will receive him he still comes. those who receive becomes God's daughters and sons.

Think about that. What would have meant if Joseph had gone about with his original plan and decided to divorce Mary?

Remember Nazareth was a very very small town at the time. It is even small nowadays. And so Mary would be a single mother in a small town.

And having lived in a small town I know what small town gossip's about. It's not good. Think of the shame and disgrace both Mary and Jesus would have borne.

But Joseph spared them that when Joseph took Mary home to be his wife. And go down here that time.

[ 15 : 33 ] But it's not like Jesus was totally spared shame and disgrace. Isaiah 53 3 says he was despised and rejected by mankind.

A man of suffering and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised and we held him in low esteem. Herod first of all Pilate's soldiers put a purple robe on Jesus and mocked him and came up to him and yelled Hail King of the Jews!

And spout on him and laughed at him. Then Herod's soldiers did the same. When Jesus was crucified the religious leader says if he's the son of God why doesn't why doesn't he come down? Save yourself. Even one of the criminals who was crucified with Jesus at that time said to Jesus aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us.

Wow. So Jesus was vulnerable to shame and disgrace. Unbelievable. In fact the very purpose of a crucifixion why it was designed was not only did you make a slow painful death but was designed to humiliate and shame the person who was sentenced.

[ 17 : 03 ] That's why it was done on a hill outside of Jerusalem where everybody could see and many people would gather just like people used to gather to watch a hanging.

People liked to see those kind of things. Jesus was vulnerable to shame and disgrace. He was also vulnerable to rejection. John chapter 1 verses 9 to 11 says the true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

He was in the world and though the world was made through him the world did not recognize him. He came to that which is his own but his own did not receive him. He came to that which was his own but his own did not receive him.

Luke 4 has the record of Jesus coming to his hometown in Nazareth and he's given the scroll of Isaiah to read and he reads and then he says the scripture is fulfilled in your hearing and first people thought oh this is great and then they thought he was going to do some miracles there just like he'd done in Capernaum close by and he said no and he said a prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and he talked about how Elijah went to a widow in Sidon instead of somebody in Israel and how Elijah had healed Naaman the Syrian and this upset the people of Nazareth and they took him to the brow of the hill and we're going to throw him off the cliff we're going to kill him Jesus we rejected his hometown and John 7 5 it says his own brothers did not believe in him think about that rejected his hometown rejected by his own family he knew rejection like we'll never know rejection even he was rejected that rejection eventually led him to be crucified when when the people were by

Pilate were given a choice between a notorious insurrectionist Barabbas and Jesus they chose to have Jesus crucified Luke 23 20 says wanting to release Jesus Pilate appealed to them again but they kept shouting crucify him crucify him rejected totally by his own people even to the point of death I'd like to read one more poem that I wrote actually I wrote it for Good Friday but it's fitting for now it's what I thought Jesus words thoughts might have been when he was on the cross it says God I can still remember how crowds flocked to me when they listened to every word that you gave me but I also remember how those fickle ones fled when I expounded to them about the life-giving bread their first shouts of

[ 20 : 22 ] Hosanna still ring in my ear even back then I knew it was perfectly clear blessed is the king that comes in the name of the Lord was an empty cry that they could easily afford I knew all long that Judas was your chosen man that his betrayal had always been part of your plan but still his pretentious kiss was like a clushing blow to have his friend leading my enemies hurt me so I even predicted Peter's threefold denial that he wouldn't stay true to me as I'll trial his promise to stay with me was just another empty boast but even he followed me longer than most all all these betrayals and denials were no surprise it is true that no matter how a person tries if you trust in his own strength he would surely fail sinfulness resides in every male and female the phony trial the beatings and the crown of thorns do not hurt nearly as much as the people's rude scorns now the devil has a temporary victory now he's laughing as he see me hanging on this tree but why my father and my

God have you forsaken me in this hour of darkness I feel your wrath poured on me as all the sin of the human race falls on me I'm your beloved son how could you do this to me Jesus became vulnerable for us vulnerable for an early death vulnerable to shame and disgrace and vulnerable to rejection anyone he calls us to become vulnerable for him because we must be vulnerable enough

to admit that we can't make it on our own that we are sinners and we don't deserve his salvation we must be vulnerable enough that we need to repent and have faith and we must be continually vulnerable even after we confess Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord we still sin from time to time and also we must be vulnerable to one another so often we put on a brave face and think oh everything is going so great that's not the way

Jesus was a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering we must become vulnerable to one another how else can we support each other how else can we encourage one another how else can we pray for one another I don't know how you're hurting how can I pray for you if you don't know how I'm feeling how can you pray for me how can you support me that's vulnerability is what it's all about if the son of God the creator of the universe can become vulnerable to the point of being the size of a pin brick and subject to shame and disgrace humiliation and death rejection why can't we be vulnerable to one another let us pray heavenly father we thank you so much that your son became so vulnerable for us that he left the glories of heaven for a womb a manger and a cross help us to become vulnerable to admit that we need you and we need one another in Jesus name we pray amen