



## A CHILD WAS BORN

December 31, 2017, Third Sunday in Advent

Luke 2:22-40

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*God of the whole world, God of the stars and of the planets and everything there is: at Christmas we remember that you loved us so much so that you gave us Jesus Christ, Your Son, the Light of the World. May His Light shine into our Christmas and guide us through the New Year ahead. Amen.*

This past Monday we celebrated the birth of a child. A child born of a virgin, the Virgin Mary. A child who was, and is, both human and divine. Hundreds of years before this child's birth, there had been prophecies about Him and what He would do. Countless things had been said about this child before his earthly grandparents were even a sparkle in their own parents' eyes. Hundreds of prophecies were proclaimed about this poor little child lying in a manger. This child who in today's reading was being presented in the temple for purification rights just as any other child of the time.

Over the past couple weeks we were reminded of many of the things that took place in the years, months, weeks and days leading up to Christ's birth. We were introduced to Zechariah of the priestly order Abijah and his wife Elizabeth, a descendant of Aaron. We were told about how they were too old to bear children until an angel of the Lord visited Zechariah in the sanctuary and told him they would bear a son and they should name him John. And that this son of theirs would be filled with the Holy Spirit even before his birth and he would go out before Christ with the spirit and power of Elijah to prepare people for the coming of the Savior. Because Zechariah was skeptical about this, because of his and Elizabeth's old age, he was stricken mute.

And then, just as the angel had said, Zechariah and Elizabeth became pregnant and they bore a son. This child was no ordinary child but was one who had been announced by an angel. He was not to be named in the usual way by his parents but rather had been named



by God. It was a name that didn't run in the family and that put people aback, and by doing what the angel had said, by naming him John, Zechariah immediately regained his voice.

In the midst of that story we were also reminded of the angel Gabriel's visit to Mary and how the angel had said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to 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 holy; he will be called Son of God."

Then, following this visit from an angel, Mary left her home and traveled to the hill country to visit with her cousin Elizabeth. And as Mary entered the room, John, still in Elizabeth's belly jumped, knowing that Mary would be the one who would bear the child who would fulfill the prophecies of the Messiah. Mary sang a song of praise, John the Baptist was born, and then John's father, Zechariah told a prophecy about his son and his son's announcement of the coming Christ.

In that prophecy, one of the things he had said was, "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins. By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

Then, some time had passed after Zechariah had spoken the prophecy and Mary and Joseph needed to travel for four days back to Bethlehem, where Joseph was from. This was because of the decree that had gone out from Emperor Augustus, saying that the whole world needed to be registered. And so they marched toward Bethlehem but long before they started making that journey three wise men from a far-off land had been following a star to find the newborn King of the Jews.

And if that wasn't enough for them, or for us, after this Christ child was born in a manger in Bethlehem, just as it had been prophesied hundreds of years before, an angel, and



choirs of angels, appeared in the dark of the night on the hillside to shepherds and announced the birth of Christ.

It was said that, “Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth lying in the manger.”

And suddenly there was an army of angels, of the Lord Most High, praising God and singing, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!” So the shepherds went to see the child and they told Mary all that they had seen and heard and she was glad.

So, a quick recap of this story. An angel met with Zechariah. In disbelief, Zechariah was struck mute until he announced the name of his son John. An angel met with Mary and told her she would bear God’s child even though she was a virgin. Joseph stuck with her. Elizabeth’s belly jumped. Mary sang to God. John the Baptist was born. Zechariah prophesied. Three wise men traveled on camels from a far off land following a star in the sky, knowing years in advance that the King of the Jews would be born. Mary sat on a donkey and journeyed with Joseph to his home land to be counted because of the decree. There was no room for them at the inn and so they had their baby, Jesus, in a cave and placed him in a manger. The shepherds were invited by an angel in the sky.

Well, we knew all that. Even though we forget pieces here and there sometimes, we know it. We’ve heard it for 2,000 years and that story resides in our bones and in our hearts. Over the past few weeks we reflected on some of it during Advent and then celebrated the rest of it last Sunday and Monday. But it’s still Christmas and yet it’s also New Year’s Eve, so what does any of this mean for us today?

It means Jesus was born and named and after eight days He was circumcised like any other Jewish child at the time. That’s why we find ourselves here at The Temple of the Lord today. The time had come to present Jesus to the Lord. As if **He** needed an introduction. But here we have it, human and divine. So He is presented and a sacrifice is offered according to what was stated in the law.



And Simeon, a righteous and devout man, having Jesus in his arms, borrows language from Isaiah grounding Jesus' work in Isaiah's vision of the restoration of Israel. Simeon was so amazed and relieved by this child who was being presented to God. Because, he believed that this child was the one, the Messiah, who was to come and save us all. He believed it so much so that he basically said; now he could die. And if that's not enough, the prophet Anna "spoke about Jesus to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem." Here we have it, the Holy and the human so perfectly woven together. The human and the divine, wrapped up for us all in bands of cloth, lying in manger.

This was the Christ-child, the Messiah, the Prince of Peace, the Son of Man, the Son of God. He was the New Adam, the Light of the World, the Lamb of God, the King of the Jews. This Child, who by the time he was twelve, was found during the festival of Passover in the Temple in Jerusalem, "sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers." This Child, who by being at the Temple, was simply dwelling in His Father's House.

This all means that a human, and yet our God, was born in the simplest of ways. Jesus was, and is, our God who came down in the flesh and dwelt among us so that we could be freed from our sin. He was tempted as we have all been tempted. He experienced the joys and the pains of life just like we all do. He came so that we may all live. So that we could all find peace in our hearts and share His love with the world around us. He came so that we could live eternally with Him.

Jesus came, a small simple child in a manger, so he could grow into the King of the Jews who died on an old rugged wooden cross for our sins. Christ came and dwelt among us, as a child of God so that we could all be God's children. Christ came so that he could turn the world upside down. This man, this divine human, came to teach kings to kneel like servants. This King came to bind up the broken-hearted, to lift up the lowly, and to make it so that the lion would lie down with the lamb.

At his friend Lazarus' grave, Jesus said to Martha that He was and is, "the resurrection and the life. [That] those who believe in [Him], even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in [Him] will never die." And after he had said that, He asked Martha, "Do you believe this?"



And she responded to Him by saying, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.”

So I ask, can we say that too? Do we believe?

Jesus was the man who had to let his best friend Lazarus die. And, He is the one who wept over the death of his dear friend. Who felt the kind of pain we all feel when we lose someone so near and dear to us, when we crumble. And He was, and is, the man who in His divine nature was then able to call Lazarus from the grave. To breathe life back into him so that he might live.

Jesus healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, helped the lame walk, fed 5,000 and then fed 5,000 more. He healed on the Sabbath, shattered the laws of the time and taught people what it meant to be followers of God. Jesus came into this world to seek to save sinners like you and me. He came to forgive us of our sins.

This child who spent His whole life knowing He was headed to the cross. Knowing that He would march toward Calvary so that we wouldn't have to. This divine person whose **faith** in God the Father was so strong that **it** could set us free of our sin and make us free to live in love. So that we could live life abundantly and have eternal life.

He came in order that we could have a tangible expression of what God's love for us looks like. He came and He brought with him Grace. Grace upon Grace. Love upon love. Forgiveness and healing. He came in order that we might have direct access to God through the power of the Spirit that now dwells in each of us so we could go into eternity with God. This was that child in a manger wrapped in bands of cloth. This was that child that the wise men came from a far distance to find and that the shepherds left their posts to go see. This was Jesus the Christ, the Messiah.

In Ephesians, Paul said, “For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light – for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.”

Take this with you as you head into the New Year. Take this Christmas story with you and always remember why Christ came and dwelt among us, so that you can be a part of the story, and so that you can continue the story. Dwell in Christ's love by going into this



new year being patient and present, by being kind to one another and loving one another, by putting Christ and His teachings before anything else so that this whole world can be changed by Him and by you.

*In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Isaiah 9:6-7, New Revised Standard Version

<sup>6</sup>For a child has been born for us,  
a son given to us;  
authority rests upon his shoulders;  
and he is named  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.