

What Child Is This?

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Date: 18 December 2022

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[0 : 0 0] childbearing, a miraculous conception. And just as the angel said, Zachariah's wife became pregnant with this great prophet-to-be in her old age. And she is now near the end of her second trimester as we come to this part of the story here in Luke chapter 1 verse 26. So 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. So Luke is now telling us about a second visit from an angel. The first visit happened at the temple in Jerusalem. This second visit takes place in that northern town called Nazareth.

God sends Gabriel to a young lady named Mary. Who is this girl? Luke tells us that she's a virgin.

She's a young lady of marriageable age who has never been with a man. But Luke also tells us that there is a man in her life. Mary is right now at the time of this visit engaged to a man named Joseph.

Now in Jewish culture they had some different marriage traditions than we do today and engagement and all that. I'm not going to go into all those details except to say that they were pledged to be married to each other. They have a wedding coming up at some point here so likely they're thinking towards what that day might be like and making plans. Now who's this Joseph fellow? Luke doesn't actually tell us very much about him. He simply says a descendant of David.

David was the great king of Israel who reigned a thousand years before this and we'll hear more about that as we go along. So let's hear about this visit. The angel went to Mary and said greetings you who are highly favored. The Lord is with you. Can you imagine what this must have been like for this young lady? Seemingly out of nowhere an angel appears probably standing before her and in a paraphrase. Hello highly favored one. God is with you. Luke tells us how Mary was feeling here.

[2 : 3 6] He says Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her do not be afraid Mary. You have found favor with God.

God. Greatly troubled. Afraid. So picture this young lady trembling. Fearful before this angelic being.

It doesn't tell us here what Gabriel looked like but we can at least imagine that he didn't just appear as an ordinary man dressed in white. Whatever his appearance, whatever his voice sounded like, it was enough to greatly trouble Mary to put fear into her heart. So the angel says do not be afraid.

And again he says you have found favor with God. We might pause here for just a moment. Wouldn't it be something to hear an angel sent from God to you say these words?

Greetings. Greetings Dave. You have found favor with God. God really does see and know our lives inside and out. He knows what we're doing. He knows what we're saying. He knows what we're thinking and feeling and planning. Sometimes it's hard to live to please God when it seems that our actions go unnoticed or so we think. But they don't go unnoticed.

[4 : 17] God had been watching Mary all along, seeing her life and he was pleased with her. She wasn't perfect. She was a sinner too. But she was making an effort by faith to live that righteous life that God desires. And what a relief to hear from God's angel in that moment.

You have found favor with God. He's pleased with you. Well God might not send an angel to us, but just the same. He's watching. He sees all that we do. And like Mary we can find favor with him if we by faith just seek to do what pleases him. Don't think that you're living for God doesn't make a difference to anyone or that nobody notices it. God sees every good and loving and kind thing that you do and you will have your acknowledgement and your reward from him at the time that he chooses.

So the angel says to her, you found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great. He 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. How will this be? Mary asked the angel.

Since I'm a virgin. The angel answered, the Holy Spirit will come on you and the power of the most high will overshadow you. So the Holy One to be born will be called the son of God.

[6 : 04] 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 for no word from God will ever fail.

I am the Lord's servant, Mary answered. May your word to me be fulfilled. Then the angel left her. So the angel doesn't waste any time. He goes straight from you have found favor with God to you will conceive and give birth to a son. Can you imagine what's going on in Mary's mind right now?

Like what? Mary was probably just a teenager or at the oldest in her early 20s. Here she's been thinking about her wedding, maybe making some plans and all of a sudden out of nowhere an angel sent from God tells her that she's going to be pregnant and give birth to a son.

This declaration probably left her wide eyed and with her jaw dropped right to the floor. And then the angel goes on to tell her all this wonderful stuff about who this child will be.

Stuff that's so wonderful that she was probably just continuously floored, shocked. How could this be? And by the time it comes for Mary to respond, we might expect her to ask a question like, are you saying that I'm going to give birth to the Messiah?

[7 : 40] Or maybe, what do you mean he will be the son of the Most High? Or maybe, is my son going to lead Israel in breaking free from the rule of the Roman Empire?

Or maybe, is my son going to be the son of the Roman Empire? But Mary doesn't ask any of these questions. She's still trying to get a handle on the fact that she's going to be pregnant. And how? She says to the angel, how will this be?

Since I'm a virgin. I'm not married yet. I've never been with a man. It's impossible for me to conceive and give birth to a son. Or unless you mean that this is going to happen after we get married.

After the wedding, the angel answers the question. I'm going to paraphrase this a little bit. But basically, he says, no, you're going to conceive before the wedding.

This baby's not going to come in the natural way. God's Spirit will come upon you. His power will overshadow you. Causing you to conceive without a husband.

[8 : 52] So that this child will rightly be called the son of God. You think this sounds impossible?

But it's not. Basically, the angel says, when God speaks, he always brings it to pass. No word from God will ever fail. He can do the impossible.

Just like he's doing with Elizabeth. Your relative right now. Who's six months pregnant in her old age. I love these words.

That Luke shares with us here. The supernatural conception of Jesus. Without a human father. Is enough to send shivers down my soul.

The creator. The author of all life. Is going to bring a human life. And he himself will be the father.

[9 : 52] Of that human baby. He will work powerfully and miraculously. Bringing forth. Jesus in the womb of Mary.

This miracle is right up there. With the resurrection of Jesus. From the dead. I got thinking about this this past week. Even just the conception.

Of a human life from two parents. The natural way. Is already stunning. And miraculous. So mind-boggling. And how complex it is.

What a wonderful thing. How each of us began our existence in this world. As a single human cell. Made up of parts.

From both mother and father. A cell which then set in motion. An innumerable chain of events. To assemble. You. A living. Breathing human being.

[10 : 48] It's amazing. How much more though. That God can do that. With only half the parts. Required. Half the equation. And just miraculously.

Supply that other half. All on his own. This right here. Is the explanation. For how Jesus was. Both human. And divine.

God. And man. I don't know about you. But it puts wonder into my heart. As I. Come around to celebrating Christmas. What child is this?

Jesus is. The son. Of God. God. But there's more. That the angel. Has to say here. About this son. To be born. We skipped over it.

A little bit. But let's go back up. To verse 32. The angel said to Mary. The Lord God. Will give him. The throne. Of his father. David. And he will reign.

[11 : 45] Over Jacob's descendants. Forever. His kingdom. Will never end. To many of us here today. In North America. 2,000 years later.

This probably sounds. Kind of strange. We live in a day of nations. And. Democratic governments. Not kingdoms. And empires.

We've got prime ministers. And presidents. And chancellors. And yeah. There's some monarchy. Some dictatorships. The monarchy though. That we are most familiar with. Here in Canada.

Is mostly symbolic. Harkening. Back to when Canada. Was not. Its own nation. But a colony. Of the British Empire. So all this talk. Of Mary's son. Sitting on the throne.

Of his father David. And reigning. Over Jacob's descendants. In a never ending kingdom. It's kind of hard. To relate to today. Isn't it? But I would submit. To you this morning.

[12 : 39] That it might have been hard. For Mary to relate. To this as well. King David reigned. About a thousand years. Before this angelic visit. And after the death.

Of King David's son. Solomon. The great kingdom of Israel. Went through. Some pretty significant changes. First it split into two. And there was all kinds of. War and conflict.

Between the northern. And southern halves. Then a series of empires. Rose up. And wars were waged. At times. Both kingdoms. Were subdued peoples. Under larger empires.

The Assyrians came. And they laid waste. And conquered the northern kingdom. And dragged off the people. Into exile. Then the Babylonian empire. Rose up. And overtook the Assyrian empire. And conquered the southern kingdom.

And dragged them away. Into exile. Then came the Persian empire. And the Greek empire. And back and forth fighting. Of the Ptolemies. And the Seleucids. And caught in the middle.

[13 : 35] Of all this. Is this land. That God promised. To the descendants of Jacob. And the descendants themselves. Who had been conquered. Taken out of the land. And then.

By God's power. Brought back into the land. It wasn't until about. 150 years. Before this angelic visit. That Israel had experienced. Anything like.

A kingdom. In their own territory. There was a short period. Of about 100 years. When the surrounding empires. Lost their grip. Over the land of Israel. During the time of the Maccabees.

And they enjoyed a short. Period of independence. And freedom. But then again. About 40 years. Before Mary was even born. The Romans came.

And took over. And once again. They were a subdued people. In the Roman empire. In 37 BC. Israel came to have a king again. But it was not anything like.

[14 : 32] King David. This man. Herod. Was an opportunistic man. He rose to power. By brokering a deal. With the Romans.

I'll keep this region. In order. I'll make sure. That they pay taxes. I'll ward off. Some of the threats. Of the neighbors. That are hostile. If you. Back me. And support me.

As the king. Over this people. So you can imagine. That to Mary. This promise. Of a son. Who will sit. On David's throne. And reign over Jacob's descendants.

A never ending kingdom. Sounds almost as strange. As it does to us. There hasn't been anything close to that. Since the rule of David. And Solomon. In the centuries before.

Mary. Have been full of war. Plundering. Hostility. Oppressive rule. By whoever has had the upper hand. At the time. As we look at the history.

[15 : 30] We might be tempted to think. That God has forgotten. The promise. That he made to David. Long ago. So let's go back. And be reminded. Of what God had said. To King David. Long ago.

First Chronicles. Chapter 17. And I'm just going to read. A little lengthier section here. First Chronicles. Chapter 17. After David.

That's the king. Was settled in his palace. He said to Nathan. The prophet. Here I am. Living in a house of cedar. While the ark. Of the covenant. Of the Lord. Is under a tent.

Nathan replied to David. Whatever you have in mind. Do it. For God is with you. But that night. The word of God. Came to Nathan. Saying. Go. And tell my servant David.

This is what the Lord says. You are not the one. To build me. A house to dwell in. I have not dwelt in a house. From the day. I brought Israel. Up out of Egypt.

[16 : 27] To this day. I have moved. From one tent site. To another. From one dwelling place. To another. Wherever I have moved. With all the Israelites. Did I ever say.

To any of their leaders. Whom I commanded. To shepherd my people. Why have you not built for me. A house of cedar. Now then. Tell my servant David. This is what. The Lord Almighty says.

I took you. From the pasture. From tending the flock. And appointed you. Ruler. Over my people Israel. I have been with you. Wherever you have gone.

And I have cut off. All your enemies. From before you. Now I will make your name. Like the names. Of the greatest men. On earth. And I will provide a place. For my people Israel.

And will plant them. So that they can have. A home of their own. And no longer be disturbed. Wicked people. Will not oppress them anymore. As they did at the beginning. And have done ever since.

[17 : 22] The time I appointed leaders. Over my people Israel. I will also subdue. All your enemies. I declare to you. That the Lord. Will build. A house. For you.

When your days are over. And you go to be. With your ancestors. I will raise up. Your offspring. To succeed you. One of your own sons. And I will establish. His kingdom.

He is the one. Who will build. A house for me. And I will establish. His throne forever. I will be his father. And he will be my son. I will never take.

My love away from him. As I took it away. From your predecessor. I will set him over my house. And my kingdom. Forever. His throne. Will be established.

Forever. Now it's hard to jump back. In time. Almost a thousand years. Before this visit. From Gabriel. To the time of King David. But in some ways. There are some big similarities.

[18 : 18] Did you catch. What Nathan the prophet. Said to David. Verse 9. He said. They can have a home. Of their own. And no longer be disturbed.

Wicked people. Will not oppress them anymore. As they did. At the beginning. And have done. Ever since the time. I appointed leaders. Over my people. Israel. To feel the weight.

Of these words. You almost have to go back. And read the whole story. Of Israel. Right up to this moment. But especially. What's happened with them. Since they entered. The promised land. This kind of sums it up.

They've been disturbed. A lot. The wicked nations. And peoples around them. Have oppressed them. And ruled over them. And it's been chaotic. And turbulent. For all the people.

Right up until. Now. When God has established. This united. And strong kingdom. Under David. And it didn't come quickly. Or easily. There were years.

[19 : 13] Of battles. With all the surrounding nations. And peoples. And finally. God promised. To put an end. To all that. And to bring a time. Of peace.

Here was David. The shepherd boy. Now grown. And shepherding. The whole nation. Every tribe. Of Jacob's descendants. And David.

Was like Mary. He found favor. With God. God. He had faith in God. He loved God. The chronicler tells us. That one day.

To paraphrase it. He. Sort of looked out the window. And. Up there on the hill. Where the Lord's. Tabernacle was. All of a sudden.

Had a moment of realization. Here I am. Living in this beautiful palace. That I've built for myself. And God's place. Where he dwells among us. It's a tent. This doesn't make sense.

[20 : 12] There's something wrong. With this picture. I've put all this time. And energy. Into beautifying. My own house. My own palace. And yet the place. Where God dwells among us. It's a tent.

It's not right. The best. And the most beautiful house. In Jerusalem. Thought David. Shouldn't be mine. It should be the Lord's. And so David.

Got it in his heart. To build a beautiful house. A temple. For the Lord God. And. God was so deeply moved. By this. Love. Of David.

He sent the prophet. Nathan to David. And this is what God said to David. I'm paraphrasing it. I'm deeply touched. That you want to build a house for me.

But no. I'm going to build a house for you. Not a building. But a family. A people. A dynasty.

[21 : 09] A kingdom. What a promise. To make. To David. A forever kingdom. A house.

But not a building. Rather a people. Always to be ruled. And governed. By a son of David. And amazingly. There is sort of a double fulfillment.

To this. Promise of God. If you know the story. The son of David. Who took the throne after him. Was Solomon. And God did establish his kingdom. It was the greatest kingdom of Israel.

That the world had ever seen. Built up and expanded. Beyond what David had achieved. And there was a great time of peace. No longer did their enemies. Oppress them.

And. This son of David. Solomon. And ruled over all the surrounding nations. They paid tribute to him. Solomon did build a house for the Lord. He built the most.

[22 : 06] Magnificent temple. The world had ever seen. For Yahweh. The creator. But then as I said earlier. Solomon died. And this kingdom.

Divided. And spiraled. Downward. And was seemingly. Snuffed out. What happened to God's promise. A never ending kingdom.

Where is it? Well it turns out. That what God did with Solomon. The son of David. Was just a taste. Was just a foreshadowing. Of what he planned to do.

Much later. Through another. Son of David. A descendant of David. Who was coming. Back to Luke. Chapter 1. Verse 32. What did the angel say to Mary.

About the child she would bear. The Lord God will give him. The throne. Of his father David. And he will reign over Jacob's descendants. Forever.

[23 : 06] His kingdom. Will never end. God hadn't forgotten. About what he had promised to David. Almost a thousand years before this. He was still planning to do.

The same thing. To establish this great kingdom. And here's the crazy part of this. God declares. That he's going to do this. In such a. An interesting time.

In a time. When here is Mary. And Joseph. And the people of Israel. A subjugated people. Under the imperial rule. Of one of the greatest empires. That the world has seen.

Mary. You're going to give birth to a son. And he will take up the throne. Of King David. And he will reign over. For all of the descendants of Jacob. Forever.

In a never ending kingdom. Amazingly. This is God's plan. Not a line of kings. That will continue forever.

[24 : 03] But a king. At the end. Of a line. Who will live forever. And reign forever. The son. Of David. The son.

Of God. Both. Here and now. In one person. He will reign forever. And the kingdom. Will never end. Because he will live.

And reign. By the power. Of an indestructible life. Isn't this something? Gabriel. An angel of God. Is declaring this.

To a young. Lady. Named Mary. In the northern town. Of Nazareth. Who's pledged. To be married. To a man named Joseph. This little baby.

Who in nine months. Will be in her arms. He's the one. Through whom God. Will keep. This great promise. That he has made.

[25 : 01] Over a thousand years ago. This Jesus. Is the one. He will be. The son of God. He will be. The special.

Son of David. The one. Through whom. All of it. Will be fulfilled. This is what makes. Christmas. So special. But like Mary. We too. Have to celebrate.

And rejoice. By faith. How will this be? We might wonder. How will this come about? We. We know the story. Of the miraculous. Conception. And the birth of Jesus.

But all this other stuff. About the kingdom. That will never end. How will this be? The story of Jesus.

Didn't go like many of us. Might have expected. He didn't rise up. To an earthly throne. Displace Herod. Chase out the Romans. And go on to establish.

[25 : 57] The kind of kingdom. That we were looking for. He rode into Jerusalem. On a donkey. And then week. Later. He was crucified. And then three days.

After that. He rose from the dead. And 40 days later. He was taken up. Into heaven. Again. God's plan.

Is somewhat. Unexpected. The king has come. And has left. And it turns out. That the promise. And time. Of this great kingdom. Awaits.

His return. At the end. Of our world story. And so like Mary. We too. Are waiting. We're waiting. To see.

How God's word to her. Will be fulfilled. But as the angel said. No word from God. Will ever fail.

[26 : 50] It was Jesus. Who taught his first followers. To pray. Your kingdom. Come. On earth. As it is in heaven.

And when the disciples. Asked Jesus. On that day. That he ascended. Into heaven. Lord. Are you at this time. Going to restore. The kingdom to Israel. What did he say to them.

He said. It is not for you. To know. The times or dates. The father has set. By his own authority. And what did the angels say. After he had gone up.

Into heaven. They said. This same Jesus. Who has been taken from you. Into heaven. Will come back. In the same way. That you have seen him. Go. And when Jesus.

The king. Returns. He is going to turn this world. Upside down. He is going to fulfill. All the promises. Establish. The good kingdom of God.

[27 : 50] Here on earth. And it will be the last kingdom. That this world. Has ever seen. What matters most.

For us here today. Is will you have a place. In this kingdom. Will you be. One of the citizens.

Of this kingdom. A servant. Of the king. Jesus. And the apostles. Made it clear. That you can have.

Citizenship. In this kingdom. They proclaim. The good news. Of the kingdom. Of God. If you repent. And you believe. You too. Can be a citizen. Of this kingdom. That is coming.

And it will be. A great kingdom. A kingdom made up. Of both Jew. And Gentile. A global kingdom. And it will never end. It will be.

[28 : 44] The last kingdom. Will you have a place. In the kingdom. It's the most important question. That any of us. Has to answer.

Have you repented. Of your sins. Have you believed. In your heart. That Jesus. Is the Lord. Have you confessed that. If you have.

God's promise to you. Is that you will be saved. And you will come to enjoy. This good kingdom. When he returns. So what child is this.

That we celebrate. At Christmas time. Luke tells us. The story. He is the son of God. He is the son. Of David.

This. This. Is Christ. The king. Let's pray. Father in heaven.

[29 : 44] We thank you for your words. We thank you that we get to. Listen in. On what happened. On that day. Two thousand years ago. When the angel.

Visited Mary. And I pray that we would. Each one of us. Take these words to heart. That this child. Your son. Is special. Is like no other.

I pray that you would fill our hearts. With the wonder. Of that truth. Of who he is. And the beauty of that. And give us great joy. As we celebrate this. Christmas.

In your name we pray. Amen.