

Monday, November 28: Adam and Eve

Genesis 3:14-15

So the Lord God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”

Genesis 3 tells the story of the fall of mankind into sin. Even though man lived in perfect harmony with God, as a result of the enemy’s tempting, they disobeyed Him. This action is one that would define the next 4,000 years of human history, and even beyond, as life would look much different. But here’s the thing; God didn’t leave man without a hope. In fact, from the very beginning God had a plan to redeem mankind, and it is told in these verses. One day, the offspring of the woman will crush the head of the serpent who tempted them. One day, a child of woman would crush the great adversary. One day, a man born of woman would defeat the devil. This promise would inspire the people of God, reminding them that one day all would be made right again.

In these words, God was foreshadowing the coming of a Messiah. The Messiah is someone who God promised would deliver His people. Throughout the rest of human history God would use different men and women for different purposes. Some of them were deliverers like Moses and Aaron, or kings like Saul and David, or prophets like Ezekiel or Jeremiah. But, while God used these men, they aren’t who He was talking about in the Garden of Eden. No, all the way back in the Garden of Eden, when man first fell into sin, God promised them Jesus. He promised that one day he would come, born of woman, and he would crush the head of the serpent!

That is what we celebrate every year at Christmas- the birth of Jesus. You see, Jesus’s birth wasn’t some random event, it was the promise God gave man at the fall. Throughout this week, each day we will look at a different person. Each of these people have something in common- they are Jesus’s family. Today we see the promise that God gave to Adam and Eve, and tomorrow we’ll look at the promise that God gave to Abraham, then Jacob, then Ruth, and Friday we will look at the promise that God gave to David. The Old Testament is full of people and stories that point to Jesus. The Jewish people in the Old Testament were waiting for a savior. While we now live in a world where the savior has already come, it is important for us to remember what this meant for the people in Biblical times. That will help us to truly understand Christmas, and truly appreciate what it really means!

Here’s a question that you can discuss with your family today:

Tuesday, November 29: Abraham

(Genesis 12:1-4)

Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

(Genesis 17:15-16)

And God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.”

Meet Abram, a descendant of Noah. The first time we see Abram (apart from being mentioned in Terah's descendants) is in Genesis 12 when God gives him a very hard command, but a very good promise. God told Abram to leave everything he had ever known, and travel out into the unknown. Imagine how scary that must have been for Abram. He had to leave his home, his friends and family, his job, everything, and the only thing he had to hold onto was the fact that God would lead him. Not only would God lead him to a new land, He would also make him a great nation. So, not only will God give Abram a place, He will make him a mighty nation there. But there's a problem there. Abram has no kids, and his wife Sarai can't have kids...

So how does a man with a barren wife end up being the father of a great nation? It's easy- what God says will happen, will happen! Abram believed in and listened to God. Now, things weren't always perfect. Abram made a lot of mistakes, but, that's kind of the point. You see, Abram wasn't a perfect person. He lied, he cheated, he made decisions that were just plain bad. And that's part of what makes his story so beautiful. You see, this story isn't about how great Abram is, but how faithful God is. God took a messed up man with a barren wife, and made them a promise.

God used Abram and Sarai so that we would remember God. Much like Abram and Sarai, we tend to disobey God, we get scared and do things to try and protect ourselves, and we often find it hard to trust God and try to take the easy way instead. We are a lot like Abram there. But even through all of that, God gave Abram what he had promised him- a son. Abram had a son named Isaac, and through him God fulfilled his promise that Abram would be a great nation. See, in Matthew 1, Jesus's genealogy starts with Abraham (God eventually changed his name) because of this promise. If you don't want to read all the names in Matthew 1, you can always listen to the song Matthew's Begats by Andrew Peterson! Abraham DID become the father of many nations. Abraham had Isaac, Isaac had Jacob, and Jacob (whose name would later become Israel) had twelve sons. These are the tribes of Israel. And it all began because Abram was willing to listen to God, and because God was faithful to keep his promises to Abraham! And while God was faithful to give Abraham Isaac, he isn't the son we should focus on. Through Isaac, Abraham's descendant would ultimately be Jesus, the son who would be the ultimate king from his line!

Sometimes we can be like Abraham, but we can also learn from him. Even in times when life looks hard, even when it seems impossible, we must remember that God has a plan for everything, and his plan is perfect. Abraham wasn't perfect, but God was!

Wednesday, November 30: Jacob

Genesis 35:9-12

God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Paddan-aram, and blessed him. And God said to him, “Your name is Jacob; no longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name.” So he called his name Israel. And God said to him, “I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply. A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come from your own body. The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your offspring after you.”

Jacob is another person who we would not expect to be an ancestor of Jesus. Jacob was not an honest man. He manipulated his brother, and lied to his father, all to have a better life for himself. However, later on in his story, we see an account of God making a promise to Jacob. God continues the promises that he made to Abraham through Jacob. Just like God told Abraham, he told Jacob that a mighty nation and kings will come from his children. God also changed his name to Israel.

Now, Israel would end up having twelve sons, and you may have heard that there were twelve tribes of Israel. That’s because each of those tribes are the descendants of each of Israel’s children. While Joseph may be the one we know the most stories about, he’s not the son we’re focusing on. Jesus is often called the Lion of Judah. Why is that? Well, that’s because Jesus was a descendant of Judah. It was through Judah’s children that we get Jesus.

God told Jacob to be fruitful and multiply, and he did. God blessed him with twelve children. God told him that kings shall come from his children, and throughout the lineage of Judah we see exactly that. However, just like the last few days, there’s more to the story than just his kids and what they would do with their lives...

God continued His promise to Abraham through Jacob, which means that the ULTIMATE promise wouldn’t be found in any of his sons, but in a son who would one day be born in Bethlehem. Joseph did some great things throughout the rest of the book of Genesis, and he could only do those things because Judah convinced the other brothers to sell him instead of kill him, but it’s not the brothers who our eyes should be focused on. This is just one more foreshadowing of the Messiah.

Not only that, it is another example of how God would use messy people for his plans. Jacob’s life is another one that leaves us scratching our head and wondering, “why did God pick him?” Are you seeing a pattern yet? Just like with Abraham, this promise NEEDS God in order to happen. God used broken men to complete his plans to show us that He is in control, and that He can redeem any story. Jesus’s lineage is full of liars, cheaters, crooks, murderers, and even a prostitute. It’s only fitting that God used people like this to bring about the Messiah. The only way that killers, drunks, liars, cheaters, and a prostitute could result in the Messiah is for God to make it happen. He takes messed up people, and he uses them for great things.

Not only does he do this to show us how he can redeem people, this will continue to be a pattern throughout the scriptures, all the way up until the cross, and even beyond! God uses murderers to bring life. He uses liars to teach the truth. He used a cross to save mankind. He used the death of Stephen to spread the Gospel to other nations. And he uses each and every one of us who are his children, mess and all, to continue to spread the good news of the Gospel to the whole world.

Sometimes we can feel discouraged because of our sins. Sometimes we can let the enemy tell us lies that because of our sins God can no longer use us. Maybe you have done things that you regret. Maybe you’ve done things that really are bad. Never forget that God doesn’t expect us to be perfect, He just expects us to be willing, just like Abraham, and just like Jacob.

Thursday, December 1: Ruth

Ruth 4:14-17

Then the women said to Naomi, “Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him.” Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse. And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, “A son has been born to Naomi.” They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

The story of Ruth is a beautiful story of redemption. Ruth was a Moabite woman, who married a man named Mahlon from Bethlehem. However, this family was struck not once, but twice with bad news. First, Ruth’s father-in-law, Elimelech, died, leaving her mother-in-law in the care of her sons. Then, both sons died, Ruth’s husband Mahlon, and his brother Chilion. This left Naomi and her two daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, all alone. In these times, that was a terrible fate. Naomi now had no husband, and no sons to care for her, and she was too old to remarry. So, she sent Orpah and Naomi away, back to their hometown, in hopes that they could salvage something of their lives. While Orpah listened and left, Ruth refused to leave Naomi, and she continued to travel with her.

While this was a noble thing to do itself, what would really set Ruth’s story apart is a man named Boaz. He was a distant relative of Naomi, and he was what is called a *Kinsmen Redeemer*. In an instance where this happens, and these women are left alone, Boaz is one of the men who could redeem them by purchasing all that belonged to Elimelech, and taking Ruth as his wife. And he ended up doing just that! Boaz ended up redeeming these women who had lost all hope! However, he isn’t the redeemer we are going to focus on today.

Instead, we are going to focus on Obed. That’s right, Obed. Ruth’s baby. You see, while Boaz redeemed Ruth and Naomi, we are going to focus on the words of the women. When they talk about the “redeemer” who will be “a restorer of life” and “nourisher of your old age,” they aren’t talking about Boaz. They are talking to Naomi about Obed! Obed will be the one to redeem them. Obed will be the one to restore them. Obed will be a nourisher. All throughout the book of Ruth when the word redeemer is used, it is used about Boaz, except here. Here, at the end of the book, Obed is the redeemer. Why?

Obed is the continuation of the promises of God to his people. Boaz redeemed Naomi by continuing her lineage. She lost her husband, and both of her sons, and had no grandsons to continue her line. When Boaz took Ruth as his wife, and they became pregnant, this was the continuation of Naomi’s line. Through this child, she would continue to be blessed. And if that were all there was to the story, it would still be a beautiful story! But that’s not all there is. See, we know who Obed is. He would go on to have a son named Jesse, who would go on to have a son named David, who would one day be the king. Not only did Naomi’s line continue, God continued to keep His promise to His people. He promised the snake that one day a son of woman would come who would crush him. He promised Abraham that from Sarah would come a mighty nation. He promised Jacob that his children would produce kings. And through Ruth we are one step closer to King David, ancestor of Christ.

Sometimes life seems hopeless. Sometimes, no matter how hard we look, and no matter how much we try, we just cannot seem to make sense of what is going on in our lives, or why. But just like in the life of Ruth and Naomi, we must remember that God is faithful. He promised to provide for His people, and He did. He redeemed Naomi in this situation, but that’s nothing to the way that he redeems those who respond to Him. God had a plan from the foundation, to redeem mankind, and He did that through Ruth’s descendant, Jesus. Obed redeemed Naomi, and his many great grandson Jesus would redeem all of mankind.

In all of these stories, God has proven Himself to be faithful. Even when man isn’t, God still is. Even when man messes up, God keeps His end of the deal. That is who He is, and it is important that we

remember that about Him. Do not be tempted to look at what is going wrong around you, look to the God who has been faithful, and who will always be faithful.

Friday, December 2: David

2 Samuel 7:8-16

Now, therefore, thus you shall say to my servant David, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel. And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.’”

Your throne shall be established forever. These are the words of God to David. David was the youngest son of Jesse, son of Obed, son of Ruth. David was a shepherd. He wasn't very tall, he liked to play his harp, and he loved protecting his sheep. Through some crazy events that can only be explained by saying “God,” David ended up becoming the king. He went from working the fields and saving sheep from lions, to defeating a literal giant, and ultimately becoming the king of God's people. That is a story that only God could write!

Something that set David apart from the other people around him was his heart. No matter what happened, no matter what was in front of him, he knew that he could trust God. When the giant Goliath mocked God, David wouldn't stand for it. Not because he believed that HE could defeat a giant, but because he knew that GOD could! David's life is full of some amazing stories! Stories of wars, and battles, a life full of plot twists! Living in palaces and living on the run for his life. His story involves death, life, good decisions and bad ones, prosperity, and poverty. But in the midst of all of it, there remains a truth about David. He was a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22).

Throughout this week we have looked at the promises that God made to His people, but this is the first time that we see the fulfilled promise of a king. David is a descendant of Abraham through Isaac, and Jacob, and Ruth, and he has now become king! And not only that, he became king because God chose him to be the king! David had a heart for God, he fully trusted and relied on God, so it only makes sense that he would be the child that was promised! He is a descendent of Abraham, he is leading a mighty nation, and he is the king! He checks off all of the boxes! But David isn't the child the world was waiting for. You see, just like us, David wasn't perfect. He made mistakes, sometimes BIG mistakes. David isn't the mighty one who will finally crush the serpent once and for all...

However, God made a promise to David, the final promise we are going to look at this week. He promised him that his throne would last forever. And even though it would take a long time for this to happen, it did happen! Not through Solomon, or Rehoboam, or Abijah, but through Joseph. Joseph, a carpenter, who was a descendent of a king, who was set to marry a woman who would give birth to the Messiah. This is how David's throne would last forever. David would die, and his descendants would end up living in slavery again. But that wouldn't be the end of David's throne, because one day he would have a descendent who would be born of a virgin, live a perfect life, die a sacrificial death, and then rise up from the grave, ascend into heaven, where he is seated at the right hand of the Father, ruling. And his reign will never end. Abraham was the father of nations, Jacob was the father of Israel, Ruth was the mother of a redeemer, David was the king of God's people, but they all point us to another. The ruler of many nations, the leader of his people, the redeemer, and the king who shall reign forever! Jesus.

Monday, December 5, 2022

Read: Luke 1:26-38

This week's devotions will focus on events prior to Jesus' birth. Today we give attention to Gabriel's visit with Mary, the virgin who would be God's mother. People tend to go to one of two extremes concerning Mary. They either magnify her so much that Jesus takes second place, or they ignore her and fail to give her the esteem she deserves. Elizabeth, filled with the Spirit, called her "the mother of my Lord" (Luke 1:43); hence, she is also the mother of our Lord and that is reason enough to honor her.

What do we know about Mary? She was of the tribe of Judah, a descendant of David, and a virgin. She was engaged to Joseph, a carpenter in Nazareth. At that time, if a Jewish man and woman were engaged to be married their vow could be broken only by divorce. In fact, they were called "husband" and "wife" even before the marriage took place. Jewish girls married young, so it is likely that Mary was a teenager when Gabriel appeared to her.

When you consider Gabriel's greeting, you can well understand why Mary was stunned and afraid: "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you!" Why would an angel come to greet *her*? In what way was she "highly favored" by God? How was God with her? Her response shows her humility and honesty before God. She never expected to see an angel and receive special favors from heaven. There was nothing unique about her that such things should happen. If she had been different from other Jewish girls then she might have said, "Well, it's about time! I've been expecting you!" No, all of this was a surprise to her.

Gabriel then gave her the good news: she would become the mother of the promised Messiah whom she would name *Jesus*. As Mary's son, He would be human; as Son of the Highest, He would be the Son of God. The emphasis is on the greatness of the Son, not the greatness of the mother. He would also be a King, inherit David's throne, and reign over Israel forever!

Mary knew *what* would happen, but she did not know *how* it would happen. Her question was not evidence of unbelief; rather, it was an expression of faith. She believed the promise, but she did not understand how it would happen? How could a virgin give birth to a child? The Spirit of God would prepare His body God "overshadowed" Mary. The same word is applied to God's presence in the holy of holies in the Jewish tabernacle and temple (Ex. 40:35). Mary's womb became a holy of holies for the Son of God!

Mary believed God and her response was to surrender herself to God as His willing slave. She experienced the grace of God and believed the Word of God; therefore, she could be used by the Spirit to accomplish the will of God. She saw herself as God's "handmaid", the lowest kind of female servant, which reveals the depth of Mary's trust in God. She belonged totally to the Lord, body and soul. She humbled herself before God and was granted the privilege of changing God's diapers. What an example for us to follow!

Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God. And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. For nothing will be impossible with God."

(Luke 1:34–37)

As we celebrate the miraculous birth of our Lord may we be reminded of an essential tenet of our faith, "Nothing is impossible with God." (v. 37). Gabriel speaks these words to Mary, an affirmation of God's power and character, a guiding principle to quiet her inwardly and silence all naysayers concerning the coming of God's Son.

Jesus was born naturally, but conceived supernaturally! He went through the natural process of birth; his mother carried him for a full term of pregnancy. Yet, he is unique in that he did not have a human father. Jesus was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, a miracle in the strictest sense of all: it was an act that only God could bring to pass.

The birth of Jesus, the *how* of his conception and birth, to many was a scandal. Premarital sex, or fornication, was forbidden in Jewish society. A young woman, a virgin, coming up pregnant before she was married, claiming God did it to her, was just the sort of thing to make her and her baby outcasts. Surely, Gabriel's assurance was of great comfort to Mary. She was pregnant, yet she had not yet known a man as her husband. The baby growing in her womb, the normal changes in her body that occur in the first, second and third trimesters were living testimonies that *nothing is impossible with God*. In her body she carried around the inner witness of peace knowing that God was secretly doing the impossible.

The story of Mary and her role in Jesus' birth reminds us of God's possibilities and prompts us to hold fast to this truth as a pillar for our own inner peace. Questions and doubts will rise in our minds about many religious subjects and we become anxious amid difficult circumstances. They are the natural result of our fallen state. Our faith is at best very feeble, and our knowledge at its highest remains clouded by mystery and weakness. Yet, the antidote to a doubting, anxious, questioning soul is a thorough conviction of the almighty power of God. God alone can bring something out of nothing; life out of death; fertility from a barren woman; a virgin birth.

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 name Him 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 His kingdom will have no end.”

You may think that nothing could be greater than to have an angel make an announcement like this to you. However, stop and envision the awesome responsibility that such an honor placed upon Mary. It was no light matter to become the mother of our Lord in this unheard of and mysterious way. It put Mary’s reputation at stake and was a great test of her faith.

Do we realize the risk she took and the price she had to pay to become the mother of God’s Christ? Only one woman, out of the countless millions in the human race, could be the one to birth Jesus. Only one woman would have the responsibilities of bearing, tending, protecting and parenting God’s Son. Also consider Gabriel’s words, the glorious account of the greatness and majesty of her son, God’s Son. He will be great. He will sit on David’s throne and His kingdom will never end. Later, she will learn that she will experience all the pains of motherhood. The promise of the Messiah’s birth comes with a sword that will pierce her own soul. She will see her baby endure violence and suffer (Luke 2:35). Mothers uniquely feel the pain others inflict upon their children; the rejection of his own people, the injustice of his trial, the sting of whip, him accursed and hanging on a criminal’s cross will stab her soul like a sword. No wonder she is called “highly favored.”

Mary took on the responsibility of being one of God’s choice servants in establishing his eternal kingdom and life everlasting for his people. All the empires of this present world will one day pass away. Like Nineveh, Babylon, Egypt, Tyre and Carthage, they will all come to nothing! But God’s people, we the saints of the Most High, will remain for the Messiah’s kingdom has no end! One day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord, his kingdom alone will prove to be everlasting. His dominion will not pass away (Daniel 7:14, 27). On that great day all who have served him faithfully will exchange a cross for a crown.

The beginning of Jesus’ life is marked by a mother who submits to the will of God. The end of Jesus’ life is marked by the words: “Not my will, but yours be done.” (Luke 22:42) Mary took on the responsibility of mothering (shaping and influencing) God’s Son. She was God’s provision for Jesus, to show him what it looked like to serve his Father without question or objection.

The angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God.”

Today I invite you to consider an underappreciated aspect of Jesus’ conception and birth, the work of the Holy Spirit. So often we read that Jesus was conceived by the Spirit without pondering the glory and depth of such a statement. Think with me for a moment... the angel’s news puts the Holy Spirit at the center of the action. What does this necessarily mean for how God will establish, nurture and birth the Life from a woman’s body? (Jn. 1:1-4, 14; 1 Jn. 1:1-2)

Previously, I noted that Mary’s question to Gabriel was not *what* would happen. She knew God could do whatever he wanted. Her question was *how* would God do it? Obviously, she couldn’t be pregnant without having relations with a man! She’s right, it is impossible... unless God intervenes... and God did intervene! His answer to Mary’s *how* was the work of the Holy Spirit—he would miraculously bring about the physical conception of eternally existent God (Isa. 7:14; 9:6; Gal. 4:4). Scripture uses the phrase “come upon you” to show God’s intense and focused work. The Spirit will work extraordinarily and effectively where the natural means are absent and powerless. One ancient writer put it this way, “The Son shall not only descend from heaven into you but also shall come on you with great power, that he may work effectually in you.”

Therefore, Joseph, her betrothed, would not be the child’s father (Matt. 1:18–25), even though Jesus would be legally identified as his son (Lk. 3:23; 4:22; Jn. 1:45; 6:42). It is possible that some people thought Mary had been unfaithful to Joseph and that Jesus was “born of fornication” (John 8:41). This was a part of the pain that Mary bore all her life (Lk. 2:35).

The honor here given to the Spirit is in precise harmony with the teaching of Scripture in other places. Every step of God’s redemptive work through Christ gives special attention to the Holy Spirit’s work... in Jesus’ dying to make atonement for our sins (Heb. 9:14), in his rising again for our justification (1 Pet. 3:18), and in comforting Jesus’ disciples between his first and second coming (Jn. 14:26-27). The Holy Spirit who inspired men to write God’s word (2 Pet. 1:19-21) also built the Word, the God-man, with flesh and blood, skin and bones. The Father’s Spirit would never be far away from Mary. He would overshadow her and be in her to build and shape Jesus inside her. One might say the Spirit transformed the merely human elements she provided into a pure and holy flesh born from God. Thus, Mary’s womb gave residence to the Word made flesh—the whole of who Christ is—so that God’s Spirit might bring forth His Son, through her, for the redemption of all who believe upon His name.

And Mary said, “Behold, the bondslave of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

Today, we conclude our look at Gabriel’s announcement to Mary (Lk. 1:26-38). Each meditation has emphasized that Mary believed God. In short, she was convinced that he would do this peculiar and indescribable miracle; thus, she promptly and sincerely yielded her body and soul to the Lord’s purpose. Clearly, she knew that being pregnant prior to uniting with Joseph would not be easy; she could be exposed to painful criticism and ridicule (Matt. 1:18-19). Still, God had promised the child *would be born*; therefore, she need not fear unknowns or the Law’s penalty for premarital relations (Deut. 22:23f). Her faith was in God, that whatever he did would be good and fit for his purpose. Gabriel’s mission was complete and the text says the angle left her.

Think with me... What would make her yield so quickly and completely? How could she not be dissuaded or discouraged by knowing that the certain troubles will come with problems that have yet to be revealed? The answer, Mary saw herself as the Lord’s “bondslave,” God’s creature living under covenant obligation as one among his chosen people. Simply, she was the Lord’s slave and he was free to dispose of her as he pleased.

Some scholars and Bible translators prefer “handmaid” over “bondslave.” They argue that God’s character and the context requires a softer touch. The word *bondslave* makes God seem oppressive, unfeeling and cruel. Their reasoning is correct in that we generally associate the word *slave* with forced subjection, involuntary service, and (frequently) harsh treatment. Sane people avoid, fight against and run from such things. But Mary’s reaction was the very opposite. “May it be done to me according to your word” displays unreserved and unconditional surrender. The exact attitude of the *Servant* in Isaiah’s Servant passages (42:1–9; 49:1–9a; 50:4–11; 52:13–53:12). Passages that her son, God’s Son, the promised Messiah, would fulfill! She is eager to be the Lord’s bondslave, ready to do his will and to be used for accomplishing his purpose. To her heart and mind God is far from being cruel; rather, he is showing her unmerited favor!

Mary’s words show the real proof of faith. Her mind is restrained, her heart held captive, from further objections or questions. She dares not to reply this or that to God, for such boldness in disputing with God gives life and vigor to unbelief. Unbelievers rebel against God’s hand, and use their abilities and power to obstruct his work. While faith presents us before God, that we may yield in complete submission to our Lord’s authority. May our hearts not be stubborn against the God who loves us. May we eagerly, promptly and sincerely, present to him the submission he deserves and requires.

Monday, December 12, 2022

Joseph: From the Line of David

Read Matthew 1:1-16

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham... and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

The book of Matthew opens up with a list of names. Some of these names are easy to pronounce, like Jacob, and some are harder to pronounce, like Rehoboam, or Shealtiel. But each one of these names is important, because each of these names is an ancestor of this man named Joseph. We don't know a lot about Joseph based on scripture. We know his entire Genealogy to Abraham, we know that he was a carpenter, and we can infer a good bit about his character based on some decisions that he made. Other than that, Joseph isn't talked about much, and he is one of the only "major" characters who we do not have *any* of his words recorded in scripture. So... Why is he so important? And what can we learn about his life?

Well, today we are going to look at Joseph's family. You see, in Micah 5, we see a prophecy. "But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, 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 coming forth is from of old, from ancient days" (Micah 5:2). This passage tells us that the Messiah will be from Bethlehem! Because they knew this prophecy, God's people were *expecting* the Messiah to be someone from Bethlehem. Well, if we look to Joseph's family tree, we see the name David. This is the same David who fought Goliath, and became king. Here's why that matters. Luke 2 tells us that Caesar Augustus called for a Census. This meant that everyone would have to return to their hometowns to be counted for the census. So, because Joseph was a descendant of David, he had to go on a trip to Bethlehem.

This was not a trip that Joseph was going to make alone though. Joseph was betrothed to a girl named Mary, who was pregnant, but it wasn't Joseph's baby. Mary was pregnant with the Son of God, Jesus, the Messiah. She was going to give birth to the savior of the world. Here's where the story gets really cool, as if it wasn't already...

God made a promise to David that the Messiah would come from his line. Joseph was from David's line. Micah prophesied that the Savior would be born in Bethlehem. God used the emperor to order a census to get Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem. God made a promise to Abraham, and then God used Joseph to fulfill that promise. Even though we don't know much about Joseph, and even though we can't read his own words, we see that he was the perfect person for the Lord to use! And that is exactly what the Lord did.

This story not only highlights the role that Joseph played in the Old Testament prophecies, it shows us a little peek at how God works. God was in control of everything. Only God could have written a story so perfect. He used an Emperor, and a carpenter, and countless other little things that we would look right past. But that's exactly how God works!

Tuesday, December 13, 2022

Joseph: The Virgin's Protector

Read Matthew 1:18-25

“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”
(Isaiah 7:14 ESV)

Like we said yesterday, not a lot is known about Joseph; however, we can learn a lot about his character by looking at his decisions. You see, the world in the 1st century looked very different than the world in the 21st century. Namely, in this specific story, in marriage. Mary and Joseph were betrothed to be married, meaning they were sworn to each other. By Jewish customs, Joseph's family likely paid Mary's family in order to secure this marriage, and they were now in a type of *waiting* period. You see, it was normal custom after the marriage was arranged for the husband and wife to not see each other for a long period while the husband prepares the home for his new bride. This is likely where our story picks up, in this in between time. One of the things that was tested in this time was their faithfulness to each other while they are apart, and unfortunately for Joseph, he discovered that the woman he was to marry has become pregnant.

Here's where we see the first sign of Joseph's character. This would have brought great shame on him, and his family, yet he was not concerned about that. Matthew tells us that Joseph was a just man who was unwilling to put her to shame, so he was going to address this privately. By Jewish law, this story could have looked a lot different, but Joseph didn't want that for Mary. Joseph did not make decisions selfishly, but rather even in this time he was protecting Mary.

Thankfully, Joseph didn't divorce her. While he was thinking about what to do, an angel came to him and filled him in on the missing piece. Mary hadn't been unfaithful, she had conceived a child by the Holy Spirit. She was a virgin, who was pregnant. This would likely have really meant a lot to Joseph anyways, but just in case, the angel reminds him of why this is a BIG deal! This is one of the signs of the savior! The prophet Isaiah wrote that a virgin would give birth, and he told Joseph that this is the fulfillment of that prophecy! And boy, did Joseph's plans change!

Now, not only was Joseph going to marry this woman, he was going to make sure that he protected her and this story. So what did he do? He married her. But he resigned that they would not consummate their marriage until after Jesus was born. Yet again, Joseph was not thinking about himself, but about others. He was thinking about his wife and future son, and all of the people that his future son would impact.

Joseph teaches us an important lesson that many of us struggle with- our lives aren't about us. Joseph was faithful to the Lord, and his decisions reflect that truth. Even when it didn't make sense, or it wasn't convenient, or it wasn't fair, Joseph obeyed the Lord. He didn't look for what he could get from this, or how it would benefit him, he obeyed the Lord with total abandon. Too often we can be tempted to not obey the Lord and His calling for us because it may not make sense to us, or it may not be convenient, or because we don't feel like it is fair, but, like Joseph, we should be willing to listen to the Lord without any qualifier. Let us be like Joseph, faithful to the Lord and His promises, without looking for a return.

Wednesday, December 14, 2022

Joseph: Faithful to the Lord

Read Matthew 2:13-23

“Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, ‘Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.’”
(Matthew 2:13 ESV)

We have already seen Joseph’s willingness to sacrifice his own comfort, his own dignity, his own reputation, in order to follow the Lord’s guidance regarding Mary. This characteristic did not stop with the birth though, as today’s passage takes place after Jesus has been born, and after the wise men have visited him. An angel appeared to Joseph to tell him to take Mary and Jesus to Egypt to hide. You see, Herod was the king at the time, and Herod was just a tad bit crazy. And by that, I mean he was VERY crazy. When he learned about Jesus being born, and he learned that he was said to be the king of the Jews, he started to panic. He was afraid that this baby would try to take the throne from him. So, he came up with a plan...

That’s where we find ourselves. The wise men have visited Jesus, and now Mary, Joseph and Jesus are preparing to head out when the angel appears to Joseph to warn him that Herod is searching for Jesus. You see, Herod came up with a plot to kill Jesus. The only problem was, he didn’t know *which* baby was the king. So he did what a crazy king would do, and decided to kill every male child in the region who would be about Jesus’s age, two years old and under. That’s why Joseph was warned to take his family to Egypt, so that Jesus would be safe. But, that isn’t the only reason...

You see, in Hosea 11:1, there is a prophecy spoken about the Messiah. “Out of Egypt I called my son.” This prophecy was both a call back, and a look forward. It was a call back to when the Lord delivered Israel out of Egypt, something that they regularly celebrated in the Passover. God was faithful to His people to deliver them. It was also a look forward to the Messiah. Just as He delivered Israel from Egypt, so He would also deliver His child, the Messiah, from Egypt. You see, it was no coincidence that they ended up in Egypt. It was to fulfill a prophecy that was over 500 years old!

And that’s not the only prophecy that was fulfilled. After Herod died, and they could leave Egypt, there was another problem. Herod’s son was now ruling, and Joseph was afraid that if they went back to Judea they wouldn’t be safe. He was then warned in a dream, so he decided that he wouldn’t take his family to Judea, but instead would go to Nazareth. You may have heard of Jesus referred to as “Jesus of Nazareth,” and this is why. But again, this was no coincidence. Matthew doesn’t cite a specific passage in verse 23, but rather a collective of writing from throughout the prophets. Everything that happened, happened for a reason, just as the Lord designed.

Now, what does this teach us about Joseph? Joseph was faithful to the Lord. Joseph uprooted his entire life, his entire family’s lives, to follow the Lord where he would have him to go. Not only that, we never see an account of Joseph griping, and grumbling, and complaining. We never see him lash out at the Lord, even though many of us would believe him to be fully justified in doing so! Some crazy king is out to get his son, so he has to uproot his whole life and move to Egypt? Then the king’s son causes him to uproot and flee to Nazareth? Joseph was a business man. He was a carpenter. Nazareth was a place that was not very favorable. In fact, when Jesus begins his ministry, someone asks if anything good can come out of Nazareth. Even though he had every right by our standards to be mad, he chose instead to be faithful to the Lord. May we learn from him, and his patience, and his trust in the Lord, that we may also live lives that would follow the Lord, no matter where that may lead.

Thursday, December 15, 2022

Joseph: Faithful to the Law

Read Luke 2:22-38

“And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.” (Luke 2:39-40 ESV)

Something that is an important, yet often overlooked part of Jesus’s life is the fact that he was born as a baby. I don’t know how many newborn babies you have ever been around, but they don’t come out of the womb knowing how to walk, talk, dress themselves, and do their own taxes. The same is true about Jesus. The story in Luke 2:22-38 tells us of a time when they took Jesus to have him presented at the temple, a regular custom for babies. Jesus both was special, and he wasn’t special. He was special in that he was the Messiah, but he wasn’t special in the sense that he grew up just like any other child in Nazareth. They had to change his diapers. They had to teach him how to walk. They may have even gotten giddy when he uttered his first word, and no, it probably wasn’t “propitiation.” By many accounts, Jesus was a totally normal kid.

As a normal kid, especially a first-born son, that means that Joseph had a few responsibilities. It was the father’s job to have his son circumcised, to find him a wife, teach him a trade, and teach him the Torah. We know (because we live 2,000 years later and know the whole story) that Jesus came to fulfill the Law, but how did Jesus know the Law? Because Joseph faithfully taught it to him. Jesus was a carpenter from Nazareth because Joseph taught him this trade. See, Jesus’s early life probably didn’t look all that much different than any other kid of the time. In fact, John 6 shows us a time when Jesus, in his public ministry, had tried teaching the people of Nazareth who he was, they identified him as Mary and Joseph’s kid.

If you have ever seen the Disney cartoon *Hercules*, you may remember that when baby Hercules is born on Mt. Olympus, he has this golden glow around him, and he has powers of super strength, and a pet flying horse. It can be easy to think that when Jesus was born he was this little glowing baby, who could perform miracles. Or maybe he was like Jack-Jack from the *Incredibles*, who would sneeze and accidentally activate his super powers. However, that is not a picture we ever see.

Jesus had to grow up, which meant that his parents had to raise him. Yes, right after this we see a story of Jesus in the temple, full of wisdom even as a boy, but let us not look past the fact that he was growing in his understanding of the Law largely due to Joseph’s faithfulness to teach his son about the Lord, and to teach his son about what the Scriptures said. Not only is this something that is good for us to know about Joseph, it is also a reminder for each one of us. Maybe you have kids- are you training them up in the ways of the Lord? Are you teaching them what it means to live a life that honors the Lord, committing yourself to them and their raising? Or maybe you don’t have kids- are there any kids in your life who you could be pouring into? Nieces, nephews, cousins, kids at your church? How are you helping to teach the next generation after you, or the generation after them, to love the Lord, and live a life that is honoring to Him?

See, the reason they were in the temple in the first place was to consecrate their baby to the Lord. Exodus 13 teaches that, beckoning to the Passover, Jewish families are to redeem their firstborn son. They sacrifice the firstborn of their animals to the Lord, and the firstborn of their sons they redeem, that the hand of the Lord may be upon them. How can we take this, which Joseph did, and use it to leave a lasting impression on the generations to come?

Friday, December 16, 2022

Joseph: The Kinsman Redeemer?

Read Luke 1:26-38

“Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him.”
(Ruth 4:14-15 ESV)

One of my favorite stories this time of year is the story of Ruth. When you read this story, you are introduced to a man named Boaz. He is something called a Kinsman Redeemer (for a little more about this story, you can go back to week 1, day 4). All throughout the book of Ruth, when the term *redeemer* is thrown around, it's talking about Boaz, and how he could redeem Ruth and Naomi. That is, until the very end of the book. In Ruth 4:14-15, we see a new redeemer mentioned- Obed. Boaz was able to redeem Naomi by marrying Ruth and continuing Naomi's lineage, but it was Obed who was the redeemer. Not the kinsman redeemer, the redeemer.

This story shares some similar parallels with the Christmas story. Joseph, through his character, his convictions, his willingness to listen to the angels and follow the Lord, all of this served to protect, provide for, and serve Mary. He protected her, not only in not casting shame upon her, but in still taking her as his wife, and even protecting the claims of the virgin birth. He loved her sacrificially, he raised Jesus faithfully, and he served the Lord strongly. And in the end, just like Boaz, it was his son who would be called the redeemer.

Boaz may have been Obed's father, but by Jewish customs, Obed was the continuation of Naomi's line, not Boaz's. And Boaz was okay with this, he knew what he was doing. Likewise, while Joseph was there for Jesus, and while he was the one raising Jesus, Jesus was the son of the Most High. The Son of God. And Joseph was okay with this, he knew what he was doing. Both men were faithful to these women, each one who would give birth to a redeemer. One would redeem a family, while one would redeem the whole world.

In Genesis 3, a dichotomy is created. A rivalry is formed. The Enemy vs. the woman. This is a pattern that continues throughout the Old Testament, the New Testament, and throughout cultures for the last 6,000+ years. This is a rivalry that makes Alabama and Tennessee look like best friends. Satan's enemy is the woman, and he desires her destruction. However, no matter what seemed to be rising up against Mary in this time, Joseph was there to serve as her protector, and as the protector of their child. As the dragon flew overhead, circling, searching for the woman, Joseph was there, leading her to safety, protecting her, providing for her, caring for her child, teaching him to be a mighty man for the Lord, until one day when this child would be ready to defeat this great adversary.

We don't know a lot about Joseph, as we have already said, but he was faithful to the Lord. He loved his wife, he loved his child, he protected them, he provided for them, and in so doing, he taught us all many valuable lessons of how we should be living our lives, mainly how to live a life sacrificially for the Lord. Joseph was faithful. May we all be able to learn from his life, and may this time of year, when we so often think about him, serve as a reminder of this to us- it is all about Jesus.

Have you ever noted that each of the four Gospels starts by placing Jesus within a historical setting? Matthew opens by showing Jesus' genealogical links to David and Abraham. Mark starts with John the Baptist and his preaching. Luke goes a step further by starting with the prediction of John the Baptist's birth. But the Gospel of John stands out for another reason—the apostle begins with a theological prologue. He begins in eternity past, before time and history. It's as if he said, "I want you to consider Jesus' teaching and deeds, but you will not understand how good the good news of Jesus is unless you view him like this... Jesus is God manifest in the flesh, and his words and deeds are those of the God-Man."

John aims to draw our attention to the special relationship and eternal fellowship that exists between God and the Word. The Word was not only "in company with" God, but the Word "was" God. Simply put, Christ did not at some point in time come into existence, or begin a relationship with the Father. In eternity past the Father (God) and the Son (the Word) have always been in a loving communion with each other. Both Father and Son are God, yet there are not two Gods.

As human beings, our words reveal our hearts and minds to others. Jesus Christ is God's "Word" to reveal his heart and mind to us. The term "Word" is the common Greek word *logos*, which means speaking, a message, or words. Logos was widely used in both Greek philosophy and Jewish wisdom literature. It was a familiar word to John's readers, but he forever transformed it by investing it with new meaning. According to Hebrews 1:1–3, Jesus Christ is God's *last* Word to mankind, for he is the climax of divine revelation.

Jesus Christ is the eternal Word (vv. 1–2). He existed in the beginning, not because He had a beginning as a creature, but because He is eternal. He *is* God and He was *with* God (John 8:58).

Jesus Christ is the creative Word (v. 3). Think about the parallel between John 1:1 and Genesis 1:1, the "new creation" and the "old creation." God created the worlds when he said "Let there be ..." and it was done. God created all things through Jesus Christ (Col. 1:16), which means that Jesus is not a created being. He is eternal God.

Jesus Christ is the incarnate Word (v. 14). He was not an impersonal force or a ministering spirit (phantom) set loose upon the earth. His body wasn't merely an illusion. John, as well as the other disciples, had personally touched and felt Jesus' body (1 John 1:1–2). Even though John's emphasis is the deity of Christ, he makes it clear that the Son of God came *in the flesh* and was subject to the nature and limits of a human body. Jesus took on Himself sinless human nature and identified with us in every aspect of life from birth to death. "The Word" was not an abstract concept of philosophy, but a real Person who could be seen, touched, and heard.

Jesus, the Word in flesh, revealed God's glory in his person, his works, and his words. The Law could reveal sin, but it could never remove sin. Jesus Christ came with *fullness* of grace and truth, and this fullness is available to all who will trust Him (John 1:16).

I have often wondered how Joseph and Mary addressed Jesus. How do you properly talk to the Son of God, the Word made flesh? Oh, he's your son legally, but he is also the God-man, "the ideal Man." Just calling him to supper would be a thought-provoking experience! How do others refer to you? Do they call you by your given name, a nickname that's uniquely yours, or possibly by your professional title? Do you prefer people address you by a certain name or title? Jesus had a name, or title, he fancied for himself; the Son of man.

It was common knowledge among the Jews that "Son of man" referred to the coming deliverer, God's Messiah (Jn. 12:34). The prophet Daniel had a vision of Jesus' coming (Dan. 7:13-14) and Jesus used the title in the same way (Matt. 26:64). The Gospels employ this title more than eighty times. It speaks equally of Jesus' deity and humanity, his miraculous power and suffering; his work as "the ideal Man." When Jesus speaks of himself as the "Son of Man," he is evoking an image of conflict and kingship. Jesus' earthly life, like ours, was a tale of conflict with Satan punctuated by the immediate presence and guarantee of the coming fullness of God's kingdom.

As the Son of Man, Jesus left heaven to come to the earth. He is the "living link" between heaven and earth. This explains his reference to "Jacob's ladder" in Genesis 28. Jacob thought he was alone, but God had sent the angels to guard and guide him. Christ is God's "ladder" between heaven and earth. "No man cometh to the Father, but by Me" (John 14:6). Often, we find Jesus reminding people that he came down from heaven.

Jesus of Nazareth, Joseph's boy, Mary's baby... is the ideal Man. Jesus is God come in the flesh. When Philip called Him "the son of Joseph," he was not denying Jesus' virgin birth or divine nature; rather, he was following the Jewish custom of identifying a man by who his father was (John 6:42). The witness of this entire chapter is clear: the man Jesus is God come in the flesh!

Christmas is the time when Christians stop everything to rest and give attention to the Son of man's birth. He joyfully descended to us so that he might lift us above the power of sin and evil to heavenly glory. The "ideal Man" was born of woman that he might open the way to heaven for sinners. The comfort the Son of man gives is beautifully summarized in the words of this 18th century Christmas hymn...

God rest ye merry gentlemen
 Let nothing you dismay
 Remember, Christ, our Savior
 Was born on Christmas day
 To save us all from Satan's power
 When we were gone astray
 O, tidings of comfort and joy
 Comfort and joy
 O, tidings of comfort and joy

In Monday's devotion, I noted that John opened his gospel with a theological introduction. His heart is bent toward showing how Jesus informs and transforms our thoughts about God and his salvation. This point is established by John the Baptist's proclamation, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" Calvin offered this helpful summary of John's instruction to his readers...

John, as he points to Christ, bears witness that he is the Lamb of God, by which he means that whatever sacrificial victims the Jews used to offer under the law had no power at all to atone for sins, but were only figures whose reality was revealed in Christ himself.

The people of Israel were familiar with sacrificial lambs and the harsh reality that atonement requires a sacrifice. At Passover, each family had to have a lamb; and during the year, two lambs a day were sacrificed at the temple altar, as well as the additional lambs brought for personal sacrifices. Those lambs were brought by men to men, but here is God's Lamb, given by God to men! Those lambs could not take away sin, whereas the Lamb of God does take away sin. Those lambs were for Israel alone, but this Lamb would shed His blood for the whole world!

In one sense, the message of the Bible can be summed up in John 1:29. The "lamb of God" is an idea that runs throughout the history of redemption. The question in the Old Testament is, "Where is the lamb?" (Gen. 22:7) In the four Gospels, the emphasis is "Behold the Lamb of God!" Here He is! After you have trusted Him, you sing with the heavenly choir, "Worthy is the Lamb!" (Rev. 5:12).

The prophet Isaiah declared that the Messiah would be in the likeness of a lamb (Isa. 53:7). The apostle Paul used this same imagery (1 Cor 5:7). John, inspired by the Holy Spirit, saw Jesus as the sacrificial Victim who was to die for the sin of the world (Isa. 53:12). In Revelation, the image of Christ as a lamb achieves prominence. Jesus is the lamb that was slain (Rev 5:6, 12; 13:8). The blood of the lamb cleanses the saints (Rev 7:14) and is the means of their victory (Rev. 12:11).

Christmas is the day set aside to celebrate the Lamb of God. As we gather with family and friends, take a moment to consider the whole picture of God's redemption. Ponder Jesus' birth in light of the cross, the resurrection, the ascension, and the outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. Only then will we begin to see the depths and the riches of God revealed in the words... "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

Do you know many skeptics? Are you skeptical? You know, folks whose mantra is “I’ll have to see it to believe it!” Nathanael, a fisherman and one of Jesus’ early disciples, was such a man. He was a good man, stable and forthright in his dealings. He held with the popular opinion that nothing good could come out of Nazareth. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, but reared in Nazareth; thus, he bore that stigma and was looked down on and rejected. True to form, when Nathanael’s friend, Phillip, announced that he had met the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, Nathanael immediately doubted. Phillip’s response was to challenge him to come see for himself. Nathanael met Jesus and was immediately shocked into belief. He discovered that Jesus already knew him inside and out! He was convinced that Jesus was indeed was “the Son of God, the King of Israel.” The title “King of Israel” would be similar to “Messiah, anointed One,” for the kings were always God’s anointed (Ps. 2:2, 6–7).

Jesus’ divine knowledge moved Nathanael to confess him as the Son of God and the King of Israel. Obviously, this doesn’t mean he fully understood the Trinity or the Incarnation; rather, he was convinced that Jesus was the Son of God in the messianic sense, the future Davidic King. As such, his supernatural knowledge would be the work of God’s Spirit (Isa. 11:1–2). However, Nathanael’s confession contains another necessary theological principle: the Son of God will not come without showing himself as King over God’s people.

Here, Nathanael teaches us two very important lessons. First, our personal experience of and witness to Christ must be understood and measured by how they align with Scripture. When our doubts, emotions and opinions disagree with God’s Word, they are dead wrong. Like Nathanael, we must be quick to dismiss them. Second, our faith should not only cling to Christ’s heart for us, but also to his sovereign power and supreme office as King! We gain little benefit in knowing of Jesus’ love without prompt and sincere submission to his wishes for us. Many error by giving all their attention to understanding Jesus’ heart while simultaneously neglecting his kingly rule, which rests in his power to save.

Nathanael declares Christ is “King of Israel,” but it’s a confession limited to the measure of his faith. He did not yet know that Christ’s kingdom extends to the remotest parts of the earth. He did not yet realize that Christ was appointed to be King over the whole world, or that from every corner of creation the children of Abraham would be gathered in, so that the whole world would be the Israel of God. We, however, have been granted this knowledge of Christ’s kingdom! Our faith should exceed those narrow limits. Celebrating Christmas is a celebration of the birth of our King! May we follow Nathanael’s example and exercise our faith in hearing the Word, using every means God provides to strengthen it, not allowing it to stay buried, but to break out in our confession that Jesus is our God and King!

“We have found the Messiah!” those were the words Andrew spoke to his brother Simon. Today’s devotional completes our Advent devotions. We arranged the content and order to bring us to this point. Today we look at Christmas as the coming of God’s Messiah, or Christ, his Redeemer for sinners.

Messiah, a Hebrew word that means “anointed,” with the Greek equivalent being *Christ*. The apostle John used the *Christ* in order to disclose to the whole world what had previously been a Jewish mystery. To the Jews, *Christ* (anointed one) was the same as “Son of God.” In the Old Testament, prophets, priests, and kings were anointed and thereby set apart for special service. Kings, however, were specifically called “God’s anointed”—it was the ordinary title of kings, given as they were anointed in a solemn ceremony. Consequently, when the Jews spoke about their Messiah, they were thinking of the king who would come to deliver them and establish the kingdom (1 Sam. 26; Ps. 89).

The Jews understood that someday there would be one King whom God would anoint to fulfill their hopes for perfect and eternal happiness. Israel knew that David’s earthly kingdom would never be permanent. There was another King, a future Sovereign, to whom David’s rule pointed. Throughout history, God used his deliverances from oppressive burdens and various trials to stir their hearts to longing for the *Messiah*. Each progressive step in God’s plan brought clarity as it more clearly revealed that His coming was close at hand. The prophet Daniel gave the clearest expression of this King being the *Christ*, the ultimate and final Redeemer (Daniel 9:25–26). Therefore, it was customary to speak of and understand the Messiah, or Christ, as the long-anticipated Redeemer from God. Isn’t it amazing and ironic that He who was so eagerly longed for and widely spoken of should be accepted by so few.

Yet there remained some confusion among the Jewish teachers as to what the Messiah would do. Some saw Him as a suffering sacrifice (Isa. 53), while others saw a splendid king (Isa. 9 and 11). Jesus was always explaining and re-explaining to his followers that the cross had to come before the crown, that he must suffer before he could enter into his glory (Luke 24:13–35). Whether or not Jesus was indeed the Messiah was a crucial problem that challenged the Jews in that day (John 7:26, 40–44; 9:22; 10:24).

Today we’re much the same. People all over the world celebrate Christmas, with little to no regard for Christ as God’s Anointed, his Redeemer for sinners. The hallmark of Jesus’ preaching and teaching was the kingdom of God is at hand, which is a natural accompaniment to his status as the Anointed One. As the anointed King he has the authority to describe the nature of the kingdom, to dispense its blessings and accept people into the kingdom. As we celebrate Christmas our words mirror Andrew’s words to Simon, “We have found the Christ, won’t you come and see!”