

Luke 1:46-56 PM

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 December 2024

Preacher: Rev. Aaron Roberts

[0 : 0 0] Oh, Heavenly Father, would you open our hearts to hear your word this evening, in Christ's name, Amen. So, here we are at the sermon, and here's what's going to happen.

I want to spend a few minutes talking about our very first reading, which is Luke 1, 26 to 35. And I want to start with just the very first few words of verse 26.

In the sixth month, and we're going to stop right there, in the sixth month. These are the kind of details we skip too quickly in Bible stories, because we want to get to the good stuff.

We want to get to baby Jesus. We want to hear about the star. We want to hear about the shepherds and the wise men. But these words, in the sixth month, really matter. And they matter, because what they do is they place the events of Luke 1 in a calendar.

And what does that mean? It means Luke, who wrote this gospel, is saying, I'm writing history, not fantasy. If we go back to the beginning of the chapter, here's how Luke actually kicks off the whole thing.

[1 : 1 0] And we can jump to verse 3. This is what Luke says. Right at the beginning, he says, So Luke doesn't start off his gospel with the words, once upon a time, or sort of the ancient equivalent of that, as if he's writing a fairy tale.

Luke wants us to know that this story he is writing is grounded in history. And the people in the story are not metaphors. They're real. And the events described here really happened.

That's the first three words. Let's keep going. In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee now named Nazareth. We're going to stop here again. It's saying in space and time, in the sixth month, God did something.

Gabriel was sent from God. And again, this is really, really important, these words. The Christmas story is about God doing something.

It's not a story about good advice. It's not a morality tale. I love Christmas movies. I really love Christmas movies.

[2 : 3 4] Our family watches a ton of Christmas movies over the holidays. But mostly, mostly Christmas movies are about people becoming slightly better people.

Which is lovely. Which is great. If you can become slightly better, you should do that. But the original Christmas story, the OG Christmas story, is not really about us.

It's mostly about something that God did. And this is key to understanding our whole faith. Because I think many people think Christianity is just moral advice.

And that the Bible is, you know, God's hot tips on being a nice person. But Christianity is actually really, really unique amongst the great religions of the world.

See, most other religions of the world are based on something that you do, on advice. It's do this and be saved. Perform these acts and you're saved. Well, Christianity is very unique.

[3 : 3 6] Christianity says, God has done something. You should trust in that. You should believe that. We could say it like this. The gospel is news.

It's not advice on life. So, summary so far. In time and space and history, God did something. Okay, that's all we've got so far.

So now, let's talk about what it is that God did. What did God do? What's right there in the passage. God sent a messenger to a teenage girl in this backwater town in the Middle East and said, you're going to have a baby.

You're miraculously going to get pregnant. It's God's son. Call him Jesus. You could probably say it like this. God announces. God announces that he's going to knit himself into his creation by becoming a human baby.

Now, the obvious question is, is why? Why would God do this? God becoming a human baby sounds like, I mean, it sounds like a huge drama, doesn't it?

[4 : 44] Why would God do this? Well, you know, it's not a stunt. God did it because he wanted to get close to you. He wanted to be close to us.

God's son. In 1961, the first man to go into space was the Russian cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin. And the state religion of the Soviet Union at the time was atheism.

So when Yuri returned to Earth, the propaganda machine kicked in and quoted Yuri as saying, I went into space and I didn't see any God up there. And C.S. Lewis was alive at the time.

If you know C.S. Lewis, he wrote Chronicles of Narnia, but he was also a Christian academic. And he was still alive at the time in 1961, and he responded by writing an essay called The Seeing Eye. And let me read a little quote from that. You wouldn't relate to God the way a person on the first floor relates to a person on the second floor. You don't find God by going up higher in your own space.

[5 : 46] If God is our creator, then he would relate to God as Hamlet would relate to Shakespeare. Now, how would Hamlet ever going to know anything about Shakespeare? Hamlet's not going to find him anywhere on the stage.

The only way he's ever going to meet him is if Shakespeare writes himself into a play. Can you see what he's saying there? He's saying the only way for the character Hamlet to ever meet his creator Shakespeare would be if Shakespeare wrote himself into the play, made himself into a character called Shakespeare who interacts with Hamlet.

And this is what God did. God wrote himself into our story so he could be close to us, so we could know him. And that's an astonishing thing to try and wrap your head around.

And again, it wasn't some stunt that God was pulling. God becoming human came at a great cost. God being human came at a great cost.

Sometimes in the middle of winter here in Canada, when there's been rain for weeks, I think about how I grew up on a sunny Pacific island.

[7 : 03] And look at this. I'm even, like I wear socks with palm trees on them because I grew up, I grew up with palm trees on an island in the Pacific, and sometimes I wake up and I'm like, what am I doing here?

Well, I'm here because the people I love are here. So I'm willing to pay the price for months of awful weather to be with the people I love.

Now, I felt like that was a pretty killer line, to be honest. And I think I was hoping for people to go, oh.

So can I just do it one more time? Because I thought that was really good. You ready? I'm going to do it one more time. So we can cut out this last bit in post-production, right?

I'm just trying to get in the space. I'm here because the people I love are here. Thank you.

[8 : 18] So, okay, back to the Bible. My point is here. God becoming human came at a huge cost. Let me read a couple of verses from our reading again.

Verse 31. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and he will be called the son of the most high. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever.

And on this kingdom there will be no end. So think about the cost here. God who is the most high, and you don't get higher than the most high, right? There's the high, then there's the most high.

That's the highest, right? The most high will become a baby. You don't get more vulnerable than a baby. From the highest to the lowest.

There's no other religion that makes a claim like that. That their God became vulnerable like that for us. God went to extraordinary lengths to be with us.

[9 : 17] That tells us something about how much this God loves us and wants to be with us.

Dorothy Sayers is an English playwright, and she wrote about the incarnation.

The incarnation is a fancy theological word that means God becoming human. Let me read a little short quote from Dorothy Sayers. It's absolutely brilliant. The incarnation means that for whatever reason God chose to let us fall into a condition of being limited to suffer, to be subject to sorrows and death, he has nonetheless had the honesty and the courage to take his own medicine.

He himself has gone through the whole of human experience, from the trivial irritations of family life, to the cramping restrictions of hard work, the lack of money, the worst horrors of pain and

humiliation, defeat, despair, and death.

He was born into poverty and suffered infinite pain, all for us, and thought it well worth his while. I think that's a brilliant summary.

And I think when we understand this, you realize that you can't just respect Jesus. Jesus can't be somebody that is just this great moral teacher that we refer to every now and then, or a peace activist.

[10:30] Jesus can't be on the edges of our life of somebody that we think about philosophically every now and then. He is God, he is higher than we can imagine, he became lower than anyone ever has, so that we can have peace with him.

And this is the Christmas story. Now the question is, how are we going to respond to it? What do we do with this? And that's what the rest of the chapter is about. Let's look at how Mary responds quickly.

So back to the passage. The angel appears to Mary and says, Greeting, favored one, the Lord is with you. And her response is, well, she didn't go, well, yes, of course, I've heard of such things. No, verse 29 says, She tried to discern what sort of greeting this is.

She's turning it over in her mind, going, What is going on? Why is God speaking to me? Then the angel tells her what's going to happen, that she'll conceive a child, the child will be the Messiah. And her response is, how will this be since I'm a virgin, which is a very reasonable question, to which the angel says, nothing is impossible with God.

Now if we just looked at that, sort of objectively, we might sort of say, not a great response from Mary. Perhaps a bit of lack of faith there. She's got all these questions. Took her a bit to get on board.

[11:42] But I think that would be a great misunderstanding of what faith looks like. You know, some people would say, I'm a skeptic, I ask questions, that's the difference between me and religious people.

I'm allowed to ask questions. Religious people are not allowed to ask questions. It's just blind, irrational faith. It's a mischaracterization. Faith doesn't mean you don't question. Faith doesn't mean you turn your brain off.

Mary has questions. She was not rebuked for it. Questioning is not the opposite of faith. Doubt is not this awful thing. You push out to the back of your minds.

You know, you don't hide your questions. You don't hide your doubts. You wrestle, you think, you talk, you work through them. That's part of a healthy faith. And actually at our church, we even run these groups for people who don't think of themselves as particularly religious, but they're genuine skeptics.

They have genuine questions. And they want a bit of a space to work through them. If you're interested in a group like that, come and talk to me. Mary's response was thoughtful. Thoughtful and questioning.

[12:42] Remember, we're thinking about how we respond to the story of Jesus. Jesus, Mary had questions. That's okay. But she also responded with gratefulness. We didn't read it, but there's a section coming up, if you kept reading, called The Magnificent.

It's a song of praise that Mary sings in response to what has been spoken to her. Let me read a few lines here. And Mary said, She's saying she's moved to the depths of her being.

She's astonished at what's happened to her. She's overwhelmed by the goodness of God, that God would choose her. But do you see what else she's saying here?

She restates one of the most consistent messages of the Bible, which is God is available to the humble. To meet God, you need humility.

Now think about the Christmas story again. God's about to change history. He's about to enter the material world. And who does he choose to announce it to?

[14:13] Well, God's messengers were not sent to the kings and the queens, the elite, the power brokers, the generals, the academy. God was about to change the course of human history. And where was he?

He was with this poor teenage girl in this backwater town in the middle of nowhere. God is with the humble. I'm going to finish here very quickly.

Folks, here's everything I've tried to get across here. The original Christmas story is not a fantasy. It's not a morality tale like Aesop's fables.

God is real. He became a real child to be with us. And he went to extraordinary lengths to do that. And this is how much he loves you. This is how interested he is in you. And it's a wild, wild story. And it will change your life if you let it. But receiving it requires humility. [15 : 11] It requires you to be willing to bring your questions. And I'll be happy to chat to anyone who would like to know more about that.

Amen.