

BIBLE STUDY

The Life of Jesus Christ

The Coming of the King

Study Section 2



Jesus Christ: Study 4

The Herald of a King (Part 1)

In study 1, we referred to the promise given by God to the children of Israel through the prophet Malachi, the last prophet of the Old Testament, a promise of future redemption. In the last few verses, God acknowledged that there was a remnant of His people who did “esteemed His name” (Malachi 3:16).

God has promised that they will be His, and their names will be written in the Book of Remembrance. He will, indeed, remember all His promises throughout the centuries to those who love and cherish Him. (see also Rev. 21:26, 27) God makes a declaration to people who seek and love His ways saying:

“but for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings.” Malachi 4:2

He is, of course, alluding to the fact that light will once again return to this dark world, and that a healing will take place. We can see this as a fore-shadowing, fulfilled and echoed in the birth of His Son, through whom sin would be overcome. The breach caused between God and man because of sin would be healed through the Saviour that He would provide.

In the first four verses of Malachi chapter 4, He indicates that there will also be a time of terrible judgment upon those who continue to reject Him so that “...all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze, ...” (See also Rev. 20:15) Righteousness in the end will prevail. Then in verse 5 God declares that a sign would herald the coming of the Lord of righteousness and judgment:

“Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet, before the great and terrible day of the Lord” Malachi 4:5

The Promise Remembered

Now as we turn to the New Testament, we see in the Gospel records, that the Jews of Jesus’ day lived in expectation of great events. Most were only looking for relief

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from the Roman oppression, but, true to the words in Malachi, some in the nation had true faith and looked for the coming of a Messiah, who would be their spiritual Saviour. In the early chapters of the Gospels, examples are given, such as Zacharias and Elizabeth, Simeon, Anna, Joseph and Mary. (Luke 1:5; Matt. 1:18).

To such faithful hearts, would come the first stirrings of the Spirit, preparing them for the birth of the true Messiah, Jesus Christ. Of these faithful people, in this section we will look in particular at Zacharias and Elizabeth. Both Zacharias and Elizabeth had names that have a significant meaning. Zacharias means “Yahweh has remembered” and Elizabeth means “the oath of El”. Together they signify that the time had come for God to remember His oath.

Luke, in chapter 1 of his Gospel, sets the time frame as being in the days of Herod, King of Judea, and defines their family lines (verse 5). He then describes them:

“and they were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. And they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren and they were both advanced in years.” Luke 1:6, 7.

A Bible Echo

To anyone who is familiar with the record regarding Abraham and Sarah, who were in exactly the same state in that they were in their old age when Sarah who had been barren bore Isaac, it is thus impossible to miss a very significant Bible echo here.

But, there is even greater significance to this echo. In a similar manner, throughout the history of His people, God has signified the birth of individuals for whom He had specific purposes. These miraculous births would leave no doubt that His plan and purpose were involved. This served a two-fold purpose in also fore-shadowing the miraculous birth of His own Son.

The wonder of this echo becomes even more remarkable, if we look into the record of 1 Samuel, chapter 2, verse 1. Toward the end of the time of the Judges, a faithful woman called Hannah was also barren, and longed for a child. She prayed to God for a child and her prayers were answered. She became pregnant and gave birth to Samuel, who was to become the last of the Judges of Israel. After his birth, Hannah, unselfishly, dedicated the child’s life to the service of the Lord, and expresses her immense gratitude to God in a prayer of thanksgiving. In the course of this prayer, she makes a statement:

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“even the barren gives birth to seven...” (1 Sam. 2:5)

In the Bible record, six barren women are specifically mentioned. Each of them ultimately gave birth, and their sons were all significant in the plan of God, as He carried out His objective of deliverance. The names of these sons echo through the history of men, as it is unfolded in the Bible. If we consider these women and their children, we note that:

SARAH	- gave birth to Isaac
RACHEL	- gave birth to Joseph
HANNAH	- gave birth to Samuel
MANOAH'S WIFE	- gave birth to Samson
ELIZABETH	- gave birth to John the Baptist

The above list includes five barren women. We said that six barren women were noted in the Bible record:

REBEKAH	- gave birth to twins, Jacob and Esau
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Seven significant individuals in the history of God's people were born by six barren women. Once again, God's word provides its own proof of Divine authorship, if we but look for it with an open mind to see the wonders in God's Word.

It is also interesting to note that Hannah gave birth to Samuel whom she dedicated to God, but that she went on to have 5 more children after Samuel (2Sam 2:21) five is a number representing the grace of God. So Hannah's prayer for a child, because of her faith, was answered by her having a complete family. Great indeed is the love and mercy of God!

A Prayer is Answered (Luke 1)

It was about the year 6 or 7 B.C. when Zacharias, who was a priest, was officiating in the temple in Jerusalem. He was burning incense at the altar during the evening prayer. No sooner was the incense sprinkled on the hot coals in his censor, than there appeared a glorious angel of the Lord, as though coming from the Holy of Holies, from the Lord's right hand. Zacharias was mystified and very fearful, but immediately the angel reassured him with a remarkable message:

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“But the angel said to him, do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife, Elizabeth, will bare you a son, and you will give him the name, John.” Luke 1:13

The Silence Broken

True to the promise given in Malachi, God was presenting the sign that would herald the birth of the Messiah. The angel describes the type of person that John will be, and then, in verses 16 and 17 he confirms the sign:

“and he will turn back many of the sons of Israel to their God. And it is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn back the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous; so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” Luke 1:16, 17

The Angel Gabriel

Zacharias, as a devout and righteous priest, would undoubtedly have been familiar with the testaments, and, at this announcement, he would surely have thought of that very significant promise in Malachi and realized what this announcement meant. He then questioned the identity of the angel, who replies that he is:

“...Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God; and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.”

Upon hearing the angel’s name, would Zacharias’ thoughts have raced back in time to the days of Daniel and his prophecy?

If we turn back to this prophecy in Daniel as the name of Gabriel echoes up through history it will once again provide us with astounding proof of the word of God, that should set the mood as we embark upon a marvellous study of the Life of Jesus Christ.

In chapter 9 of the book of Daniel, he records that he was speaking and praying and confessing his sins, and the sins of the people of Israel, before the Lord God. He was seeking understanding regarding the future of God’s people as they lived in bondage in Babylon. An angel, who identifies himself as Gabriel, suddenly stands before him in response to his prayers. In verse 24, the Angel states:

“70 weeks have been decreed for your people and your Holy City, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy place.” Daniel 9:24

He then defines the beginning of this time period and specifically relates it to the Messiah. (Daniel 9:25, 26) The following quote is taken from Nelson’s Bible Encyclopedia:

‘Daniel predicts the Messiah will redeem his people after 70 sets of 7 years (“weeks”), beginning with Nehemiah’s return to Jerusalem in 440 B.C. (Daniel 9:24). The Messiah is to be “cut off” at the end of 69 sets of sevens (Daniel 9:25, 26), or after 483 years starting with the proclamation of Artaxerxes, in 444 B.C. This turns out to be the very week that Jesus was crucified, taking into account all the necessary calculations.’

The Birth of John the Baptist

In verse 18 of chapter 1 of Luke, Zacharias questioned the announcement of the angel, declaring his age and his wife’s continued barrenness because of age. As a result he was struck dumb and told that he would be unable to speak until after the birth, because he did not immediately believe. His being struck dumb would also be a sign both to himself and those who would be present at the naming of his son such that they marvelled at what took place. (Luke 1:63-64)

The record in Chapter 1 of Luke, beginning at verse 57, confirms that on the eighth day after the birth of his son, Zacharias, who had been unable to speak since that announcement, was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied. Verses 68-79 provide a wonderful declaration of God’s remembrance of His promise and the seed of the house of David through whom this promise would be fulfilled. (Jesus). Zacharias states that his own son John will go forward before the Lord to prepare the way. Luke concludes this record regarding John with the simple statement, in verse 80:

“and the child continued to grow, and to become strong in spirit, and he lived in the deserts until the day of his public appearance to Israel.”

And so it was, until years later, when John the Baptist bursts upon the scene just prior to the beginning of Christ’s ministry, preparing the way for Him.

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LESSON FOR US

The Lord does answer the prayers of those who endeavour to walk in the commandments and requirements of His way. Faithful followers, who diligently search His word, will find the way enlightened and God will address their needs, in relationship to salvation.

“For the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose ‘heart is completely His...” 2

Chronicles 16:9

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The Herald of a King (Part 2)

Bringing Israel to Repentance

This great work of pronouncing the need for repentance was to make John a herald of the Messiah. As Elijah, the prophet, ran before the chariot of the King, Ahab, (1 Kings 18:46), so John would go before the Messiah in the spirit and power of Elias. (Elias is the Greek form of the name Elijah.) Without any preliminaries, like Elijah the Tishbite, the Scriptures suddenly and dramatically present John on the scene. Mark's Gospel graphically demonstrates this, we read:

“The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the son of God. As it is written in Isaiah, ‘Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make ready, the way of the Lord, make His paths straight.’ John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. And John was clothed with camel’s hair, and wore a leather belt around his waist, and his diet was locusts and wild honey. And he was preaching, and saying, ‘After me one is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals.’” Mark 1:1-7

A Word Study

References to this man throughout the New Testament refer to him as John the Baptist. This title was because in his preaching to the children of Israel, who had lived in the darkness of sin for 400 years, he insisted upon baptism as a symbol of repentance.

This provides two significant echoes from the Old Testament. Passing through waters was consistently a symbol of God's children being drawn out of the heathen nations around them. For example we can think back to the occasion when Moses brought the children of Israel out of Egypt and by the power of God they passed through the waters of the Red Sea. (This is explored in more detail in the series of studies about Genesis) Joshua led the next generation of the children of Israel, out of the wilderness,

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into the land of promise, by passing through the waters of the River Jordan. These are examples of the foreshadowing of being drawn out or crossing over, through water. Now circumcision of the Jews was required as a symbol of their covenant relationship with God. Similarly, passing through the waters of baptism was required as a symbolic act by John, who of course did not instigate this of his own volition, but carried out the act of baptism by the word of God. Christ Himself reaffirmed this principle in His ministry, when He stated that unless one is born again of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God (John 3:3-5).

Throughout their ministries, the Apostles confirmed this need for baptism into the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Baptism is symbolic of repentance, forgiveness and re-birth, through the ministry, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. The act of baptism throughout the New Testament is a confirmation of understanding and the desire for forgiveness, on the part of one who realises what Christ's sacrifice means.

If we look in a Strong's concordance, the only word for "baptise", throughout the New Testament, is the Greek word "baptizo" (Strong's 907). In the Greek dictionary we find that this word means: "to make whelmed, i.e., fully wet." It further goes on to say that this is used only in the New Testament and relates to the ceremonial ablution, especially of the ordinance of Christian baptism.

John Fulfills His Role

In due time, John's stern, authoritative message swept through the nation, and he was well received by the people, with crowds flocking to him, accepting his call to repentance and return to the precepts of God. John the Baptist had by his own ministry made ready the way of the Lord, and the time had come for him to complete his role as herald, and to introduce Jesus. His dramatic statement, before the throngs that followed him, is recorded in John 1:29 where John declares:

"Behold the Lamb of God."

This statement encompassed all the divine revelation that preceded the birth of Christ. John's work was then done and his decline began.

His Death

In his proclamation of a return to the ways of the Lord, John had made enemies, especially among the leadership of Israel. Prominent among these enemies was Herod

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the Tetrarch, whom John condemned publicly for marrying Herodias, the wife of Herod's brother Philip. (Matt. 14:3). The wife plotted John's death because of this, and eventually when John was imprisoned, she succeeded in tricking Herod into having John beheaded.

Relationship to Elijah

The Jews were certainly aware of the prophecy regarding the spirit of Elijah heralding the birth of the Messiah. In the early days of his preaching, they sent Priests and Levites from Jerusalem to question John's identity, asking directly: "Are you Elijah?" (John 1:21) Later the disciples of Jesus questioned Him regarding the coming of Elijah (Matt. 17:10). In reply Jesus clearly stated that Elijah had already come, and the disciples recognized Jesus' reference to John the Baptist. (Matt. 17:12, 13.)

If we study the record of Elijah the Prophet in the Old Testament, we see the striking similarities that verify that John's life provided an unquestionable pattern of the work of this mighty prophet, and that he was, indeed, the Herald of the King. In the same manner as John, Elijah, the Tishbite, appears suddenly and dramatically in the record of the Kings of Israel. Even his appearance foreshadows John the Baptist for we read:

“and they answered him, “he was a hairy man with a leather girdle bound about his loins”. And he said, it is Elijah the Tishbite.” 2 Kings 1:8

Elijah's work emphasised that unconditional loyalties to God that were required of the nation of Israel. He was opposed to the accepted laxity of standards in his days. His views were in conflict with those of King Ahab, who, contrary to Jewish law had married Jezebel, daughter of the King of Tyre who was an idolater. Ahab was strongly influenced by her and so, saw no harm in accepting her ways and her religion. It was this same Jezebel who plotted against the life of Elijah, forcing him to flee for his life.

It was Elijah's responsibility to announce the appointment of a King over Israel. (1 Kings 19:15). When Elijah's work was finished, he gave way to the prophet Elisha, a prophet whose life and work has been compared to that of the ministry of Jesus. Elisha's name speaks of grace and means, "Jehovah my Saviour".

Elisha was a prince of the court. His ministry was marked by miraculous works as he endeavoured to teach and to win the people over to the way of God. He was a messenger of mercy, being gentle and sympathetic. So, with Elijah, and in his

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eventual giving way to Elisha , we see the foreshadow of John the Baptist, who gave way to the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ.

A House that is Ready

John the Baptist had certainly performed his role and the stage was set and ready for the coming of Jesus. But sadly, as in previous times throughout their history, few turned back wholeheartedly to God. The children of Israel at the time of Jesus, rejected the light that shone upon them. They rejected the Son of God, the sacrificial Lamb that the Father, Himself, had provided. (a promise made to Abraham) Thus, the people of Israel slipped back into their old ways and eventually entered another period of darkness and a long time of dispersal from their land.

Jesus, himself, used these events as an example in a parable in relationship to his position as master of his Father's house. (Luke 11: 24-26) He speaks of a house, swept and tidy, ready for its new occupant. But when the rightful owner came to his own, his own received him not. So the last state of that house became worse than the first, and consequently, as expressed in the last words of the book of the Prophet Malachi (Ch. 4:6), the land was smitten with a curse which lasted for nearly 2,000 years, until once again, due only to the faithfulness of God's promises, they became a nation. This occurred in 1948, as God began drawing back His people out of the nations into which they had been dispersed, following the destruction of the temple by Rome in A.D. 70.

In our generation, we have been privileged to witness the next stage in God's plan, as we too, prepare for the coming of a King – the return of the Lord Jesus.

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LESSON FOR US

As a Nazarite, dedicated to God from the womb, John kept himself from the ways of the world, awaiting his time to proclaim the coming of the King. He was committed to following the ways of God. We too, should endeavour to resist the grip of worldly influence as we await our Redeemer. In our efforts to do this, we can gain strength through prayerfully seeking out the message of God's word and being determined to put its lessons into practice in our lives.

“This I say, therefore, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walked, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart;” Ephesians 4:17, 18.

Write down any questions that you may have about this section or that you have thought of whilst reading the various passages mentioned so that you will remember them. It might help to discuss them with the person helping you go through this series of studies.

Test Yourself

1. What was significant about the birth of John?
2. Who was the ministry of John the Baptist?
3. What was the significance of John baptising people?
4. Describe some of the similarities between the work and life of Elijah and that of John the Baptist

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The Birth of a King (Part 1)

At the time of Jesus' birth, Divine Providence and prophecy had merged to make circumstances ideal for the presentation of the "Good News" from God. Rome had conquered the world. Roman law brought about peace, and well-made roads made travel possible. Greek culture and language had made their impact, and translation of the Hebrew Scripture into Greek gave a wider audience for the Word of God.

With the conditions of that time, those who were watching and waiting in faith and hope would discern the hand of God. In the place required, and according to the time prophesied, Jesus was born, as Son of David and Son of God, the future King of Israel and of the whole world.

The Announcement

Three months before the birth of John the Baptist, to Elizabeth, (Luke 1:26), important events were taking place in Nazareth of Galilee, in the home of a young virgin girl related to Elizabeth. Mary belonged to the house of David and was betrothed to Joseph, a carpenter, who was also of the house of David. The Angel Gabriel came to her home and announced to Mary the wonderful privilege that was to be granted to her. She was to become mother to the heir of David's throne, the Son of God. Gabriel began the announcement with the words: "**Hail, favoured one! The Lord is with you.**" (Luke 1:28).

A Sharp Contrast

The word, "hail", is literally "rejoice". She is to be filled with joy in the favour that she has found with God and in the privilege of this birth. If we compare this with the first announcement regarding birth recorded in the Old Testament we note that as a result of sin, Eve was told:

"...I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, in pain you shall bring forth children." Gen. 3:16

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Now, at last, through the seed of this woman Mary, the way was to be opened to take away the dreadful effects of the sin in Eden. This rejoicing in the birth of Jesus would foreshadow the great rejoicing that will take place throughout the world as a result of the ministry of Jesus and his death and resurrection. By His great sacrifice Jesus triumphed over sin. Jesus was completely free from sin and so undeserving of death.

Mary's Reaction

Mary was initially frightened at the appearance of the Angel and his greeting, but was quickly reassured that she was not to be afraid "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God". He told her that she would conceive and bear a son, whom she must name "Jesus".

A Bible Echo

The Bible echoes relating to the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are to a great extent beyond our ability to address in this short study. The records of the Old Testament, almost all point forward toward God's redeeming work of grace, which alone could provide redemption to His creation in spite of sin. So many things in the records foreshadow His Son, Jesus Christ, in whom, and through whom, God's work of salvation would be culminated. Now in this announcement to Mary, Gabriel provides her with a brief, but profound, description of this child.

"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." Luke 1: 32, 33

Consider the thoughts that must have been racing through Mary's mind at that moment, as these words echoed the prophecy of Isaiah (9:7), many centuries before when God had promised just such a child. As you read the words of this prophecy, let the wonderful announcement of this birth to Mary encourage you as you remember and witness God's faithfulness to His promises.

"For a child will be born to us, a Son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it

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with justice and righteousness from then on and forever more. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will accomplish this.” Isaiah 9:6-7

Consider the similarity in wording that must have been uppermost in Mary’s mind as she quickly submitted to the will of God, and said: **“...Be it done to me according to your word. ...”** Luke 1:38

However Mary asks “how this can be?” since she is a virgin. The angel’s response and his choice of words demonstrate the foreshadowing in God’s activities and association with His people throughout the ages. Faithful followers, familiar with His word, would quickly understand what was said because of what had gone on before. The angel answers (verse 35):

“...The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the Holy offspring shall be called the Son of God.”

The use of the word “overshadow” would clearly explain to this girl that she would conceive as a result of the action of God’s Holy Spirit. The child she was to carry would be entirely conceived through the power of God. Her knowledge of God’s word would eliminate the need for any further clarification. Just as we look for echoes in the Scriptures, those in Jesus’ time, who were watching and waiting, would immediately recognize echoes in the wonderful events that were beginning to happen.

This “overshadowing” is the same action of the Holy Spirit that was described when the cloud abode on the tent of the congregation as recorded in Exodus chapter 40, verse 34:

“Then the cloud covered the tent of the meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.”

This cloud signified the presence of God in the midst of the people throughout their journeys in the wilderness. Now this overshadowing of Mary would signify the presence and activity of God in the conception of His Son.

The tent of the congregation in the wilderness was the meeting place between God and man. Now, in the child conceived by Mary, was another and better meeting place between God and man. Just as the cloud manifested the presence of God in the tent, His Son would be a manifestation of Him and all His power.

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The record in Matthew provides us with additional detail in regard to the announcement of the birth of Jesus. In this case, the emphasis is on the announcement to Joseph, Mary's betrothed. Matthew, chapter 1, verses 18 and 19, shows that Joseph was facing a perplexing problem. Now, verse 18 discreetly records that she was found to be pregnant before they had "come together" and in verse 19, Joseph is described as her husband. This is not a contradiction, as among the Jews, betrothal was considered to be a legal tie between man and woman. From the moment of betrothal, or as we would call it, engagement, they were regarded as if they were married, even though the marriage had not yet been consummated. The betrothal could not be dissolved except by divorce. Thus the fact that Mary was pregnant would brand her as an adulteress.

We read in verse 19, that Joseph was a righteous man, who did not want to publicly disgrace her, so he proposed to quietly dissolve the union. He had come to this decision, but had not yet acted upon it, when an angel came to him in a dream, advising him that his betrothed had conceived miraculously through the power, or Holy Spirit, of God. The next statement of the angel recorded in verse 21, leaves no doubt regarding the purpose for this conception. It stands today as an exciting expression of God's purpose to each one of us, who reads this record in faith.

"And she shall bear a son. And you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins."

Matthew, in his record, then provides us with an unmistakable Bible echo:

"Now all this took place that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bear a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which translated means, God with us." Matt: 1: 22-23,

A Bible reference will immediately take you back to Isaiah where we read:

"Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel". Isa 7:14

In referring to this promised son as Immanuel, (God with us), God is clearly identifying Him as His Son. This miraculous birth will signify that Jesus will manifest God's presence, and that He will be endowed with all His Father's attributes and authority, even though He is also the Son of Man.

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A much earlier, Joseph, as a type, or foreshadow of Jesus, demonstrated this relationship. Although a son of Israel, he was given all authority in Egypt, and was responsible only to Pharaoh. In all respects, he manifested Pharaoh in relationship to the people of Egypt. Inasmuch as the various names, or titles of God, are all representative of aspects of His association with His people, these same names are sometimes applied to Jesus, especially in Messianic prophecies. As “Immanuel”, Jesus is second only to His Father in authority and position. The Apostle John bears witness to this:

“He who has received His witness has set His seal to this that God is true. For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He gives the Spirit without measure. The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on Him.” John 3:33-36

Later in this same Gospel, in chapter 5, John states:

“For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; And He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man.”

And yet, even though He was endowed with all this authority, and was, indeed, a manifestation of His Father’s presence on earth, Jesus acknowledged that He was still subject to the authority and power of His Father.

We need look no further than this same chapter in John and read Jesus’ words:

“I can of myself do nothing...” John 5:30
“Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel.” John 5:19

Coming back to the record regarding Joseph in Matthew chapter 1, we see his faith translated into action, as Matthew records that Joseph arose from his sleep and did as the angel commanded him, and took Mary as his wife. The angel’s words in the announcements to Mary and to Joseph in these two accounts in Luke and Matthew combine to provide clear statements about Jesus. They describe Jesus as:

1. The Saviour from sin (Matt. 1:21)
2. Truly man (Luke 1:31,32)
3. Son of God (Luke 1:31,32)
4. King of Israel (Luke 1:31,32)

Heritage of a King - The Throne of Israel

Genealogies of Jesus Christ are listed in Matthew 1:1-17 and Luke 3:23-38. The child born to Mary was to be the son promised to David. But he was also to be the seed promised to Abraham. At the time of Jesus' birth, the descendants of David were but few in number. This was in a generation which was to see the running out of time in regard to the great 70 weeks' prophecy of Daniel 9. Mary was of the line of David and she was betrothed to Joseph, one who stood in direct line to the throne of David.

In Matthew, the genealogy given of Jesus is that of the kingly line. He is therefore shown to be the legal inheritor of the promises made to both Abraham and David because the inheritance belonged by descent to Joseph. As the son of Mary, through her marriage to Joseph, Jesus was regarded as the first born of her husband. Thus Jesus held the legal right of Joseph to the inheritance. But as Mary's son, Jesus was also biologically and directly descended from Abraham and David, as shown in Luke. In every way, Jesus was the promised seed - "the seed of Abraham" - and "the seed of David" and thus was "Heir to the throne".

In these two records of Luke and Matthew, the great promise of God to David became a living reality. David must have surely been perplexed by what appeared at first sight to be an inherent contradiction in the promise made to him:

“When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom... I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son.” 2 Samuel 7:12-14

These sections of the Gospel record resolve this in a way that David could hardly have foreseen. The genealogy established descent from David, but the circumstances of His birth show that the Messiah is, quite literally, the Son of God.

The miraculous birth of Jesus from a virgin was absolutely necessary. He had to have one human parent; otherwise He would not have been able to share our humanity, share our trials and share our feelings. But Jesus could appreciate all these things,

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because through His mother, He inherited our weak human nature. Consequently, as the New Testament says:

“For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.” Hebrews 4:15

Without one human parent He would never have known what temptation was. But on the other hand, if Jesus had two human parents, He could never have conquered every temptation. The last three words of the Hebrews 4:15 declare that Jesus did indeed conquer all temptations. Jesus had to be the Son of God in order to inherit enough strength to overcome sin.

Through the two genealogies recorded in the Gospels, Jesus’ claim to the throne of David is established. Thus as we have seen in this study so far, Matthew’s Gospel establishes the legal position of Jesus through Joseph and Luke’s Gospel establishes His natural position through Mary.

LESSON FOR US

As you read of, and remember, the announcement of the birth of Jesus Christ in the Gospel records, recognizing all the signs and foreshadows that were brought together in His birth, think of His name, signifying what His birth means to you as an individual.

JESUS: Yahweh is salvation
CHRIST: The anointed One
IMMANUEL: God with us

Only in Jesus, the anointed one of God, is to be found the salvation of God. Through Him, God is manifested, and is with us.

The Coming of the King Study Section 2

The Birth of a King (Part 2)

Matthew, (chapter 1), and Luke, (chapter 1:26-37; and chapter 2:1-30) are the two Gospel writers who provide details related to the birth of Christ. It is Luke who puts the birth of Jesus into a world perspective:

“Now it came about in those days, that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth.” Luke 2:1

This was actually part of a sequence of censuses taken every 14 years in the Roman provinces. Luke then adds a note which would cast doubt on his creditability from those who challenge the authenticity of the Bible, if his statement were not true, for he says, in verse 2: **“This was the first census taken while Quirinius was Governor of Syria.”**

Historical Challenge

Many modern critics have sought to challenge Luke on this ground, saying that the taxing which Luke referred to took place ten years later in A.D. 6, in order to correspond with Quirinius’ position as Governor. However, subsequent discovery has proven the critics to be wrong and Luke to be correct. Quirinius (Cyrenius, in some translations), also held the position of Governor of Syria in B.C. 5 and 4, when he began his census. (See story of the Bible, Volume 8, pages 21 and 22 and the work of historical researcher Sir. William Ramsey).

Bethlehem

It was necessary for all individuals to return to their own city to register for this census. So Luke records that Joseph went up from Nazareth of Galilee to Judea into Bethlehem, the city of David. This was, of course, because he was of the house and family of David. Thus in an apparently natural manner, God was shaping events according to His will. Caesar Augustus wanted to gather in the fruits of the vast Empire won by Rome’s victorious legions. It would never have occurred to Caesar that because of his actions the birth of the destined King of the World would occur in exactly the manner stated by God through His Prophets.

When Joseph took his pregnant wife Mary on this journey south to Bethlehem, on the orders of a pagan Gentile ruler, prophecy was being fulfilled for we read:

The Coming of the King Study Section 2

“But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you one will go forth for Me to be a ruler in Israel...”

Micah 5:2

We all know that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. This is an established fact. Even the arch enemies of the Christian faith in Israel, the Pharisees and Sadducees, never denied it. But the faithful readers of God’s word must recognize how unlikely it was for that prophecy to have been fulfilled by mere chance. Bethlehem was, as the prophecy mentioned, a very small place. Just consider the odds against Micah predicting hundreds of years in advance that the future King of Israel, King of the World, would be born in the remote town of Bethlehem. Only the power and inspiration of God would enable Micah to prophesy with such pin-point accuracy.

No Room

Mary and Joseph arrived in this little city, which was overflowing with travelers, at a time when she was ready to give birth. So we read that the Son of God was born in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn. This humble birth was to be the beginning for this child who was destined to be the King of the Earth. Can we see in this, a foreshadow of a condition that has existed from that day forward until our own time? In this troubled, busy, modern world, the majority of people have no room in their hearts for the Son of God.

News of Great Joy

As we follow the narrative in Luke 2:8-20, we read of the announcement of this breathtaking event to the shepherds who were tending their flocks that night. Suddenly the dark night was illuminated by the Divine Glory (verse 9). We cannot miss the obvious Bible echo here when Jesus the light of the world, as the light of God Word, dispels the darkness of night (Genesis 1). The shepherds are naturally frightened, but the Angel reassures them with the announcement that what was happening on that night would be of world-wide benefit:

“...For behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people;” Luke 2:10

The Coming of the King Study Section 2

The Gospel Message (The Good News)

Among the many prophecies regarding the birth of a Saviour, there are four that are particularly relevant to this occasion, as the Angel made this announcement.

1. Isaiah (9:6, 7) had prophesied of the ‘Son born’, the ‘Child given’, who would one day rule the world.
2. Psalm 2 said the ‘Son born’ would be God’s Son - the ‘anointed’, or ‘Christ’ (verses 2, 6 and 7).
3. Psalm 110 had called Him ‘Lord’, which means ruler or master (verse 1).
4. All this was in keeping with God’s intention to reveal Himself as ‘just’ and as a ‘Saviour’ (Isaiah 45:21).

These prophecies were being fulfilled that very night and would be manifested in Jesus Christ. So the Angel, in his announcement, pulls these threads together saying:

“for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the lord”. Luke 2:11

Praising God

Then, just as suddenly as the darkness of the night had shone with the Angelic presence, a vast choir of Angels appeared singing **“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased”**. Luke 2:14

The rendering of this verse has been taken from the American Revised Standard Version, which is closer to the original text than the King James Version, which speaks of ‘peace on earth and goodwill toward men’. We note that the ‘peace on earth’ proclaimed by the Angels is among men **with whom God is pleased**.

LESSONS FOR US

In the birth of Christ, we see the fulfilment of many prophecies pointing forward to the time when God would provide the perfect Sacrificial Lamb for sin - His own Son. According to the wisdom of God, prophecy is provided for our benefit. Consider just two reasons:

The Coming of the King Study Section 2

1. When we witness the fulfilment of prophecy, we are provided with solid grounds on which we can rest our faith in all of God's Word. When history provides us with evidence of a fulfilled prophecy, we can have total confidence in prophecies regarding the future. e.g., the birth of Jesus means that we can confidently believe promises of His future return to this earth.
2. The fulfilment of these prophecies becomes a beacon for each one of us by providing reassurance that God is in control. They generate the excitement of knowing that we are getting closer to the GREAT DAY OF THE LORD as we see their fulfilment. e.g., 1948 saw the restoration of Israel as a nation, which was a unique event in world history.

As we study God's Word, the recognition of these prophecies can stimulate our desire to be in a state of readiness and watchfulness, just as the faithful ones anticipated the birth of the Saviour:

“Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.” Luke 21:36

To continue building upon this study, your own personal study of the Life of Christ, as revealed in the Gospels, will be greatly helped by using Bible study aids, such as concordances, and especially references to associated Bible records. Use of these can help bring alive the redeeming work that was, and will be, accomplished in the Son of God

Test Yourself

- 1) What words did the Angel Gabriel say by way of introduction to Mary and what was the significance of this greeting?
- 2) In what was Jesus both 'Son of God' and 'Son of Man'?
- 3) Give three prophecies that were fulfilled by the conception and the birth of Jesus.
- 4) What was significant about the angelic announcement to the shepherds at the birth of Jesus Christ?