

52 STORIES OF THE BIBLE

by

Dr. Bill Mounce

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27. The Birth of Jesus

I. Promises from Old Testament

The first part of the Bible makes some amazing promises. In the very beginning, when God created Adam and Eve, he created them so that they could have a relationship with him and enjoy him. And then they did what they weren't supposed to do, the Bible calls that sin, and as a result they and their descendants lost their relationship with God. And in Chapter 3 of the first book of the Bible, God makes an amazing promise because he promises the he will do something about their sin. In Genesis 3:15 we read God's curse on the snake who was Satan and he says, "I will put enmity [or hatred] between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring. He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel." A promise that one of Eve's descendants would deliver the mortal, crushing blow and kill Satan even though Satan was going to be able to bruise his heel, was going to be able to hurt this descendent.

In 1800 B.C. God makes another amazing promise to Abraham. In Genesis Chapter 12 he promises: "In you all the families of the Earth will be blessed." He promises that, through Abraham, God is going to bless all people, all families.

Eight hundred years later, in 1000 B.C. He makes a promise to King David in the Book of 2nd Samuel: "When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers [In other words God says "King David, when you die"] I will raise up your offspring after you who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom and he shall build a house for my name and I will establish the throne of his Kingdom forever and I will be to him a father and he shall be to me a son." Three amazing promises rolled into one. That David would have a physical descendant, someone who would come from his body, and this descendant would rule over an eternal kingdom, and that God would have a Father/Son relationship with this descendant; this descendent came to be known as the Messiah, or Christ. They both mean the same thing.

Three hundred years later, in about 70 B.C. God makes a related promise through a prophet named Micah and in the 5th Chapter of his book he writes: "But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, [Ephrathah is just an old name for Bethlehem] who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me One who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is of old, from ancient days." It is a prophecy that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem and yet the phrase "origin is of old from ancient days" is the promise that this Messiah who is to be born in Bethlehem is going to be supernatural. He is going to have existed before he was born.

And at the same time that Micah was prophesying, another prophet named Isaiah was prophesying and God made a most amazing promise through him. In Chapter 7 where God says, "The virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Emanuel." The promise of a miraculous, birth from a virgin. The name Emanuel means "God with us", so God is not only promising a miraculous birth, but he is promising that there will be something supernatural about the child himself who is born.

Some amazing promises scattered throughout the first part of the Bible.

II. Angel Visits Mary

About 700 years later, God starts, in his timing and in his way, to keep his promises and an angel by the name of Gabriel paid a visit to a young woman, a virgin, named Mary.

We read about this in the Book of Luke, Chapter 1 starting at verse 26:

“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. And he came to her and said “Greetings, O favored one. The LORD is with you.” But she was greatly troubled at the saying and tried to discern what sort of greeting that might be and the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God and behold you will conceive in your womb and bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High and the LORD God will give him the throne of his father David and he will reign over the House of Jacob forever and of his kingdom, there will be no end.” And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be since I am a virgin?” And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you, therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold your relative, Elizabeth, in her old age has also conceived a son and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.” And Mary said “Behold, I am the servant of the LORD. Let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.”

Notice all the promises that God is starting to keep:

Mary was a virgin. Her son, Jesus, will fulfill God’s promise made through Isaiah that a virgin shall conceive and have a child. And in fact, the connection between Jesus’ birth and Isaiah’s prophesy is made explicit in another book of the Bible called Matthew and in telling the same story in Matthew, Chapter 1, we read: “All this took place to fulfill what the LORD had spoken by the prophet. Behold the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and they shall call his name Emanuel, which means “God with us”.

But there are other promises being kept. Joseph, as is clearly pointed out, is a physical descendant of King David and therefore Jesus fulfills God’s promise to David that one of his body would sit on the throne and that Jesus will reign over this eternal kingdom forever.

Promises are being kept in the fact that his name is “Jesus” because the name “Jesus” means “God is Salvation”. Again, back in Matthew 1:21, it is made explicit: “She shall bear a son and you shall call his name ‘Jesus’ for he shall save his people from their sins.” And hence the promise to Adam and Eve that something would be done to take care of their sins is being kept.

But Jesus will also be a blessing to all and thereby fulfill God’s promise to Abraham.

The blessing will be the blessing of forgiveness but it is more than just that. The name Emanuel means “God with us” and the greatest blessing that we could ever receive, whether it is through Abraham or through anyone else, is to enjoy a personal relationship with our Creator, to live in the very presence of God, for God to be with us. The greatest blessing that could ever come.

Many promises and many promises being kept.

As the story continues Mary does in fact become pregnant as God promised. She goes to see her relative, Elizabeth, and when she gets there she recites a song. Evidently she had been composing one in her mind as a way, and a typical Jewish way, of expressing her joy and her thankfulness and she sings this song to Elizabeth. In verse 50 she says an amazing thing [Luke 1:50] Speaking of God Mary says:

“And his mercy is for those who fear him.”

Mary is starting to make a distinction that is going to be continued through the rest of the Christmas story. The blessing of Abraham is available for all. It is good news to all people and yet, God will treat only some with mercy. Only those who fear him, who approach him with reverential awe, who approach him in worship, are going to be the recipients of his mercy. Blessing for all, mercy for those who fear God.

III. Birth of Jesus

As the story continues into Luke Chapter 2, at verses 1 and 7 we actually then read the story of Jesus’ birth.

“In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town and Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea to the City of David which is called Bethlehem because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there the time came for her to give birth and she gave birth to her first born son and wrapped him in a swaddling cloth and laid him in a manger because there was no place for them in the Inn.”

And how could something so wonderful happen without it being announced and so the angels come and announce Jesus’ birth to the shepherds.

“And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field keeping watch over their flock by night, and an angel of the LORD appeared to them and the glory of the LORD shown around them and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them “Fear not, for behold I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day, in the City of David, a Savior who is Christ the LORD and this will be a sign for you. You will find a baby, wrapped in a swaddling cloth and lying in a manger.” And suddenly, there was with the angel, a multitude of the Heavenly Hosts praising God and saying “Glory to God in the highest, and on Earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.”

How appropriate that the birth of God’s son would be first announced to shepherds, people who are very much at the bottom of the ancient social ladder. The blessing of Abraham is available for all, even shepherds. There is great joy that will be for ALL people, the angels say. And yet, notice the distinction that is made between verse 10 and verse 14; that God’s peace is only on those with whom he is pleased. God’s peace is only upon those who fear him.

Peace means that the conflict has ceased. Peace means that the relationship has been restored.

And we all need that peace desperately. And yet, some people live their entire lives without peace, fighting God and not allowing that void in their life to be filled by the only source that can fill it and that is the relationship with God through Jesus Christ. The fact of the matter is, God does not treat all people the same. He is ALWAYS fair, but he determines what is fair. He is fair to all and yet only SOME will receive his mercy and only SOME will receive his peace.

IV. Who Is this Baby Jesus?

Who, then, is this baby? Who, then, is this baby, Jesus?

A. Fully God

On the one hand he is fully God, just as God promised the Messiah is supernatural. He existed before he was born. That is a pretty good trick. But he existed before he was born because he is the Son of the Most High. He is the Son of God and God has fulfilled his promise to David that he will have a Father/Son relationship with the Messiah. This Messiah, the Son of God, is a supernatural being, but he is more than just that.

Son of God is Biblical language for God himself. This baby is God.

The very first verse in the Gospel of John: "In the Beginning was the WORD [John's word for Jesus] and the Word was with God and the Word was God."

Later on in his life, in John chapter 10, Jesus will say "I and the Father are one." Jesus is fully God. God could have sent his Messiah some other way. Other than prophesy he didn't have to have his son born of a virgin, but he did send Jesus in the way he did to make it clear to you and to me that Jesus is God and that his father is God. And yet, it was absolutely necessary that Jesus be fully God, because in 33 years this baby is going to die on the cross and on that cross this baby is going to carry the sins of ALL the people. No human being could possibly endure the pain of that much sin. And no human being could pay the penalty for someone else's sin. It is just not possible. Only God could endure the pain on the cross and only God could apply his death to the sins of others and therefore, Jesus the Messiah, HAD to be God.

B. Fully Human

And yet, along with being fully God this Messiah is also fully human. He was born of a human mother. In John 1:14, he is going to say "The WORD, or Jesus, became flesh - the stuff that hangs on your bones. "The Word became flesh and he dwelt among us." He was fully human. And this mystery we call the incarnation. It is the greatest miracle in all the Bible. The resurrection can hardly hold a candle to this mystery of the incarnation because the incarnation is the fact that God was incarnated - that God was made flesh. The greatest miracle that has ever happened. And yes, God probably could have sent his Messiah, his Son, some other way, but he sent Jesus this way to make it clear that he was also fully human and it was necessary that Jesus, that the Messiah, be fully human because only a human can pay the penalty for human sin. Oranges can't pay the penalty for fig trees and only a human being can pay the penalty for human sin. This is what the Book of Hebrews is talking about in Chapter 2 where the author says: "He had to be made like his brothers in every respect, [he had to be fully human] so that he, [Jesus] might become a merciful and faithful High Priest in the service of God [he is interceding for us. He stands between us and the Throne.] in order to make propitiation [in order to make a sacrifice] for the sins of many people." He HAD to be like us if he was going to make a sacrifice for the sins of people.

Jesus was fully God; He HAD to be! And yet he was fully human; he HAD to be.

Because Jesus then as the incarnated God, becomes the unique revealer of what God the Father is like. John 1:18: "No one has ever seen God. The only God [this is Jesus] who is at the Father's side, he has made him known." Jesus as the incarnated God becomes the unique mediator, the unique intercessor, the only High Priest that we have.

Paul tells Timothy in 1st Timothy 2:5, "For there is one God and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."

Jesus as the incarnated God then is the unique Savior of ALL of mankind. Again, the Book of Hebrews, chapter 7, writes:

“Consequently, Jesus is able to save to the uppermost [In other words, completely and totally] those who draw near to God through Jesus since Jesus always lives to make intercession for them.”

No one else, especially no other human being, can possibly reveal God because only Jesus knows God. Only Jesus can stand between us and God at the Throne of Judgment interceding for us. Only the God-man Jesus can save us from our sins because only the God-man Jesus DID something about sin.

This is the mystery and this is the beauty of the incarnation of God. No wonder it was Good News being announced to the shepherds.

But it is not enough to simply know these facts, is it? It is not even enough to, in a sense, believe them because even the demons believe and shudder. The demons knew exactly who Jesus was. That’s why whenever they saw him they cried out “Holy one of God” or some other similar name. It is not enough to simply know the facts. It takes more than intellectual assent to be at peace with God and to have received his mercy, but it is as simple as A, B, C.

If we are to be at peace with God, if we are to receive his mercy, then we must: Admit, like Adam and Eve, that we are sinners. That we are separated from the Relationship that we so desperately need and want; the only relationship in which we can find forgiveness. The only relationship within which we can find mercy. The only relationship within which we can become at peace with God. We have to admit that we are separated from that.

Believe that Jesus, the God-man, died for my sin, carried my sin and hence paid the penalty for my sin and for yours and then... Commit ourselves to him. That once we are born again, to live out our lives as God’s children.

It is ALL about Jesus, The longer I do this, the more I see it. It is all about Jesus and about our separate-ness from him and about his act of mercy and peace on our behalf and then Jesus’ enablement of us to respond and become his children. It is no wonder that God prepared us for his birth by making so many amazing promises.

The offer of salvation from sin, the offer of a relationship with God that we so desperately need, is offered freely to each one of us. It is truly Good News to ALL people.

We invite you, today, to receive God’s blessing and through the A, B, C’s, to be saved by his mercy and then enjoy the wonderful walk with Jesus, hand in hand, day by day, to finally, finally be at peace with yourself and to be at peace with your Creator.