

Mighty God

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Date: 07 December 2025

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[0 : 00] Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. It's always nice when we meet a new baby, maybe someone in our family or a neighbour, maybe!

you'll see things like, isn't he lovely or isn't she beautiful and everyone's very happy. It's probably unlikely that you would say something when you've looked at a newborn baby and say, isn't he mighty? But that's the title we turn to today that was written by Isaiah in the verse that John read for us earlier as the second description of the baby who was to be born. We had wonderful counsellor last week and this week we have mighty God. Now of course we know that the baby, that baby, grew up to be a very mighty man, mighty enough to allow himself to be sacrificed for the whole world. But the description mighty God was written to tell us something that's true about God and something that was true about the child who was to come. And we're going to look at an Old Testament passage which demonstrates God's might. Now if you're familiar with the Bible you might be starting to think about examples of God displaying his might and the more you think the more you realise that there are really a lot of examples. And maybe if you're not familiar with the Bible we would love to give you one so that you can begin to explore these stories and become familiar with them yourself. So please just, if you'd love that, if you'd like to get a Bible come and speak to us after the service or if you're on the live stream email us, go onto our website and get in touch with us. And I assure you nothing makes a minister happier than giving out Bibles.

So please do, if you haven't got one, come and see us and we'd love to give you one. But once we've looked at our Old Testament story, we're going to look at an example of Jesus displaying his might. And seeing that all we read about this eagerly expected person that Isaiah was writing about, seeing how all that was fulfilled in Jesus. But how do we choose an Old Testament story from all those that are available? Right at the beginning we are perhaps God's greatest display of power in his creation of the world. God's creation is a breathtaking display of power and intention.

He spoke matter into existence where there was no matter before. Each element of creation unfolded at his command, land, sea, stars, sun, plants, animals. Then breathing life into humans to me gave that precious gift of being made in his image. We spent two or three weeks looking at the story of Noah recently. Of course that was a mighty act that changed the whole world. We could even consider the events of the Exodus, ten plagues, the Passover night and God parting the sea so his people could cross on dry land. The list could go on. The giving of the law on Mount Sinai, thunder and lightning over a whole mountain, mouths of lions closed after Daniel was flung into their den, or three faithful followers of God who would not bow down to an idol surviving, being thrown into a fiery furnace that was so hot that even the guards through the men were killed by the heat. And yet they came out not even singed. Fabulous stories.

It's hard to choose which is best. And maybe the one you thought of was there, or maybe there you thought of a different one. And if you did, I'd love to hear what it was, because there are some great stories.

[3 : 49] But in the end I just decided to go for my favourite. It's from 1 Kings 18 and tells the story of Elijah's showdown with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. The book of Kings, as the name suggests, is an account of the many kings of Israel and Judah. It's a sad list of people who mostly, as we read in 1 Kings and 2 Kings, describes them as doing evil in the sight of God. There were some good ones. It's always nice to read about them, but mostly they were bad. And the king, who was called Ahab at the time of Elijah and the prophets of Baal in their confrontation, was the worst. In fact, he was so bad that he was the standard of badness that all the others were compared to after him. He led the people away from proper worship of God and into the practices of a false religion. And God decided it was time to show them who was the real God. And so Elijah gathered all the people together on Mount Carmel for a demonstration of God's might.

Elijah introduced the confrontation with these words from 1 Kings 18, 21. Then Elijah stood in front of them and said, How much longer will you waver, hobbling between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him. If Baal is God, then follow him. But the people were completely silent. The test was that they would both build an altar, prepare wood for a fire, and both sacrifice a bull on their altar, but no lighting of the fire.

Whichever God was the true God would light it for them. There were 400 prophets of Asherah and 450 prophets of Baal on one side and on the other side, Elijah. Of course, he wasn't really outnumbered because he had God on his side as well. The prophets of Baal went first and spent the day calling to their God to light the fire. After a while, Elijah started having some fun with them. Reading 1 Kings 18, 27. About noontime, Elijah began mocking them. You'll have to shout louder, he scoffed, for surely he is a God. Perhaps he is daydreaming or is relieving himself.

Quite the sense of humour, Elijah. Or maybe he's away on a trip or is asleep and needs to be awakened. These guys even started to cut themselves with swords to persuade Baal to help them out.

[6 : 24] And after trying all morning, nothing happened. And Elijah said, All right, you've had your turn. You've had plenty of time. Now it's my turn.

Instead of calling on God straight away, he dug a trench all around his altar, which was big enough to hold seven gallons of water. Then he asked some people to fill some large jars with water and pour them over the sacrifice.

Then he asked them to do the same two more times. When they were finished, his sacrifice, the wood for the fire, the whole altar was soaked and the trench was filled with water. The point of this being, of course, that no one could possibly light this fire. Then Elijah prayed, Lord, prove today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant. Prove that I have done all of this at your command. Answer me so these people will know that you are God and that you have brought them back to yourself.

Then as one translation puts it, the fire of God flashed down from heaven and burned up the sacrifice, burned up the wood, burned up even the stones and all the water. The entire thing was consumed in a moment.

Now the rest of the story is pretty good as well. I'll leave it there, but do read it if you get a chance in 1 Kings 18. It's a fantastic story. Now I hope you'll agree that this story gave a clear demonstration of why God is called mighty in the Old Testament.

[7 : 55] As much as looking at these great stories is enjoyable, we want to ask ourselves this question. Why does God display his might? Looking at the different times God displayed his might, we can see some themes coming up again and again. Before we look briefly at some of them, we want to underline the greatest display of God's might as well as his greatest display of love was in sending Jesus, which of course brings us back to our original verse in Isaiah and shows us where we will end up this morning in seeing God's might demonstrated in the life of Jesus and of course in his death and resurrection.

But let's return briefly to these reasons why we find in the Old Testament why God displays his might. And again, when we start to think about these themes, we see many examples of them all. So we're just going to briefly look at one example from the Bible for each. Firstly, God displays his might to reveal his character, his holiness, his justice, his mercy and faithfulness.

We've already mentioned the awesome display of God's might on Mount Sinai when God delivered the law and the commandments to Moses. So significant was the presence of God's holiness in that place that God sent Moses down to warn the people not to set foot on that mountain lest they die. And later we read that God reflected glory shone so brightly on Moses and on his face that he had to wear a veil because no one could look at his face. Secondly, God displays his might to remind people of who he is and to establish his sovereignty.

[9 : 37] There are lots of examples of this, but a really good one found in the closing chapters of the book of Job. After all the questioning of God by Job and the feeble words of comfort and explanation by his friend, God decides to answer Job.

Job 38, 1-3 Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind and said, Who is this that darkens my counsel by words without knowledge?

Dress for action like a man. I will question you and make it known to you. I'm getting a bit lost in that. I will question you and you make it known to me.

Then, it's as if God takes Job on a walk through creation. Look at the earth. Look at the sea. Look at the sky. Look at the creatures. From chapters 38-41, we find this clear and concise yet literary and poetic discourse revealing God's sovereignty and wisdom.

The effect is not to belittle Job, but to situate him within a larger reality where trust in God arises. Not from full understanding, but from recognizing the sovereign wisdom, creativity and care that governs all things.

[10:56] And lastly, God displays his might to teach and form his people. Deuteronomy 8, God reminds the people about their time wandering in the wilderness and their complete reliance on God to provide everything they need.

He tells them that their time in the desert was a test and that they went through it so they would always know that they did not live by their own means. As we read in Deuteronomy 8-3, that is, people did not live by bread alone, but rather by every word that comes from the mouth of God. Familiar words, of course, that we hear Jesus quoting when he's being tempted in the desert after his baptism. There are other reasons in Scripture for God to demonstrate his might, but we know that in the coming of Jesus, all God's purposes were fulfilled.

So let's now turn to the display of God's might in the life of Jesus. Jesus demonstrated his might in authority over nature, authority over sickness and physical limitations, demonic powers and even death.

He forgave sin, taught as one who had authority and spoke of the future of judgment. And again, we can start to think about all the many examples of things that Jesus did that only he could do.

[12:16] And of course, you know which one we've chosen since we had it in our reading earlier. And this is a good example because there's probably no better example in the Gospels of Jesus' authority over nature.

We all know that extreme weather can be overwhelming. You find yourself outside in that horizontal rain that's pelting up the street, getting you in the face, or buffeted by winds that cause us to stumble.

It can all be pretty scary. Now I've mentioned before that I'm not a very good sailor. I get seasick very easily and I think that it's only getting worse as I get older.

Now this reached a new low. I couldn't decide whether to tell you this, but I'll tell you anyway. It reached a new low a year or so ago when I went with a few others from the church on the canal boat over at Polworth Church.

And within a few minutes I was so queasy I had the ass to be let off on a canal. No sea legs for sure. But many of the disciples were fishermen and they knew this lake very well.

[13:20] It's hard to imagine how bad the storm must have been for them to be in such a panic. It's even more hard to imagine how Jesus could have slept through it. And that's a good example for us of how Jesus was as human as the rest of them.

Because he must have been very tired to be able to sleep through soundly on a boat in a storm. But when they woke him, he showed a very good example of how he was also God.

Because he stilled the storm with three words. Peace be still. And there's a lovely link back to the Old Testament when the psalmist praises God as one who is master of the storm.

Clearly demonstrated the prophecy in Isaiah was fulfilled by Jesus. Psalm 89.9 tells us, You rule the raging of the sea. When its waves arise, you still them.

Now I've told this story of Jesus calming the storm lots of times in schools. And it's as easy as it is to say, Jesus calmed the storm just by speaking.

[14:22] But getting our heads around it, when we take a moment to think about it, it's a little less easy. And there's a very nice teacher in Oxfords. He always asks lots of difficult questions when you go there.

And he's a lovely guy. And while I was in his class, he said, Well, Gordon, that's a good story. But I assume you're about to tell us it's some kind of metaphor. Or an exaggeration or something else. You can't expect us to believe that someone could control the weather like that. It is impossible. Well, I was happy to tell him and the whole class that it wasn't a metaphor, but an event in Jesus' life that really happened.

And given all that we read about him in the Gospels, stilling a storm would not have been too difficult for Jesus. Now this story appears in three of the Gospel accounts. And at the end of each one, we find these words or this question.

And it was a good question for them to ask. And it's a good one for us to think about. And we find it here in Mark 4.41. But everything Jesus did was both remarkable and unremarkable at the same time.

[15 : 47] Remarkable in that they confound our senses and understanding of the world, and yet unremarkable because it was Jesus, the divine Son of God, the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us.

He was one of us, and completely different at the same time. And he was not confined by what we thought a person could or should do. He came to do the will of the Father who sent him, spent three years teaching and challenging and overturning traditions, showing love to the people his society had forgotten.

The baby, born in the most humble circumstances. The teacher, who showed God to his whole society, and ultimately to the whole world, including us. And the Saviour, whose death and resurrection made a way for us to know God's forgiveness and a new life in him.

And he is someone that we can know. The prophecy said he would be called Mighty God. And we've seen very clearly that that came true. But he is a Saviour we can know because the whole reason he came was for us to know him, and to love him, and to know his love for us.

We celebrate Jesus' birth and Advent, and over the Christmas season, but there's no better time for us to accept his offer of love, and forgiveness, and freedom.

[17 : 07] Come to the wonderful counsellor. Come to the mighty God. Let's pray together. Thank you, Jesus, for your coming. Thank you that because of your love, we can know you and your love.

May we receive all you have for us, and the new life you offer. In Jesus' name, Amen. We'll continue our worship. My favourite Christmas carol of all time.

Here is it. Hark the Herald Angels Sing. Let's join together.