

The Birth Foretold

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[0 : 00] In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary.

Heavenly Father, we bow in your presence. May your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher, and your greater glory, our supreme concern, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen. Christmas comes earlier every year. No doubt there are certain people who are already thinking about what decorations to put up and when.

When to buy their presents, where to buy their presents, where to buy the turkey, or to have a goose instead. I'm hardly the Christmas Grinch, but September's way too early to be thinking about Christmas.

Well, that's true if you're thinking of Christmas purely in terms of a commercial or model thing. But it's very far from true if you're thinking of it in terms of the birth of Jesus Christ.

[1 : 16] Every day is Christmas Day when Jesus is front and center of your mind and heart. Don't be a Christmas Grinch.

For us as Christmas, it's not just the joy of one day, but the other 364 also. Now, the angel Gabriel focuses very heavily in Luke chapter 1.

First, in announcing the conception of John the Baptist, as we saw last week. But secondly, more famously, in announcing the conception of Jesus Christ in Luke 1, 26 through 38.

Now, for our series of Christmas sermons for 2021, I'm going to take us on a deep dive of this passage. So today, given that we're still in September, and we're engaged in a series of studies in Luke Acts, which will take us some number of years, we're going to paint with broader brushstrokes than these.

Think of today as a taster for Christmas. It's only 99 days away, by the way. Also, of its context, as that which Luke carefully researched, set down in order to establish the place of Gentiles, like us, within the church of Jesus Christ.

[2 : 42] Well, we want to understand this passage, this amazing announcement of the angel Gabriel to Mary, under four headings. Kingship, reign, coronation, and devotion.

Kingship, first of all, from verse 26 and 27. Kingship. Kings come in all shapes and sizes, but never a king has come like King Jesus.

This whole passage, not just these verses, point to Jesus as king. The hero of the story is not the angel Gabriel, nor is it Mary, the blessed mother of our Lord.

It is Jesus Christ. However, it all begins here in verse 27, where the child who is to be born is described as being of the house of David.

Of the house of David. Now, you will know that David was the greatest of all the kings of Israel. And Jesus will be of his royal line.

[3 : 49] Contrast this with John the Baptist, whose lineage was priestly, from Aaron and Abijah, and whose ministry was prophetic, like Elijah.

When it comes to Jesus, Luke is emphasizing his royal line and his kingly mission. Something we'll look at more in the next point.

But this is what the angel Gabriel has been sent to announce. The coming of the king. And in that way, Gabriel's mission isn't really so different from ours, you know, because we have as our ambition, as Christians, surely, the preaching of the kingdom of God with Christ as its king.

This is the call of the gospel, is it not? To repent and believe the gospel. To do just as we'll see Mary doing later, devoting herself to Christ as king.

The word angel means messenger. Are we God's angels, God's messengers, announcing the kingdom of Christ to our families, in our workplaces, among our friends?

[5 : 12] We learn from our first study in this gospel two weeks ago that all the way through, Luke is summarizing the missionary theology and preaching of the apostle Paul.

So here we have, from the beginning to the end, New Testament proclamation. The announcement of Jesus Christ, not as king of Jews only, but as king of Gentiles too.

Jesus Christ, king of kings and lord of lords. But exactly what kind of king will he be? Will he be like the historic kings of Israel?

Warlike, intent on the expansion of Israel's geographical territory. Will like King Herod, he use the people to give him security, wealth, and status.

How great will be his throne compared to that of the emperor of Rome? Well, again, verses 26 and 27 describe to us the paradox of Jesus' kingship.

[6 : 17] The paradox of his kingship. Because these verses don't describe something taking place in this central temple in Jerusalem, but in a far-off village in Galilee.

And they describe Mary, an unmarried girl, not well positioned, like a Jewish priest called Zechariah. Zechariah. The fact that the angel speaks to Mary is very significant.

Because in the world of that day, women had little or no status. Think of today's Afghanistan. Where women are losing their freedoms every day.

Losing their dignity. Losing their status. Losing their ability to receive education at school. In the society of this day, women were considered as unreliable witnesses in a court of law.

And yet, it was to one of these women and a young, unmarried, vulnerable woman at that, the angel Gabriel announces the birth of God's king.

[7 : 25] Again, after Jesus' resurrection, the angel announced Jesus rising from the dead as we read in Luke chapter 24 verses 1 through 12 to a woman.

One of the features of Luke's gospel as we're going to see over subsequent months and years is its insistence upon a higher status for woman.

Jesus treated women as equals. Something incredibly counter-cultural in the world of his day. At a standard of which at times the church that bears his name has fallen woefully short.

In our day and generation, if we want to be faithful to Jesus and his mission and example, we must reinforce the quality of woman in our society and be seen to do so.

However, the point is this. Whereas the conception of John the Baptist is announced in the temple in Jerusalem, the conception of Jesus is announced in the obscurity of Nazareth.

[8 : 34] A far away town made up made up of Jews who didn't really know much about the world around them. It was in Galilee, an ethnically mixed northern region where people spoke with strange accents and were often ethnically impure.

It wasn't in Buckingham Palace. It was in a downbeat Fife X mining town. The word virgin is used to describe Mary is to remind Luke's readers of the prophecy of Isaiah 7.14.

Behold, a virgin shall conceive and be a child. Even as God is fulfilling Old Testament prophecies in the coming of John the Baptist, the New Testament Elijah will prepare the way for the coming of the Lord as we saw last week.

So here, God is fulfilling Old Testament prophecies in the miraculous conception of King Jesus. But again, it's the hiddenness, it's the obscurity, it's the lowness of the context which shines through.

What kind of king will Jesus be? Will his birth be announced in all the great cities of the world as that of a new Roman emperor? Will he be a warlike and expansionist king?

[9 : 57] No, from the very beginning of his conception, Jesus' kingship is set in the context of humility and lowliness.

That's the kind of king Jesus will be. The kind of king who would not break a bruised reed or snuff out smouldering flax. The kind of king who won't raise his voice in the streets, but a king who in seeming weakness and in humility will triumph over the violence and power structures of this world's kingdoms and empires.

His gentleness will overwhelm the ferocity of Rome and his love will overcome the hatred of men. This is the kind of king Jesus will be.

This is the standard to which as a church we must aspire. In the light of the humility of his birth, the cross is to be expected at his death.

He is the king who will always give himself for his people. The king that we bow before today. Our servant king. Our great shepherd humble king.

[11:16] Secondly, we want to look in verses 28 through 33 at his kingdom or his reign. His kingdom or his reign. The fact that Jesus Christ will be humble and gentle should not blind us to his inherent dignity and glory.

The angel says in verse 32, he will be great and the son of the most high he will be called. Great and the son of the most high.

Never let the meekness of Jesus blind you to the majesty of Jesus. His meekness exists only because of his majesty and his majesty is best expressed in his meekness.

There's a couple of features of his reign as a king I want to draw your attention to. I can speak of far more but I'll have to wait until Christmas time. First, notice the name of Christ our king.

Notice his name. We read first of all that he should be called Jesus. But then in verse 32 he should be called the son of the most high.

[12:26] Jesus and the son of the most high. Double named. He shall be both Jesus and the son of the most high. Again I say never let the meekness of Jesus blind you to his majesty.

His name is both Jesus and the son of the most high. Now you will know that the name Jesus is the New Testament equivalent of the Jewish name Joshua meaning the Lord saves.

In other words the reign of king Jesus the reign of the son of the most high shall be trained toward this one purpose. Salvation. Salvation not as it was understood in the Jewish sense of national political and military salvation but in the sense that was prophesied in the Old Testament as social spiritual and eternal.

Salvation not by conquest but by crucifixion not by the killing of others but by the sacrifice of the self. But who is the saviour to be born?

He is the son of the most high. He will be a man but he will be no mere man. There shall be so much more about him such that not only shall he be called the son of the most high but that that is who he really shall be.

[13:58] That there really will be no one higher than this great one this son of the most high. No angel will ever be greater than him. He is the son of God himself.

He is no petty powerless potentate. He is the greatest of all. He is the king of kings and the lord of lords.

He is the one under whose reign as Christians we delight to live under. Never let the meekness of Jesus blind you to his majesty.

But let's dig a bit deeper as I know we can in Glasgow City. You know we're quite deep. We're deep people. Are these two things meekness and majesty really as opposite as we make them out to be? The lowness of a crucified Jesus and the highness of a kingly Jesus. Are they really opposites? Or rather is it not in the nature of the son of God not to grasp onto his kingliness and godness but to embrace servitude and crucifixion in order that in love he might save his people from their sins?

[15:17] Is that not his majesty? Remember the apostle Paul was Luke's mentor. And this was certainly Paul's thinking when in Philippians 2 he describes the kingdom of Christ in action.

The meekness and majesty of Jesus working together. the expression of our salvation our faith in Christ. He says do nothing out of rivalry or in vain conceit but in humility consider others better than yourselves.

Let each of you not only look to your own interests but also to the interests of others which means have this mind among you which is yours in Christ Jesus.

this is the expression of Christ's reign in his church that we retain his name not just on our lips but in our hearts and through our actions that our meekness becomes the demonstration of our salvation in Christ.

His kingdom was marked by humility and Christ mindedness not by economic political or military strength. Is this your vision of Christ's kingdom?

[16:37] In what ways do the meekness and the majesty of Christ find expression in the way in which you act toward other Christians.

But then secondly notice also the extent of Christ's reign. The extent of his reign. Verse 33 He will reign over the house of Jacob and of his kingdom there will be no end.

You'll notice that the extent of his kingdom is described in two ways. Forever and no end. The first corresponds to time.

He will reign forever. In our darker moments we see the pride, evil and violence of the world around us and we despair that the love and humility and meekness of Christ will ever win out.

Rather like that Roman empire which for 500 years ruled almost the entire known world, we fear that the kingdom of Christ shall fall before the malice of the world toward it.

[17 : 45] not so. The reign of Christ shall last forever. Whereas the first descriptor relates to time, the second descriptor corresponds to geography.

Of his kingdom there will be no end. As was prophesied by Solomon in Psalm 72, may he have domination from sea to sea, from the river to the ends of the earth.

We talk about Christmas being a great opportunity to speak to friends and neighbours, but what if, as is the truth, as Christians we celebrate Christmas every day?

Surely that means for us that the kingdom of Christ becomes universal for us, not just on the 25th of December, but on the 26th also, and every day until the next 25th of December.

In a recent sermon, Stephen Strong used the expression the geography of grace. What a wonderful expression. The geography of grace. May I suggest that in the light of Luke 1 33, we view the geography of grace as being universal, that people from all tribes and nations shall experience for themselves the beauty of the majesty and the meekness of Jesus, Europeans and Africans, Americans, Asians, and everyone else also.

[19 : 14] The kingdom of Christ shall know no ethnic boundaries and the church of Christ shall be inclusive of all kinds of peoples. Remember, the reason Luke is writing is to assure Gentile Christians that they belong in the church.

And even from the lips of the angel Gabriel, they have it in black and white. Christ is Lord of all. Christ is king for you. You belong.

Well, third, and more briefly, from verse 34 through 37, we have coronation, coronation. Meekness and majesty in this child to be born, Jesus the Savior, the Son of the Most High.

But how shall this be? John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus, was conceived in the normal way. He contained the genetics both of Zechariah and Elizabeth.

But to Mary, by her own admission, had never known a man. If she were to conceive and be a child, it would be a miraculous conception, not a bending of the natural order as you see with Zechariah and Elizabeth.

[20 : 34] Or as you see in the Old Testament with Abraham and Sarah, it will be a new rule altogether. In fact, what we read between verses 34 and 37 is the greatest of all coronations, where God is present in the fullness of his glory and the hiddenness of his power.

On the 1st of June, 1953, Queen Elizabeth II was crowned at Westminster Abbey in London. Present at her coronation were the greatest figures in the world of the day.

But present at the coronation of Jesus Christ, as it were, are the greatest figures of all. As Luke will reveal more and more as we go through this gospel and also the book of Acts, the Holy Trinity of Father, Son, and Spirit are one God.

And here in this passage, they are present. The child to be born is the Son of God. He is conceived as the Holy Spirit comes upon me.

And it will all take place by the power of the Most High. A Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, all present here in Luke 1.

[21 : 58] The greatest of all participants are present as that child is miraculously conceived in the womb of the Blessed Virgin. There could be no greater present at this coronation than Father, Son, and Spirit, one God, Israel's God, the Christian God.

Amazed at his Son's obedience and humility in being willing to be made an embryo. Father and Son worship him who at this stage is just a tiny bundle of cells being implanted into the wall of Mary's womb.

Here is the true miracle. Not the birth of the child, it was rather natural, but the miraculous conception of the child. Furthermore, all this talk of power and overshadowing brings to mind an earlier event.

In Genesis chapter 1, God created the heavens and the earth, but we read the earth was void, without form, and darkness was over the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

The womb of the Virgin resembled the formlessness and emptiness of that newly created earth. But just as the Holy Spirit hovered over the waters and filled them with life in the beginning, so the Holy

Spirit overshadowed Mary and filled her with new life.

[23 : 25] What's been spoken of here in Luke chapter 1 is an entirely new creation. Out of the nothingness, emptiness, and barrenness of a virgin's womb, God creates new life.

The king has been conceived not after the fashion of men, but by the miraculous work of God himself. What is our response to be to this? We don't want to talk about obstetrics.

We want to talk about worship. The intense mystery of this event which fills us with reverence and awe. Had you been there in the 1st of June 1953 at Westminster Abbey, you would have been awestruck by Her Majesty's pomp and pageantry.

But compared to the infinitely greater awesomeness of the incarnation of the Son of God and the hiddenness of the womb of this virgin, our beloved Queen's coronation was child's play.

Listeners, try as hard as I might, the greatest application of these truths is deeply spiritual. Bow down to worship this king.

[24 : 41] Fall down before the majesty and the meekness of his coronation. Praise him with everything you have and everything you are. You see, to go back to the previous point, the Holy Trinity created anew for our sakes.

This child who was born would go on to save us from our sin. This child who could be called both Jesus and the Son of the Most High. That child who in verse 35 is called holy, that in approximately 33 years, having lived a holy and perfectly righteous life, this child would sacrifice himself to take away all our sins and give us eternal life through faith in him.

And all we've been asked to do is to trust and to believe. Worship and praise this God who so marvelously created a universe in the womb of this virgin girl.

Trusting in Jesus, rejoicing in Jesus, it's Christmas Day every day for the Christian. Well, lastly, from verse 38, we want to look at devotion.

Devotion. This verse tells you everything you need to know about Mary, the mother of our Lord, about her faithfulness, about her character. In response to what must have been a monumental shock to her system, she responds, Behold, I am the Lord's servant.

[26 : 08] May it be to me as according to your word. Now, she knows only part of what's coming her way. Part of the path God has chosen for her. But she knows enough to know it's going to be very hard for her.

She's going to face the disgrace of being an unmarried mother. She's going to have to deal with a very far from normal life with a son who will at the same time be her delight and cause her great pain.

But this is devotion that she chooses to willingly and lovingly pursue God's plan for her life. She chooses to let it be to her according to the word of the angel.

She does not take a prideful place and say to him, Gabriel, how dare you ask me to do such a dangerous thing? Nor does she adopt a haughty attitude and say to Gabriel, you don't realize just how much this is going to inconvenience me, old boy, do you?

Way too much of that in today's church. That if anything the Lord asks us to do puts us out, we won't do it. Oh, don't ask me to turn up at church at 11 in the morning.

[27 : 23] Don't you know how much you're asking of me? Please don't ask him to come back a second time. We complain bitterly.

We do only those things God asks us to do that are easy to do. And we leave the hard ones out. Remember what Mary said.

I am the Lord's servant. I want to challenge us all here this morning, every one of us, from the youngest to the oldest. Are you the Lord's servant? As we have recognized the greatness of the coming King, King Jesus, and how he will harness his greatness to our salvation, how he will humble himself to take away our sins.

Are you ready this morning to take the next step, Mary's step, to devote yourself to him as Lord and Savior?

Are you willing to believe in him? Are you willing to trust in him? Are you willing to say to him this morning, perhaps for the first ever time in your life, I am your servant. Are you willing to follow him wherever he leads you in life?

[28 : 40] Yes, even into humility, poverty, anonymity, inconvenience, as long as it means salvation for others.

In my opinion, it's way too early to be talking about Christmas trees or putting up Christmas decorations. But if anyone would like to contribute Christmas chocolate to the minister's hardship fund, that's fine with me.

But for the Christian who's adopted the Mary-like attitude, I am the Lord's servant, who's devoting herself to the worship and service of King Jesus, every day's Christmas day.

Every day. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for this passage from your word. We thank you for its emphasis.

It might seem to us to be obscure, but that's the point. It's obscure. Jesus was born in obscurity, far away from the centers of civilization, and far away from the greatness of the great people of our world.

[29 : 56] We thank you for his majesty and meekness, harnessed together for our salvation.

Forgive us, Lord, for our thanklessness, forgiveness, for our rejection of that.

Forgive us, O Lord, that if anything should inconvenience us, or if anything should be hard for us to do, we'll say, don't ask me to do that, Lord. Don't ask me to give my time.

Don't ask me to give my money. Don't ask me to give my life. Don't ask me to give up that bad relationship. I'll just do those things that are easy. Father, give us the grace, we pray, to see how much you love us, and how profoundly you've taken our sins away.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.