

The Birth of Christ Announced - Part 1

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[0:00] Luke chapter 1 and today marks the beginning of the Advent season as the church or some church traditions observe the Christian calendar that marks our key important aspects of our Christian faith.

To the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Advent means the coming, right? The arrival of our Lord Jesus Christ with the anticipation that not only has He once come but He's coming again.

So we do not only think about the fact that Christ came in history. We also think about the fact that He will come again. And so we find ourselves in Advent season and I thought it appropriate to have us think on Advent, the Advent of Christ, the birth of Christ.

And so for the next two weeks today and next week Lord willing, we'll look at this passage in Luke chapter 1 where the angel Gabriel announces the birth of our Savior.

And we'll consider some themes in this passage to just help our hearts respond accordingly even as we think of the season we find ourselves in.

[1:25] So Luke chapter 1 and we read from verse 26. We're supposed to read all the way to verse 38 but, and we will, but we won't get to the end of this passage today which is why we have two weeks.

Luke chapter 1 verse 26. Let's hear the word of the Lord. In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledge to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David.

The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, Greetings, you who are highly favored. The Lord is with you. Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.

But the angel said to her, Do not be afraid, Mary. You have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.

The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever. His kingdom will never end. How will this be? Mary asked the angel, since I'm a virgin.

[2:33] The angel answered, The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the only one to be born will be called the Son of God.

Even Elizabeth, your relative, is going to have a child in an old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in a sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail.

I am the Lord's servant, Mary answered. May your word to me be fulfilled. Then the angel left her. This is the word of the Lord. Let's pray and ask God's blessing on our time in the Scriptures.

Father, we thank you for your word opened now, and we ask, Lord, that you would grant us insight, Lord. We pray that you would help us, Lord, to pay attention, Lord, and to focus, O God, to the truth of Scripture.

We pray that you open our hearts, that we would not only hear your word, but also receive your word, Lord. And we ask, O God, that you would help us to do what your word teaches. So, Father, we ask your blessing now, these few moments as we spend in Holy Scripture.

- [3 : 38] Would you speak to us these mercies? We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. It is believed that the purpose behind starting a story with the familiar phrase, once upon a time, is to immediately set a magical and fantastical tone, signal or signaling a departure from reality.

In fact, one definition says, it is to establish a sense of comfort and anticipation for the listener. The classic opening cues, the audience to expect a story with a fairy tale quality, often with predictable structure, and can be a signal for children to become even more engaged.

This idea of opening up a story with once upon a time. I thought of starting my sermon like that, basically like once upon a time, to get more engagement and attraction, but I resisted.

Now, what's also true in many stories that start out with this phrase, once upon a time, is that there's not a lot of specifics. There's not a lot of details given with regards to dates, locations, and times, but an eagerness to get to the actual drama.

However, as we consider the story of Advent, the story we've just read now, this morning, we see it is different from these once upon a time stories, in that it begins as an actual proper historical record.

- [5 : 12] It begins as an actual historical record. We'd begin, notice, verse 26, in the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel.

Where we see there that the Advent story opens up in Holy Scripture as a historical record, not as a once upon a time, as a reality, not as a fiction.

And as we look at this, we are intrigued, we are drawn in with the specificity of the date and the detail that we see. There's an interesting reality or an interesting thing that gets communicated even at the outset here, and it is to assure us, of course, of the historical veracity of what we are about to read.

We can date it, we can time it, we can pin it to a particular reality, namely the pregnancy of Elizabeth, and that happened to be the sixth month of her pregnancy.

There's a lot of detail there given for us. This cues, not that some can be interested in it, but this idea that we have a historical record here, it should cue at least all of our interest.

- [6 : 27] It should spark all curiosity from all of us because the story is not set in some remote fantasy land. The story is set in time. The story is set in an actual geographical location.

The story is set in reality. The birth of Christ. The birth of Christ is set in reality. Now, it's not only significant that it happened. There are many historical happenings we celebrate yearly.

So it isn't the historicity only. It's not only that it happens. It's not only the historicity that qualifies it as important, but it's also what happened.

What happened. The Advent story that we remember yearly is the birth, or is birth, out of a real historical context, actual time and place.

Now, here's the what. When God came into this world, born of a virgin, and found in appearance of a man. There's various movies we could think about where there's an impending threat or danger to our civilization, whether it is in terms of war, whether it is in terms of extraterrestrial, and there's these few people selected to go and address this threat.

[7 : 46] You know, we think of Armageddon and these kinds of movies, you know, because there's this external threat that comes to us now. But what if the threat is so personal? What if the threat to our civilization, what if the threat to humanity is internal?

What if the threat to humanity is our sin? What if our destruction lies not without, but within? Who saves us? Who comes to our rescue? Well, the story of Advent, the Christmas story, answers that question.

It answers the question, who saves us from destruction when that threat of destruction is inside of us. The answer is, the God of heaven and earth, He comes down, He draws near, He readies Himself.

And in the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God, He comes and He's born. He's born in the appearance of man. He comes to save us.

And so I want us to walk through this account over the next two weeks, and there are a couple of themes to highlight and consider. The first thing as we come to this passage is the theme of angelic appearances.

[8 : 59] Angelic appearances. It's something that we often, you know, just miss because we don't really know what to do with them. You know, they're amazing, and it's great, but like, what do we do with, you know, angels. But angels are important for this account.

The angelic appearances are worth noting. Angels are revelatory beings. That is to say, they bring revelation. They bring a message. In fact, the word angel means messenger.

That they exist, and their highest and chief duty is to serve God in communicating His messages, His revelation. And right here, during the time leading up to the birth of Christ, we see a heightened presence of angels.

It's not just Gabriel here in a few occasions where He appears. We also see a host of angels in chapter 2 when the shepherds are out in the field. And so there's this heightened sense of angelic appearances around the birth or the announcement and the birth of our Lord.

This indicates a great revelation is about to occur. It is the revelation of the birth of our Savior, the Messiah. The birth of the Savior of this world.

[10 : 11] We notice the heightened presence of angels around this, the advent or the nativity account in Scripture. First, look at chapter 1, verse 11, and it's right here in our location. So if the Bible is open, you're right there.

We see the angel appears to Zacharias in chapter 1, verse 11. Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense.

So we see here, Zacharias is being introduced, or Zacharias should say is being introduced to an angel. We also notice, of course, Mary in our passage, and then also in chapter 2, verse 9, there are shepherds out in the field keeping watch, and we are told in Luke 2, verse 9, an angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them.

We are told that suddenly in chapter, in verse 13, a whole host of angels appear. Now we read that, and the reality of what is taking place can quickly be elated on us.

The overwhelming, frightening experience of keeping company with angelic beings. I have to admit, I do not understand the insistence of associating angels with that which is fluffy and lovey-dovey and cutesy and, you know, nice and, oh, you're my angel and so forth.

[11 : 25] I don't understand that. I love my wife, but I'm not sure if I would liken her or associate her to an angel, necessarily. You say, why not? I understand we refer to people as angels affectionately, right?

My angel, our children even. And what we mean by that, of course, is that they're sweet and adorable and lovely and soft and gentle, but here's the thing that baffles me. Who said angels are sweet and adorable and gentle and soft?

We have a Hollywood idea, right, of angels. When we read the Bible, the picture we get of angels are that they are glorious, holy, immense, frightening creatures. Look at the response that is evoked from Zechariah in Luke 1, verse 12, when the angel comes in.

When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. He was startled and he was gripped with fear at the sight of this immense creature, of this immense being.

We see, for example, at the appearance of the angels, in many, if not most cases, if not all cases, when the angel appears and the person to whom the angel appears responds, the first word from the angel is what?

[12 : 44] Do not be afraid. Do not be afraid. Do not be afraid. You can see this in Luke 11, verse 13, in Luke 1, verse 29 to 33, in Luke 2, verse 8 to 10, don't be afraid.

See the effect an angelic presence had on these people, a diverse group of people. They all had the same initial response, fear. So I'm not sure if it's actually an appropriate or even an affectionate way to describe the person you love, unless by using the term you mean that they bring fear upon you.

And in that case, if you refer to your wife or somebody, my angel, maybe that person to whom it's referred to must think about what is meant by that. But anyhow, let's continue to look at the significance of angelic appearances here.

Notice the nature of the message that they bring. To Zechariah, you will have joy and gladness. To Mary, rejoice, highly favored one. To the shepherds out in the field, I bring you good tidings of great joy.

They're bringing a message of what? Of joy, of gladness. Their appearance may be frightening, to see them may startle one, but when they open their mouth, it is messages of comfort, do not be afraid.

[13 : 58] And it is messages of rejoicing, be glad. Don't miss the contrast of these immensely powerful and frightening creatures and their message of joy and gladness.

It shows us that the God whom they serve, from whom they come, He has sent them and His message is communicated through them where we see He wills to draw near to us, send us favor, glad tidings, and calls us to rejoice and be glad in Him.

Notice in chapter 2, we read that the angels are referred to as a heavenly host or a company of heavenly hosts. And that word in chapter 2, from verse 11 to verse 13, that word host, a host of angels, is a military expression.

It's a military word. It speaks of a company of military beings. And so when we hear of the hosts of heaven, we're speaking about the army of God.

Angels make up the army of God. Now why would one need a military? Why would one need an army? Well, I think the answer is clear, right?

[15 : 14] They are God's innumerable army, the innumerable hosts. Well, Matthew tells us in his account, the angel said, and you shall give His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.

Our sin, and in our sin, we wage war against God. We scoff at the goodness of our Creator. We transgress with impunity His holy and good laws and defy Him on a daily basis.

for this, as the righteous judge of all the earth, for this, He should get ready to overthrow our rebellion, snuff out our obstinance, and with His innumerable army of angels wage war against the souls of men and women.

Yet, He stands sending His army, sending His army with this message, don't be afraid. He sends His army, He sends the host of heaven, with this message, don't be afraid.

Rejoice. Don't be afraid. Glad tidings. I bring you glad tidings. I bring you good news. Don't be afraid. This is what the birth of Christ, the life of Christ, and the death of Christ means.

[16:32] God wants to make peace with the ungodly and turn them toward Himself so that they would know Him as the one through God and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The presence of these fierce and powerful creatures who we know as the army of God, they bring a message of hope, a message of comfort, a message of peace that is realized and found in the birth, the person, the life, and the death of Jesus Christ.

Angels signal this. The hymn writer rightly therefore pens this word, Hark! the herald angels sing, glory to the newborn King, peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled.

Joyful holy nations rise, join the triumph of the skies, with angelic hosts proclaim, Christ is born in Bethlehem. Hark! the herald angels sing, glory to the newborn King.

The angelic appearances signal to us the revelation that God makes known to us that he will make peace with the ungodly through Jesus Christ. Second theme I want you to notice is the humble context here.

The next point relates specifically to the geographical context and we'll call this the humble context and we read in the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, again, we get historical clues here which speaks to a historical record being communicated and which has been preserved for us, especially by Luke, the one who has set out to investigate these matters according to his opening in chapter 1, verse 1.

[18:12] And we are given detailed time in the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy. God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee. It's like God's word is open and it says go and check these things out.

There's enough for you to go and investigate on and go. If the message was a message that wasn't real and it was a message that sought to deceive, these details would be irrelevant and these details would not be given.

Now we see here the geographical context. Now Galilee was known as a predominantly Gentile area although many Jews lived there. Nazareth was a small village or is a small village in Galilee known for its modesty and its poverty.

This was not a sophisticated place or high society area but a village where many poor Gentiles and Jews lived and was often looked down upon and despised for that very reason.

we know that when Jesus was set to come from Nazareth many asked what? Can anything good come from Nazareth? Right? This alone gives you the perception people had of this reviled town.

[19:32] But God answered that question and sent the angel to Nazareth. Notice the hope of the world is announced in the heart of modesty lowliness and insignificance.

The only true fit for an exceedingly glorious God is a humble context. There's a humble context. This is so because it is improper for there to be any hint of context between God and His creature.

Between God and His creation. This is the impulse of sin to turn us against God. to seek a contest with God. To raise ourselves to the position of God.

What compliments and befits divine greatness is humility. Now this is not because God is some egotistical deity but because He is divine truth and righteousness.

What does that mean? Well it means that He must honor the truth of who is the greatest and the most glorious. God must honor the truth of who is exceedingly great.

[20:41] He must honor that. Therefore it would be the height of pretentiousness and folly the height of disingenuous and simply untrue for God to honor anything and anyone else as most glorious and greatest than Himself.

It would be a lie because it's just not true. God can pretend if we were to be given license to speak in such a manner. God can pretend that something else or someone else is greater than Him but He is the greatest of all in all of the universe.

He is exceedingly immense. He is the holy one who lives in unapproachable light. He is glorious and for Him to pretend otherwise is not as a false humility.

It would be to deny Himself. It would be to go against Himself. but the heart of the good news is that He who is not only supremely glorious and majestic is also good love is also wise merciful is also long suffering and if you would want anyone to be great allow God who is the all-consuming fire yet also slow to anger allow Him to be great.

There can be no contest therefore the only proper fit for exceeding glory is a humble context and Nazareth provides this context. And in case this still doesn't sit well note that Advent and Christmas is exactly significant because the glorious God with whom there is no contest the one who dwells in unapproachable light because of His great love and mercy He came to earth He drew near He was born in modesty put on humanity dwelled in lowliness in geographical obscurity this great and exceeding one He suffered and died on a cross and He did that for you you that's how great He is so it shouldn't surprise us that we see the splendor of heaven embrace the meekness and the unpretentiousness of a Nazareth of a Galilee again it reminds me of our opening verse that we read when we began this service

[22:57] Isaiah 57 for this is what the high and holy one says he who lives forever whose name is holy I live in a high and a holy place but also with the one who is contrite and lowly in spirit to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite it is comforting to know that our great God is great and big enough to honor the lowly to seek out the humble and to draw near to the contrite this is the theme of advent the geohistorical significance of advent in modest Nazareth is the signal that the Lord of glory lives and draws near to the lowly draws near to the humble think about God in executing His eternal plan Ephesians chapter 1 tells us before the foundation of the earth before all the glorious and wonderful nature of the universe God executes and decrees and wills

His plan before the foundation of this earth and it will be executed in the heart of Nazareth in this humble modest lowly setting do not despise obscurity lowliness and even perhaps the modesty of your life it could be a good and dwelling and fit place for God the Lord of glory to dwell as Christmas time approach we see all the displays of all sorts of decorations and yet the most fitting decoration for our heart that this time's signal would be humility lowliness modesty meekness this is the example of Jesus Philippians 2 he who in the very nature God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped but he made himself of no repute taking on the form of a servant of taking on the form of humankind human likeness he became man he became obedient he became obedient to death the example of

Jesus the example of Jesus this is in fact how we receive the grace of advent the grace of Christ with child like humble faith and trust as the hymn writer says nothing in my hand I bring so we see the angelic appearance signaling the message of redemption and then we see the humble context signaling the message of humility and lowliness that this great God of heaven and earth finds a fitting dwelling place with the lowly and the contrite and then finally and lastly I want you to see the third theme of extravagant grace extravagant grace verse 28 again the angel went to her and said greetings you who are highly favored the Lord is with you now given the response to the angel Gabriel before Zachariah responded to the angel of the Lord with great fear and startled and spare thought for this young virgin who is face to face with this fierce immense powerful creature

Gabriel spare thought that often we get startled by the appearance of what is a shadow that comes snucks up in our blind side and we kind of jump but spare thought for this young girl in this obscure little town and the charge of heaven the archangel Gabriel himself enters into her dwelling place and he speaks to her greetings you who are highly favored the Lord is with you cue the faint cue the person falling over and losing consciousness in light of what has just happened these chilling words he entered he came in no warning no prior call or announcement just a casual entrance and a greeting a better translation greetings one being filled with grace greetings one being filled with grace the angel comes in and greets

Mary with the word of grace highly favored one or literally from the original endowed with grace this is significant friends because it puts Mary as special and as significant as she is historically even theologically it puts Mary as significant as she is it puts her in the right context one needing grace one needing grace what does that presuppose presupposes that she's like us a sinner she's like us a sinner she needs grace Mary though significant as the mother of our Lord according to his human nature if you don't split the nature from the person so she is the mother of our Lord Mary though significant as the mother of our Lord is an unworthy sinner like you and me it illustrates the main intent of Christ's coming 1st

[28:28] Timothy chapter 115 this is a trustworthy saying deserving full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world why so we can have nice Christmas trees and decorations and a festive season why so we can have our family over and spend a nice lunch together Christ Jesus came into this world why so we can come to church every week and be religious and have a sense of comfort because of our religious expression why Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners to save sinners of whom I am chief says the apostle Paul of whom I am chief Mary was an unworthy sinner Paul was an unworthy sinner you and I unworthy sinners but God in his grace and mercy sent forth his son to save us Paul writes again in 1st Timothy chapter 3 verse 16 by common confession great is the mystery of godliness he who was revealed in the flesh was vindicated in the spirit seen by angels proclaimed among the nations believed on in the world taken up in glory

Christ came and accomplished and he went ascended and the application of our redemption comes by the spirit's work in our hearts as we trust and as we believe in him Mary was in the same both spiritually as the rest of us not perfect not superior not a giver of grace but like all of us a receiver of God's grace God chose an unworthy undeserving young girl sinful girl like Mary to bestow grace upon in fact Mary herself she confesses this if you just glance at Luke chapter 1 verse 47 you read Mary said Luke 1 47 my soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my savior miracles God her savior from what from her sins miracles God her savior so

Christmas started with and was carried out in an abundance of grace forgot to work with the likes of Zachariah Elizabeth John the Baptist Mary Joseph and the world requires that he be gracious and so he was Christmas reminds us that God was rich in grace as he is today lowliness modesty those things do not put the Lord off in fact those are fitting fitting for his dwelling with us as we conclude we give ourselves to consider the birth of Christ the advent season and we see that it's always decorated with at least we see in the scriptures it's decorated with heavenly glory appropriate humility and extravagant grace heavenly glory that the angels supply appropriate humility that the context demands and extravagant grace that we desperately need let us preserve this during our celebration of Christ's birth worldliness secularism takes away from the heavenly glory necessary to celebrate

Christmas pride hinders the appropriate attitude of humility with which we ought to take in advent season and stubborn insistence on our own way to approach God makes nothing of the extravagant grace God gives to do what God requires what is Mary's response to all of this and we'll end here Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be and we see towards the end as the angel answered all her questions she says in verse 38 I am the Lord's servant Mary answered may your word to me be fulfilled humble submission to the will of God not rebellion not resisting humble submission the spirit of Christmas the spirit of Advent the spirit of Christ if you will in this time humble submission to the will of

God may it be to me your humble servant may it be to me as we hear God's word week in week out as we read the scriptures day in day out and we see the truth of scripture pop up and come into our hearts come into our minds may our response be I'm your humble servant may it be to me as you have said let's pray our that our hearts will be encouraged to love you more, submit to you, O God, more carefully, and to look to you, O Lord, for grace as you are indeed the giver of life and the giver of grace.

[34 : 49] Bless your people as we ask you these mercies. In Jesus' name, amen.