

## The Son Before Bethlehem

Selected Scriptures

Last year, in our lead up to Christmas, we explored supernatural encounters that Zachariah, Mary, Joseph and the Shepherds. Each encounter the angel had to say 'fear not', because their appearance was a shock. God uses various ways to get His message across. Sometimes shocking. Sometimes as quiet as a gentle breeze or deep as the ocean. It's all recorded and completed in the Bible. There is one message that catches people's attention more than all others. God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son. That is the message of Christmas and Easter. It's the story of the birth and the story of the sacrificial death of Jesus, Son of God. We know the who, where, and when'...Bethlehem, the night Mary gave birth to Jesus. We find ways to refresh the 'how'...how God set up the circumstance for the human birth of His Son (fully God and fully man). We often end with the why. Why would God do something so risky and bold with His Son. The simple answer is for love. It fulfills God's promise of a rescuing king in a way that reveals His righteousness and mercy. The birth of Jesus is so humble. Yet the announcement is so extravagant. How many times have you heard of an angel choir. What we often miss is

that those angels singing - had been serving for the Son a long time already. Who is this little child? Who was He before Bethlehem? What did He give up, for this rescue plan? Who was the Son of God before the miraculous conception of Mary. Before the angel announced His name. Before the scandal of an unwed pregnancy and the journey to Bethlehem for the Roman census. And before the birth in an animal feeder outside 'for there was no room'. In a sense, this is the prequel to Bethlehem. The origins of our Savior. The Son before the baby Jesus.

### Prayer

This sermon touches on the doctrines we've been discussion in our Adult fellowship time – especially about God, the Son...but also in relationship to God, the Father. We begin by looking at what the Bible says about the origins of Jesus, Son of God...**before Creation.**

<sup>5</sup> *And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with **the glory I had with you before the world began.***<sup>24</sup> *"Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me **because you loved me before the creation of the world.*** Jn 17:5,24

Jesus was the **beloved Son in glory** before Creation. If our picture of God is limited to Almighty ruler, then He needs a creation to rule in order to be who He is. He turns out to be insufficient...He needs us. Does that make people love Him? Hitler called God, the Almighty. You may respect a police officer to keep traffic at safe speeds. And even if he lets you off with a warning, you are thankful but not in love.

Yet what is the first commandment of God? Love is the relationship the matters to God. And true love trusts and obeys. When Jesus prayed that prayer, He was about to lay down His life for us, in order to carry out the Father's plan to share His love.

Speaking of His disciples, Jesus prayed, *I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.* Jn 17:26

The only way to really convey the extent of God's love...is for Him to be present in us. Jesus is drawing from an eternity of receiving the Father's love and glory. When Jesus teaches us to pray to God as 'Father', Jesus is drawing us into a family-like love relationship He has shared for eons. Do we take it for granted? Do we just throw up prayers...assuming God needs them to be special? God did not

need to make the universe to be complete. So why did speak it into existence? And how is the Son involved in creation?

*The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.*

<sup>16</sup> *For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created **through him and for him.*** <sup>17</sup> *He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*

<sup>19</sup> *For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him* Col 1:15-17, 19

All God's fullness dwelt in the Son, even when He appeared as Jesus, Son of man. The phrase 'firstborn of creation' is used in the sense of Christ's supremacy and sovereignty over all things visible and invisible.

Verse 18, I could have left in, emphasizes that He is also the head and source of the church.

We know for sure that without the Son, there is no creation and no reason to make it. It is by the Word of the Son, that we and this whole universe exist right now: every molecule, every second.

<sup>2</sup> *but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.* <sup>3</sup> *The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being,*

***sustaining all things by his powerful word.*** Heb 1:2-3

The Son sustaining the universe by His Word and He is the Word that reveals God's truth for humanity.

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was with God in the beginning. <sup>3</sup> Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. <sup>4</sup> In him was **life**, and that life was the **light** of all mankind. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.* Jn 1:1-5

Jesus declared, *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."* Jn 8:12

Jesus began His ministry with 'repent and believe' the kingdom of God is near. And at the end He revealed His mission to pay the ransom for our sins and then rise again. Jesus revealed that it is by God's grace that we are saved, through faith. In trying to see the Son before the manger, it's hard not to keep peaking at the Son, our Savior.

I found a great little reading that refocuses us on the Son's involvement in creation and the reason He did it.

**Read Jesus in Genesis, pg9-11, 13**

God created the universe for and through the Son, as an extension of

His love and glory. **The Creation is a love story.**

Many believe in a Creator and elevate His creation instead. What is missing is the understanding that God has always been Father, Son and Holy Spirit – complete and filled with love. Our existence is an opportunity to know God and share His love...not make up our own gods.

After creation, we have God's story in the OT. Our quest to find the Son in the OT begins with Scriptures written after His death and resurrection. Isn't that backwards? Not really. Ever tried Where's Waldo? If you didn't have a picture of Waldo before you began looking, you'd never find him. Even the brightest Rabbis struggled to believe Jesus was the promised Savior. Even though they knew He fulfilled prophecy. Why? They had the wrong picture in their head. They weren't looking for the sacrificial lamb of God. The disciples were given the Holy Spirit after Jesus left, so their minds would be quickened to understand God saving plan in a deeper way. So now we can read the gospels and letters of the NT for a clear picture of Jesus. And see the OT in light of God's finished work on the cross and the empty tomb. And how everything is leading to Jesus' return.

After His resurrection, Jesus (in disguise) met a couple sad disciples beginning to doubt the Savior had come. *How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter His glory?* (Lk 24:25) And He began to teach them what the OT said about Him. I'd go right to Isaiah 53 about the servant who paid for the sins of the people through his suffering. Jesus had a whole afternoon to share the truth.

For centuries, Christians have interpreted Genesis 3:15 as the first hint of God's saving plan through Jesus. Adam and Eve brought sin into the world so God announced His punishment...starting with the deceiving serpent, Satan. He promised that the serpents head would be bruised – defeated by someone in the line of Eve. And so, the Son of God's birth through the virgin Mary is seen as the fulfillment. We don't know exactly what Jesus said that afternoon as He taught Cleopas and his friend (Lk 24:25-27). But their hearts were burning...on fire with the truth. And that's my hope for us today. Our **hearts burning** – sparking that inner desire to know God and share His love this Christmas.

Jesus made several shocking statements to His opponents to give

them an idea of who they were up against. One really hit the roof to stir our imagination. The Jewish authorities were trying to label Jesus publically as demon possessed and not pure Jew (Samaritan). Jesus points out that by dishonoring Him, they are dishonoring His Father. And that if anyone keeps His word, they will never see death. They jumped on that saying, *"Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died?"*

Eventually Jesus says, *"Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad."* So the Jews said to him, *"You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham? Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am (Jn 8:48-59)." I AM.* That's the same title God gave Himself to Moses at the burning bush. Wow. Jesus claims the title reserved for Yahweh. He claims a relationship with Abraham...while he walked the earth and after he died. Did the Son of God have a bodily form when they talked? What form did the Son take when He related to God's children back then and in the afterlife?

Theophanies are OT events when God seems to appear and talk to people. Now you might point out that God told Moses no one can see Him face to face and live (Ex 33:20). And the Apostle John states something similar (Jn 1:15-18, 1

Jn 4:12). Yet Jacob thought he wrestled with God and received a blessing from Him (Gen 32:30). Moses apparently spoke with God face to face often...as speaking to a friend (Ex 33:11). What's going on here? When Moses asked to see the glory of the Lord - there were limits. Seeing God's fullness (Jn 1:16) face to face would evaporate us. But God in His grace made His presence available in a form that shielded them from His frontal glory. Could it be the Son in body before Bethlehem? As a rule, when 'the' angel of the LORD (Yahweh) appears with a message and states things in a way that the authority rests on him...it's a Theophany. It's recorded in Gen 16:7-13, when Hagar fled from Sarai – pregnant with Abram's child. She believed she had seen God. In Gen 18, we have the three visitors...and the LORD tells Abraham that his barren and old wife will have a son in a year's time. In Gen 22:15-18, THE angel calls to Abraham from heaven a second time and says, I swear by myself. And He blesses Abraham - that he will have descendants as numerous as the stars, that He will give them a land and that all nations will be blessed 'because you obeyed me' (did not hold back his only legitimate son). It doesn't take a theologian to figure that the phrase 'The angel of the Lord' can mean God. The next is Exodus 3:2-6, where the

angel of the LORD appears to Moses in the flames of fire, within the burning bush.

Now I'm going to stretch things a little further. Do you remember a story about God's servants being protected from flames of fire by someone, within a burning furnace? Pagan king Nebuchadnezzar claimed he saw a fourth person...like a son of the gods (Dan 3:25). Hmmm.

Then there's Joshua's encounter with the commander of the Army of God (Josh 5:13-6:2) before the Jericho was defeated. In another instance, the Angel spoke to a whole group of Israelites declaring the punishment they were to receive for not staying true to the covenant He made with them after their rescue from Egypt and entry into the Promised Land (Judges 2:1-5). There's Judges 6:11-23 (Gideon) and finally, in Zechariah the prophet's vision where the angel of the LORD rebukes Satan and affirms Joshua the high priest (Zech 3:1-10).

Where am I leading with all this? I'm trying to demonstrate the extent God has gone to reach down to us. All by His grace. When we hear about Jesus leaving His former glory – it is no small thing. When we are asked to imitate the Son in humility – it is a great honor to identify with Him.

**Read Phil 2:1-8**