

Going Low to Go High

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[0 : 00] I think it's a great temptation this time of the year for the preacher to try and be really clever about the story and to try and find some new angle that's never been thought of before.

And that just robs, I think that robs the Nativity story of its beauty. So my goal in the next 10 minutes is just to explain the passage as simply as I can.

Because that's where the treasure is. So here we go. One of the most fundamental things you can say about Christmas is found in the very first verse of our passage that Richard read to us tonight. And that is this. In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth. So the fundamental fact about Christmas is that it starts with God.

It's about God taking the initiative. Christmas is about something that God has done. So the passage begins with this fact.

[1 : 15] In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel. So the passage begins with that. And then it does two things for us. The rest of the story, it tells us what God did.

And it gives us a bit of a model on how we respond to this amazing thing that God has done. So let's start with the first thing. What is the initiative that God takes?

What is this thing that he does? And it's this. God breaks into the universe. God knits himself into his creation. And it starts with an announcement we heard.

That God sends an angel to visit a teenage girl in this backwater town in the Middle East that has this astounding news. And he says to this young woman, you're going to have a baby. In verse 32, it says, he will be the son of the most high.

So this baby is going to be a divine child. Somehow it's going to be fully God and fully human. And then the angel goes on to say this child is going to be the king.

[2 : 18] It's the king of the universe. And this kingdom is going to go on forever. The son of God, the father, the king of the universe, will become a human baby.

And it's so hard to get your head around, isn't it? It describes, remember, it says the most high. You don't get higher than the most high.

The most high is the highest most high you can get, right? There's no higher than most high, right?

And it's going to come into the world, the most high, it's going to come into the world as a baby.

And you don't get much more vulnerable and weak as a baby. From the highest high to the lowest low, that's the journey that God takes.

No other religion makes any kind of claim like that. This is completely unique. The Christian faith is completely unique in this. Now, why does God do this? Why would he make this journey?

[3 : 18] Why would he become flesh? A child, for goodness sake. Well, one of the big reasons is that God became human so that he would be vulnerable. He became human so he could be hurt.

He became human so he could be killed. He became human so he could die. So why would God become human and vulnerable so he could die?

Well, the short answer is this. Jesus goes down to come back up and bring a ruined world with him. Jesus becomes one of us, and it was the only way.

Jesus becomes one of us, becomes this frail human being, so he can die on a cross for us in order to bring us back to the Father. C.S. Lewis, who you'll know from, you know, he wrote books like *The Lion, Witch and the Wardrobe*.

He wrote a book called *Miracles*, and he talks about this. The technical word is the incarnation, God becoming a human. It's called *The Incarnation*. In his book called *The Miracles*, he wrote a little chapter on this.

[4 : 20] I read a little section of it. He said, it's kind of like this. One may think of a diver, gone with a splash, vanished, rushing down through green and warm water into black and cold water, down

through increasing pressure into the death-like region of ooze and slime and old decay, then up again, back to color and light, his lungs almost bursting, till suddenly he breaks the surface again, holding in his hand the dripping, precious thing he went down to recover.

Christmas is such a great time to be reminded of how much God wants to be with us as we consider how far Christ came down to us to bring us back up to him.

Now, there is a presumption behind all of us, which is unsettling for a lot of people. The presumption is this. God came down to us because we were unable to make our way to God. Christmas means, amongst other things, that people are lost, unable to save ourselves. People can't sort of pull themselves together, live a perfectly good and moral life and present that life to God.

Christmas happened because, and this is the uncomfortable part of Christmas. This is the sting in Christmas. Christmas happened because people needed to be rescued.

[6 : 01] So accepting the real meaning of Christmas means swallowing your pride. You know, the Bible is fairly consistently clear on this, that God is only available to the humble.

And this truth is wonderfully embodied in our passage today. When we think about this, with the birth of Jesus, the most important 30 years of history is about to begin. And at the beginning of this 30-year stretch, where is God?

Where is God sending his angels? Well, he's not speaking to kings and queens. He's not greasing the whorls of the elite.

God is not with the powerful, the generals, the wealthy. Where is God? He is about to change the course of history, and God is occupying himself with two obscure, humble women.

One old and childless, Elizabeth. One young and a virgin. A teenager, Mary. And they are great models for us. So let's spend the next five minutes looking at, in particular, how Mary responds to this news from the angel.

[7 : 20] So Mary, a model of faith, I think. Let's see how she responded. We see in verse 32, she tries to discern what's going on when the angel turns up. In the original story, it was written in Greek.

And the Greek word for the sort of discerning, figuring out, but it's actually an accounting word. It's literally she's taking an audit of the situation. She's trying to work out what's going on. And then we see she asks the angel a question.

How can I have a baby? I'm not married. I haven't been with a man. I'm a virgin. It's a great question. It's a very reasonable question. You notice she's not rebuked by the angel, because Christians are a healthy part of our faith.

She's simply saying, help me to understand. I don't understand this. Help me to understand this.

And the angel says, nothing is impossible with God. And that answer was good enough for Mary.

And then in verse 38, she says this, Behold, I am a servant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word. Isn't that wonderful? Behold, I am a servant of the Lord.

[8 : 18] Let it be to me according to your word. This is not a simple, well, I guess I've got no choice here. Let's get on with it. No, it's actually a very reasonable, theologically grounded response.

I am the Lord's servant. What's she saying? It's very reasonable. She's saying, if there is a God, he is my creator and deserves my service, deserves my obedience. And what's really remarkable about this is this.

This teenage girl who lives in this backwater town in the Middle East somewhere, she's near the bottom of the social ladder in those days.

She's down here, you know, and by, and she knew surrendering her life to God, surrendering her will to God, she's only going to go lower.

Because she lives in this small, ultra-religious community. She's going to be pregnant and unmarried, and people are going to do the math.

[9 : 21] They're going to go, hang on, you got married here, and you had the baby here. Wait a minute. But she's willing to let this happen. She's willing to be misunderstood. So we're looking at this faith of Mary, and we see she was thoughtful.

She asked good questions. She surrendered her life, her will to God. God is God. I am not. Very reasonable, isn't it?

But she also responded with wonder. Look at her song of praise that Fleur read so well for us. And Mary said, My soul magnifies the Lord.

My spirit rejoices in God, my Savior. For he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. And for behold, from now on, all generations will call me blessed. We're doing it right now.

It's true. For he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. Spirit and soul, it mentions those two things. My soul rejoices. My soul magnifies. My spirit rejoices.

[10:23] These are not different things in the Bible. What she's saying is that she's been moved to the depths of her being. She is astonished at what has happened to her. She is overwhelmed by the goodness of God.

God chose her. And you might think, Of course she's overwhelmed. Of course she's filled with wonder. It was a pretty unique task. But all of us, all Christians should have this wonder.

Because we are all chosen by God. Ephesians 2 says this, You were dead in trespasses and sins, but God made you alive. You were dead in trespasses and sins.

God made you alive. It's not, You were subpar in your sins, and you needed a bit of improving. It's not what it says. You were dead in your sins. Dead people can't save themselves.

If you're a Christian, it means you were chosen by God. It means God saved you. Mary says, You chose me. This is, I don't deserve this. This is incredible.

[11:29] We can all say that. We should all be able to say, Me, a Christian? That's incredible. That's miraculous. That's unbelievable.

See, that should be a constant wonder to us. Let me finish with this. If tonight, a few weeks out from Christmas, you are weak in wonder, you are weak in joy, or the idea of surrendering to God's tough view, it could be because you are strong in yourself.

You believe the lie that you can prove your worth to God. You trust too much in your status, or looks, or power, or intellect. Let Christmas bring an axe to those thoughts, to those idols, so that you can experience wonder and joy at Christmas.

That Christ knitted himself into the world. That he dove into its depths. That he grabbed a hold of you to bring you his treasure, his treasure back to God.

That's the Christmas story. as simply as I can tell it. Amen.