

It's News

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Preacher: Rev. Aaron Roberts

[0 : 00] Welcome once again, it's just fantastic to have you here. Sometimes a really great story gets a bit confused.

I remember my daughter coming home from kindergarten, my oldest daughter coming home from kindergarten, and she'd been learning about Terry Fox.

And she said, she came home, she says, Daddy, Daddy, I've got something, I heard this amazing thing today. Sherry Fox, Sherry Fox cut off his own leg.

She was so animated, right? Sherry Fox cut off his own leg, became a robot, and ran around the whole world, Daddy.

Anyway. So I wasn't a Canadian then, so I didn't know any different. I was like, that's amazing, I need to check out Sherry.

[1 : 17] So I think the story of Jesus is one of these stories that we can get a bit confused about what's going on. So I just want to spend a few minutes considering the readings so far.

And there's a lot of details in it. Because there's so many details, I just want to look at it from about 40,000 feet. I hope that's okay. So we're going to start with just the few, just the first couple of verses, though.

Because it's tempting to sort of skip over the first few verses and get to what we think is the really good stuff. But those first few verses in Luke lay a very important foundation in terms of how we read the rest of the story.

So just bear with me. Just the first few verses. Let's talk about that. You'll see in verse 1 there, as you heard read, Luke doesn't start his gospel with the words, once upon a time, or the ancient equivalent.

The phrase, once upon a time, says to the reader, we're talking about something that probably didn't happen, but it's a cracking great story, and perhaps you'll learn something from it.

[2 : 26] No. Luke says in verse 1, And then he talks about eyewitnesses.

And then he describes the story as an orderly account in verse 3. And then in verse 4, he says the reason for writing it is that you might have certainty concerning the things that you've been taught. So Luke's gospel doesn't let us read it as if it's a fairy tale. Luke wants us to know that this story is grounded in history.

Jesus is not a metaphor. He is real. The events described really happened. It's a true story. And that's the foundation by which we read the rest of it.

So let's add another level to that now. There's a great word in verse 1. Luke says it's a story of what has been accomplished among us.

[3 : 40] Accomplished. What's he trying to communicate with that word? Because it's an interesting word. It means that Luke's gospel is news. It's a story about something that God has done.

It's a story of God achieving something. This means it's not predominantly a story of good advice. It's not a morality tale.

It's news, not advice. It's news about something that God has accomplished. And this is a really, really important distinction. It's a very important thing. Let me illustrate it for you.

Advice says make something happen. Do this or do that. That's advice. News says recognize that something has happened and respond to it.

So an example. Let's say an ancient town is being invaded. The leaders need advice. So the military leaders come and they say, listen, you need to put some arches up here. You need to dig some trenches down there.

[4 : 40] See, that's advice. That's good advice. But let's say a great king intercepts the invading army and destroys them. You don't need advice anymore.

What do you need? You need messengers. And the messengers go to the town and they say, I bring glad tidings of great joy. You can stop digging trenches.

You can stand the arches down. You don't need to save yourself anymore. We're saved. A king has saved us. Something has been done for you.

So there's advice and there's news. And Luke is wanting us to know that this is news. And Luke's the messenger. And this is important because I think people think Christianity is just moral advice. Many people think Christianity is, you know, like the Bible is God's hot tips on being a good person. No. Christianity is very unique amongst the great religions of the world.

[5 : 46] Most other religions are based on something you do. It's advice. It's, you know, it's great advice. Do this and you'll be saved. Christianity is unique. It says this. It says God has done something.

Believe it. So Christianity is news, not advice. And Luke wants that to be very clear right at the start. That's the foundational idea.

And we see it throughout the story. Just one, like an example, verse 26. In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to the city of Galilee. Christmas is about something God has done.

Not great advice. Not a morality tale. So that's the few verses, the first few verses. Now, the rest of the readings that you've heard so far deal with what God actually did.

So what is actually the big news? What did God do? Well, you could say it like this. God knits himself into creation. He knits himself into creation.

[6 : 49] He becomes a human baby. And he let people know this was happening. God sent an angel to visit a teenage girl, Mary, who lived in this, you know, backwater town in the Middle East.

And the angel says to this young woman, you're going to have a child and he'll be the son of the Most High. So, again, so here's the news. Here's the big announcement.

The son of God, the king of the universe, will become a human baby. A divine baby. Now, that is hard to get your head around, isn't it?

Here's what theologian J.R. Packer says about this. The Almighty appeared on earth as a helpless human baby. Helpless human baby.

Unable to do more than lie and stare and wriggle and make noises. Needing to be fed and changed and taught to talk like any other child. And there was no illusion or deception in this.

[7 : 50] The babyhood of the son of God was a reality. The more you think about it, the more staggering it gets. Nothing in fiction is so fantastic as is this truth of the incarnation.

So that's the news. The obvious next question is why? Like, why did God become a human child? Why not just...

Why doesn't God just speak to a whole lot more prophets? If God's got great advice for us, if he's got some hot tips on how we live, how to be better people, why not just send more prophets?

Well, one of the big reasons that God literally got some skin in the game here is this. And I hear this carefully. One of the big reasons God became a human is you can't kill God.

You can't kill God. But you can kill a human. God knit himself into his creation so he could die.

[9 : 01] Now, I know I've potentially sort of, you know, sucked all the fun out of Christmas. But just let me just explain that for a moment. Let me tell you what Christians believe.

Christians believe that God is holy and loving. He's holy and he is loving. Now, if God was just holy, if he was only holy, he would look at the world.

He would look at the injustice of the world. He would look at the mess of the world and he would say, I am through. I am through with you and get rid of us.

If you've seen Avengers Endgame, that is Thanos, right? That's Thanos' strategy. Right at the end of the movie. I'm going to ruin the movie for you. At the end of the movie, he comes to the conclusion that he must just destroy the whole world and get rid of everyone.

And he has this great line. He says, I will shred the universe down to its last atom. You'll pay for what you've done. So, if God was only holy, he would judge like Thanos.

[10 : 10] He would be a Thanos-like God and we would be in trouble. Now, what if God wasn't holy, but he was loving?

What if he wasn't holy, but he was just loving? And that's it. That was his only thing. He was just loving. What he would look at the mess of the world, the sin of the world, the injustice of the world, and he would say, oh, look.

Don't give it a second thought. Don't worry about it. Don't worry about it. I can see you're trying. It's fine. Water under the bridge. Bygones.

Kind of wink at us like a kindly old grandfather. And let us just get on with making a mess of things. And nothing would change. But God is not just loving.

And he's not just holy. He is holy and he is loving. So what does this God do? How does a God who is both loving and holy reconcile these things?

[11:18] He becomes a baby. Now, let me explain how that works. Why that is. How does that reconcile it? God becomes one of us.

And this, folks, is the genius of Christianity. A holy God says there must be a punishment for the mess of the world. And a loving God says, yes, there must be a punishment.

But I'm going to become one of you and I will take that punishment on myself. And that's why God became a baby. And it's just an astounding thing to try and wrap your head around.

Verse 32 describes this child born. This child who will die in God's plan. As the son of the most high. The highest of the highest.

Right? The highest of the highest becomes one of us. A frail. A real human. Who dies on a cross for us. To bring us back to God. C.S. Lewis.

[12:18] I love this quote from C.S. Lewis. It's one of my favorites. He describes the incarnation, which is the fancy word for God becoming a human. He describes the incarnation 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 the 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. And we are. We're that thing. That Christ came to recover. We're that precious thing to God.

That he wanted to recover. Jesus was born. The son of the most high. Became a baby.

[13:19] And lived the life that we couldn't live. Died the death the world deserved. And that's the thing that Jesus accomplished. And it started with a baby.

Born to a teenage girl. And in this sense. Christianity is just a completely ego-destroying religion, isn't it? Because the Christmas story is this.

God came down to us. Because we couldn't make our way up to God. So if you're wondering if God loves you. Well, you have your answer.

Look at how far down he came to get you. Let me finish with this. At the start, I said that this is a story that actually happened. It's history. It's news.

But we respond to this news. And how will we do that? Well, look at how Mary responds so wonderfully. In verses 48 to 53.

[14:19] She says, God has looked on the humble estate of a servant. He's scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He's brought down the mighty from their thrones. He's exalted those of humble estate.

He has filled the hungry with good things. And the rich he has sent away empty. What is she saying here? She's outlining one of the most consistent messages of the Bible, which is this.

God is only available to the humble. And we see this truth just wonderfully encapsulated in our story tonight.

God becomes a child. But also think about who did God speak to when he became? Who did God speak to when he was doing his thing? Who did God come to?

God's messages were not sent to kings and queens and generals and the elite. God was about to change the course of human history.

[15:19] And where was he? That holy night. Where was he? God was occupying himself with two obscure, humble women. One old and childless Elizabeth and one young and a virgin Mary.

God is with the humble. So how are we going to respond to this Christmas story? Let's respond with humility like Mary in verse 38.

Behold, I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word. In other words, my life is yours.

Now perhaps you are here and you sympathize a little bit with Zachariah. Who is the father of John the Baptist.

And you're saying to yourself, Look, I'm just not that sure about all of this. Folks, if that's you, I would love to help you think through any questions you might have.

[16:22] Come and have a chat to me. My email is in the front of the service sheet. Or I would say to you, This is really important. Carve out some time to speak to somebody you trust about this stuff. Now, Emma is going to come and sing for us a response.

Let's use this time to reflect on what we've heard so far. Thank you., and I see you.