

Who is this Jesus?

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[0 : 00] I'm going to turn together for a few moments this evening to the Gospel of Luke, the chapter we read together, chapter 2, and take up the reading again at verse 15.

Page 1033, Luke chapter 2 and verse 15. When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.

A number of years ago, I listened to someone describing the person of Jesus in human history, and this is what he said.

It's nearly 2,000 years since this man was born in an obscure village in Bethlehem, the son of a peasant girl. He grew up in another village called Nazareth, where he eventually worked as a carpenter until he was 30 years old.

Then, for the next three years, he became a preacher. In his whole life, he never travelled more than 200 miles from his birthplace.

[1 : 30] He never set foot in a big city. He never married. He never owned his own home. He never had a family.

He never wrote a book. Yet all the libraries in the country couldn't contain all the books that have ever been written about him. He never wrote any lyrics.

Yet, he's become the theme for more songs than anyone else in all of history. He never went to a college or university. And yet all the great places of learning in this world couldn't boast as many students as he can.

He never marshaled an army. Or drafted a soldier. Or fired a weapon. And yet no other leader has had more volunteers who have, under his command, seen more rebels surrender without force. This man called Jesus never practiced medicine. Yet, he has healed more physical ailments and more broken hearts than all the doctors of this world put together.

[2 : 47] And the fact remains that 20 centuries have come and gone. And with them the great statesmen, philosophers, scientists, theologians, politicians of each successive generation.

But today, on the 24th of December, this same man remains at the very centre of human history. Even now, there are still questions.

You look at any of the newspapers in the last week. All the periodicals. The articles that have appeared in newspapers. And many of them will have been about the same man.

His identity is utterly intriguing. Who is he in yonder stall? At whose feet the shepherds fall.

Who is he to whom they bring? All the sick and sorrowing. Who is he on yonder tree? Dies in pain and agony.

[3 : 56] And who is he who from the grave comes to rescue, help and save? It's not enough just to say that he was someone different.

Or even someone special. These are important questions. I'm not asking tonight for us to find out about any denomination or church.

I'm asking who is this Jesus? I want us to think about five words. Five ways in which Jesus came into this world.

Five descriptions that we could set for the way in which Jesus came into this world. First of all, he came into this world in insecurity.

Then secondly, he came into this world in poverty. Third, he came in in obscurity. Fourthly, he came into this world in mystery.

[5 : 04] And then fifthly, in mercy. Insecurity, poverty, obscurity, mystery and mercy.

Let's think about these five things. As we come to try to get our minds around the birth of the Son of God into the world. What he came to do.

Who he was. And what it meant for God to become man. But more than that, the point of contact between God and man is Jesus Christ.

And he came into a world that was the same world as the one that you and I live in. A world which was first of all insecure. And it was into that insecurity that he was born.

The stories of his birth tell us how insecure and how dangerous this world was. All you have to do is to look at Matthew's account of how Herod in jealousy and ruthless, cruel jealousy.

[6 : 02] As soon as he found out that this king had been born. Who he regarded as a rival king. And how he tried his very best to make sure that he put this rival to death.

But Herod is not a one-off. Herod is a symbol of the kind of world that we live in. A world that is broken and full of cruelty and inhumanity.

Herod was a man. Herod was a person. He had a mother and a father. He grew up in a home. He had a personality. He was a human being. There was nothing missing from his brain cells.

As far as we know. And yet he grew up to be an evil and a ruthless man. The same way as countless numbers of other people have been. In dealing with their fellow human beings.

That's the kind of world that Jesus grew up in. The kind of person that we see today. The kind of person that makes the world very often a dangerous place.

[7 : 02] The person that decides to kill and to hurt. And this is a world in which nothing is certain. Where today's successes could be tomorrow's failure.

And today's health could be tomorrow's sickness. Where today's life could be tomorrow's death.

Look how close Jesus came to dying just before he was three years old.

And if it wasn't for the intervention of God. Then he would indeed have been found by Herod's men. And he would have been killed. That's the kind of world that we live in.

And it's a world that God understands. And a world into which God came. Jesus was also born in poverty. He was born into a poor family.

Most people in the world are poor through no fault of their own. Or through no choice of their own. They can't help it. But God chose to send his son into a family that were struggling to survive.

[8 : 05] They were also a family that were under the rule of the Roman Empire. And who could be ruthless with ordinary people if they decided that they were going to be so. They didn't care what kind of risk it was to a woman who was heavily pregnant.

Making a ride on a donkey for 50 miles from her hometown to Bethlehem. All they cared about was their own book work. And their own registration. And if she lost the baby on the way.

Well that was just too bad. That was life. Life was hard. Especially for a poor underprivileged family. Who struggled in any way. In any case to survive.

It wasn't easy being poor. It never is. So the Lord understands what it is to be poor. To have nothing. To struggle. The Lord also understands what frustration is.

The whole story of Jesus. The birth of Jesus. Is one of utter frustration. Not only were Mary and Joseph forced by the Romans. To ride their donkey up to Bethlehem.

[9 : 09] But when they got there. There was no room for them in the inn. How frustrating is that? God understands the kind of world that we live in.

With all its ups and downs. With all its heartaches and headaches. With all its difficulties. God understands the world. And it was into that world. And into those very frustrations.

That Jesus came. By the way. There is an interesting theological question there. That Joseph must have wrestled with. He knew how. The angel had come to Mary.

And had announced. That she would become pregnant. By the power of the Holy Spirit. And that she would have a son. Why then. If this son is going to be born. According to the promise of God. Why does God not provide.

A place for him to be born. Why is life so difficult for him? Many Christians. Have wrestled with that very same question. If God has called me into his kingdom.

[10 : 09] If he's changed my life. If he's given me a new life. Why does God not make it easy. For me. To live the Christian life. And he doesn't. There are many many obstacles.

And dangers. And problems. And frustrations. Even in the Christian life. A Christian is not immune. From having to put up. With the same difficulties. And the same. Same real obstacles.

That other people have to. So he was born. Into poverty. He was also thirdly born. Into obscurity. By that I mean that. Isn't it strange.

That. Here is the greatest event. In all the history. Of humankind. The greatest birth. That ever took place.

The birth of the greatest king. The ruler of the world. The creator of the world. Is to be born. Into this world. And nobody knows about it. Except his close family.

[11:06] Mary. And Joseph. And the very immediate family. Into which he was born. Isn't that strange. That God keeps it so quiet.

From everyone. After all. You would think. You would expect. Wouldn't you. And there is so much. Of the story. Of the gospel. Which is. Which runs counter. To the way. We would expect it. And that is always the danger. Of expecting God. To meet. Our demands. You can never. Ever do that. You can never say. God didn't do.

What I expected. So therefore. I don't believe in him. Because God doesn't work. The way we work. He doesn't meet out. He doesn't pander. To what we think. Should happen. Because as soon as you say.

This is what I would expect. God to do. What you're really saying is. I know more than God does. And what we need to do. Is we need to come. To the story of the gospel.

[12:02] And we need to say. Here is what God did. Let me try and understand it. And you can only understand. The gospel. As you ask God. To open up your mind. And as you ask God. To give you the faith.

To take him. At his word. That's what faith is all about. It's about opening his word. And taking. There's going to. By the way. It's going to get worse. If it's difficult.

For you to believe. The story so far. Wait till we get. To the mystery. Wait till we get. To the things. That are really difficult. To grapple with. And to get our heads around.

But the obscurity. Is something quite fascinating. Isn't it? I was quite interested. To read. In the papers yesterday. How. The queen. Had set up.

A channel. On YouTube. In order to make use of this. New medium. To communicate. With. The world. And it's quite true.

[12:57] YouTube has become. The medium now. Where most people tune in. Or many people tune in. Millions of people. In fact. They tell me. Papers tell me. That.

Eight hours of footage. Are uploaded. Onto YouTube. Every minute. Can you believe that? Eight hours. Of footage. Are uploaded. Every minute.

That means. That the whole world today. We live in a world. That is clamoring. For attention. I wonder.

If Jesus. Had been born. Today. In a world. Of YouTube. Would. He. Have chosen. To announce. His birth.

By that means. Well. Actually. I don't wonder. At all. I know. He wouldn't. Because. He didn't. Choose. To announce. His birth. To the authorities.

[13:52] To the rulers. To the great. Important people. Of his day. His birth. Was utterly. Secret. It took place. Behind closed doors. Not a single one.

Of the religious rulers. Of the day. Knew anything about it. Or the emperor. Or the empire. Or the Romans. Or the Jews. Or anyone like that. No one knew about it. He was born.

In. He was born. In obscurity. Now again. If you and I. Were going to be in charge. Of this birth. We would make sure. That the press. There was a press conference. That all the media.

And the world. Were round. Waiting at the door. At the door. Of the place. We would make sure. That he certainly. Wasn't a stable. That he was born in. We would make sure. It was the very best.

Of hospitals. We would make sure.

That every. As many people. Knew about it. As possible. That's the way. We do. Do things. But it's not the way. God does things. God's son. Was born. In.

[14:49] Utter. Utter. Obscurity. And come to think of it. God doesn't need. The world's media. Not even for the gospel today. God can change the world. Without the use of the media.

Very often. We fall into the trap. As Christians. Of thinking. Well if only I had. Control of the media. I could really. Make use of it. For the gospel. Well. Maybe there is some truth. But he doesn't need that.

Because today. With or without. The media. With or without. Television. And books. And with or without. Whatever. Technological. Means there is.

For communication. God is able to work. In the towns. And the villages. And the homes. And in the hearts. Of individual people. Here. And there. And it's no use.

For you and I. As Christians. To say. Well. The gospel will never. Make an impact. Until. We really begin. To use the media. That's a load of nonsense. The gospel.

[15 : 45] Will continue. To make an impact. If you and I. Are obedient. To Jesus. And if we're ready. To share our faith. That's the way. That God makes an impact. You. In your small corner.

And me. In mine. Coming into contact. With individuals. Here and there. In our families. And in our workplaces. And neighbors. And at an appropriate time. God will. Give us the opportunity.

To be able to share. With people. Ones and twos. Here and there. That's how the kingdom of heaven. That's the kingdom of God. Has been built up. And that's how people. Have become Christians. Through personal contact.

I've become. I've come to be. Utterly convinced. Of the. Of the power. Of personal contact. In spreading the gospel. God's way. Is never to use. A big splash.

But God's way. Is behind closed doors. In the secret places. In the towns. And the villages. And right now. All over the world. They agree. The fascinating thing. Is this. That people.

[16 : 41] Are becoming Christian. Even as we speak. People are hearing the gospel. Little groups. Here and there. Meeting together. For bible study. There may only be. Three or four of them. They may be in danger. Of their lives. They're meeting together.

For bible study. And God is speaking. To individuals. And drawing them. Into faith. In Jesus Christ. Then they. They. As they're converted. They're going away. And they're telling others. And so. It goes on. Down through the generations. Until God. Finishes. His work. He was born. In obscurity. He was also. Born in mystery.

Fourthly. In fact. There are several mysteries. The first mystery. Is the virgin birth. Which we believe in. I hope. We believe. In the literal.

Historicity. Of the virgin birth. Don't say. That's impossible. Of course. It's impossible. So was walking. On the water. Impossible. So was Jesus. Rising from the dead.

[17 : 35] Impossible. God is the God. Of the impossible. But when he says. A virgin shall be. With child. And when he sends. His angel. To Mary. And when he says. You will.

The power of the Holy Ghost. Will come upon you. And you will conceive. And give birth to a son. And you call his name. Jesus. And she says. How can this be. Because I've never known a man. And he said. That's the ways to be.

And that's what happened. And we believe it. Why? How? By faith. Faith is. Remember what I said before. Taking God at his word. It's God that's speaking. If it was someone else. He'd be a lunatic. But because it's God that's speaking. God is the God of the impossible. God can override what we expect. Override natural norms in the world. Scientific norms.

He can short circuit. All of these things. And he can achieve his own purpose. And that's exactly what he did. Mary was a young woman. Some people suggest she was a teenager.

[18 : 32] She became pregnant by the power of God. I don't want to go into the mechanics. Or the biology of it. There's no need to. That's what the Bible tells me. It takes faith. To believe this.

And this is where Jesus' birth of course. Is separate. And unique from any other. And every other birth in human history. But that's not the end of the mystery at all. In fact we're only just beginning. The second mystery is. How can God become a baby? You think of it. You think of the universe. And if God really is God. Sit down and think about this.

And ask yourself. What do I mean when I use the word God? What kind of being is God? Now to me there's only one definition of that. And that is the God. God who stands as the source of everything that we know.

In other words. That he must be the creator of the universe. Otherwise he can't be God. God by very definition. Is infinite. Eternal. And unchangeable.

[19 : 33] In his being. Wisdom. Power. Holiness. Justice. Goodness. And truth. That's the way the catechism defines him. Eternal. Who can understand that? But all I can do is. To look.

At the vastness of the universe. And the unfathomable vastness. Of the universe. Now to me. God. If he's God at all. He has to have created all the universe.

Otherwise he can't be God. Otherwise he's. A lesser being than the universe. And a lesser being is simply not God. You get my drift. So for him to be God.

He has to be the creator. That puts him way beyond. My understanding. And even if I. Even if I'm. I'm proud enough.

To. To know something about the stars. Or something about the galaxies. I can't possibly know everything about them. And yet this God. Not only knows about them. He's created them.

[20 : 27] He's put them in place. See we talk so glibly about God. Do you believe in God? Yeah. I believe in God. But you know. You're not really thinking about it.

Are you? Once you start really sitting. Down and think. What do I mean. When I say. I believe in God. You may think. Well. I don't know. So don't just say.

Just for the sake of. Keeping the peace. I believe in God. Ask yourself. What do you mean by that? And whatever you do. Don't ever say. I believe that Jesus. Is the son of God.

Without thinking. What does that mean? Do you know what it means? It means. It means that this. Great indescribable God. Who created the universe.

In all its unthinkable vastness. Has actually. Come. Into this world. As a helpless.

[21 : 24] Tiny. Baby. In his mother's arms. Drinking. Her milk. And depending on her. For every. Bite of food.

That he takes. Depending on her. To change his nappies. Depending on her. To teach him. How to speak. Depending on her. To teach him. How to read. To teach him. How to walk.

That's. Where it takes faith. Doesn't it? That's what it means. That the son of God. Came into. This world. I can tell you.

It stretches. My mind. I still wrestle. With. With this whole idea. Of God.

Coming in. Some people have got to. Some people who are. Searching for the truth. Have got to this point. They say. No way. I can't go any further. It's so ridiculous. I was.

[22 : 20] God is going to come into this world. He's going to burst in. And he's going to establish himself. In some. Magnificent way. On a throne. And he's going to demand.

Obedience. And respect. And worship. He's going to obliterate. All his enemies. And he is going to. He's going to show everyone. Who he is. That's not. How God came into the world.

He came in. In obscurity. And he came in. In mystery. And the mystery. The more you think about it. The more you know about God. From the Bible.

The more mysterious it gets. We were talking about this this morning. In the Gaelic service. At what point did he. Begin to understand.

His own word. The Old Testament. Being brought up in a Jewish home. His mother and father.

Would have to sit him down. And they would have to. They would have to say. Well here's Genesis. Now you have to learn.

[23 : 17] The books of the Old Testament. Genesis. Exodus. Leviticus. Numbers. Was it difficult for him to learn it? Maybe it was the age of three. I don't know. Two. Three. Four.

Who knows. But at some point. He wouldn't have had the capacity to learn. He wouldn't have known what these words meant. And yet. This was his own word. He was the one who had created the first chapter of Genesis.

And by the word of whose power. All of these things took place. It's incredible isn't it? It's absolutely mind blowing. And the more you think about it.

When did he understand the Old Testament? What kind of intelligence? Was he brighter than other people? Was he not as bright as other people? Was he. Did he have average intelligence? Did he have a good IQ? How was he at school?

I don't know. No idea. But he had to learn. The same way. As we've all had to learn. By the same process. Because he's God.

[24 : 16] He's not a genius at the age of six months. He's not. And the amazing thing is that he chose this life. He chose to be utterly humiliated in such a way.

He was born in a low condition. He was born in obscurity and in mystery. And you know the mystery gets even worse. Because as he grows.

And as he becomes a preacher. And as the tide of public opinion turns against him. And as the religious leaders along with the populace of the day decide that they hate this man.

They don't want any more to do with him. They want him crucified. That this same God in the flesh. He's taken. He's tried.

He's mocked. He's beaten. He's nailed to a cross. And he gives his life. And the shameful. Awful.

[25 : 15] Cruel death on the cross. And don't say because he was God. Didn't feel the pain. He did. As a human being. With human nature. With a human body.

He felt every second of it. In all its awfulness and its agony. The Bible tells us. That in being made a sacrifice for our sin.

The suffering of Jesus was a kind of suffering that you and I will never have to go through. Because the suffering was consisted of his being rejected by his wife.

Why? Why was it that he said my God. My God. Why have you forsaken me? On the cross. These are the words he cried out to God. My God. He is God.

And yet he cries. My God. My God. Why have you forsaken me? Because at that moment he had become sin. He had become guilty of our sin.

[26 : 13] And that was why he came into the world. And I'll tell you why people love this time of year. And they're not prepared to follow Jesus any further. Because Jesus as a baby is safe.

You keep him in the manger. And he's nice and cuddly. And he does no harm. But when he grows. And when he becomes a preacher. He says things that are utterly uncomfortable.

And you have to grapple with who he was. And what he came to do. And as soon as you begin. As soon as it begins to dawn on you. The reason for him coming into the world.

We become uncomfortable. Why? Because it touches us. It reaches into our hearts. And reminds us that it was for us.

For sinners. For people like ourselves. That Jesus came into the world. To give his life. And we don't want to face up. To our wrongdoing.

[27 : 10] Do we? We don't want to face up. To the fact that if we were to be taken into the presence of God tonight. It would be the most awful. Awful experience.

Of our lives. Why is it. That if you imagine yourself tonight. Being taken into the presence of God. Why does that make you feel so uncomfortable.

And don't tell me that it doesn't. Because it does. It's because as soon as you begin to think of God. You can't think of God without thinking. Of your own wrongdoing.

And you can't think of your own wrongdoing. Without knowing that you're accountable to God. And that is the fact of the matter. We are accountable to God. For our sin.

And that's why it's much safer keeping him in the manger. Isn't it? Just forgetting all about him. But that's not going to solve the problem. Is it? If you really want to solve the problem. You have to come to him.

[28 : 14] As a man. And as God. And as saviour. And as a sacrifice. Your sacrifice for sin. And you have to trust in him.

And trusting means giving your all. Trusting means coming with all your filthiness. And all the wrongdoing that there's been. Believe me.

I've been there. I'm not asking you to do anything that I haven't done myself. And that others have done here. Coming to the Lord. And asking for that forgiveness.

That he alone can give. He came also lastly. In mercy. It's not quite true to say that. God kept the birth of Jesus entirely.

Absolutely secret. One of the most fascinating things about the birth of Jesus. Is the visitors. The visitors. They've captured the imagination and the attention of children and adults for centuries.

[29 : 19] They came to Jesus. Because they had been told about his birth. The wise men. From the east. They had been told by way of a star.

And the shepherds. By way of angels. Who appeared to them. Out of the blue. As they sat watching their flocks. And by the way.

Why was it that they were so afraid? That night. When they saw all of a sudden the angels. Well of course they would have got a natural fright. Because it was the last thing that they expected. But I believe.

That. They were afraid of this. In fact we're told. In verse 9. I want you to read that verse 9. Very very carefully. Because it tells us. It tells us a lot about why they were afraid. The angel of the Lord. An angel of the Lord appeared to them. And. The glory. Of the Lord. Shone round them. And they were filled with fear.

[30 : 19] The fear. Was the glory of the Lord. That's what terrified them. More than anything else. You know how I know that. Because.

Isaiah. In the Old Testament. In Isaiah chapter 6. He was filled with exactly the same fear. He saw the Lord. He had a vision. He saw. He saw something similar. And he.

With exactly the same result. Do you know what he was afraid of? Because all of a sudden. As he gazed. On the glory of the Lord. He began. To be.

To be. Acutely. Aware. Of his own sin. Just like what I was saying before. That's what made them afraid. But that's.

What the angels came to announce. That there was a way of salvation. And forgiveness. That they didn't need to be afraid. That God was not here. To condemn them. But God was here.

[31 : 13] To save them. Unto. You. Is born. This day. A saviour. Have you ever noticed that? It's not that a saviour is born. That means nothing.

But when we. When he tells them. A saviour is born. To you. That means everything. That means that Jesus was born for me.

That means that he died. For me. That means that he can forgive my sins. And take away my sins. And create within me. A new heart. And a new beginning. That's what he did.

For so many people. That he was surrounded with. You know. I'm intrigued by these shepherds.

The time has gone. Let me just carry on. For one or two more minutes. I'm absolutely intrigued. By the shepherds. I could go on tonight.

We could delve into. The other visitors. The wise men. Who were they? Where did they come from? How did they see the star? What was their business? All of these things. Let's leave that one. Let's concentrate on the shepherds. Why was it?

[32 : 08] Some people say. Well the shepherds were such nice. Humble people. That's just nonsense. That's just not true. The shepherds were outcasts.

Nobody would speak to them. The shepherds were the lowest of the low. They were the scum of the earth. And very often.

Sadly. They brought it on themselves. Because. They were. Amongst the common criminals. Of the time. Sheep would go missing. From time to time. And. It was highly likely.

That the shepherds were responsible. So don't let. Don't let's. Imagine for a moment. Well these were the decent people of the day.

These were the really nice people of the day. That's not true. And it's something that. A writer in the Times picked up this week. Richard Morrison. Has no time for theology.

[33 : 05] Has no time for the gospel at all. And yet. This is the one thing. About the birth of Jesus. That stuck in his mind. He wrote a very interesting article on it. This week in the Times. In which he's. Absolutely right.

He's saying. He's saying. Instead of announcing his birth. To all the dignitaries of the day. God chooses these. Lowest of the low. Now anyone who knows the gospel.

Knows. That there's no surprise to that. Because when Jesus grew up. And began teaching. These were the people. Who surrounded him. The prostitutes. The tax collectors. The people who nobody else.

Wanted anything to do with. In fact. When Jesus associated with them. The crowds began to grumble against. He's gone to be the guest. Of a sinner. They couldn't believe. That a rabbi.

That someone who had such knowledge. And such insight. Would surround himself. With this kind. With this type. Of person. But these were people. Who needed to be saved.

[34 : 05] They were people. Who were aware. Of their own wrongdoing. And their own guilt. Before God. These were people who. For whom there was no hope. If they listened to the scribes. And the Pharisees.

And the religious leaders. They gave them no hope. And no chance of salvation at all. They just kept them away. They put them on the outside. They wouldn't. They would cross the street. Rather than. But Jesus crossed the street.

To talk to them. To reach them. To show them. That there was a way of salvation. We believe that many of these. Very same people.

People like Zacchaeus. Came. To a changed life. People who. Were outcasts. And sinners.

That's the kind of people we are. In the eyes of God. Every one of us. Stands in the same position. Guilty. And condemned.

[35 : 03] Perhaps the reason. You're not Christian tonight. Is you've never come to see yourself. As a condemned person. That's why.

You need to ask the Lord. To open your eyes. To what you really are. Then ask the Lord. To open your eyes. To what Jesus. Really is.

Will you do that tonight? That's all. Ask him. To open your eyes. To make. Jesus known. To you. For who he was. And who he is. Let's pray. Father in heaven.

We pray. That your word. Will reach home. Into our hearts. This evening. And we pray. Lord. That even these. This short passage. Of your word. Will wrestle.

[36 : 03] With our hearts. And that we will wrestle. With your word. And that we will come to terms. With it. And come to terms. With the truth of it. No matter how. Great the impossibilities. Are. And how great.

The difficulty. And the mystery is. We ask that you will. Reveal yourself to us. Make yourself known. We pray. In Jesus name. Amen.