

REDEMPTION AND THE INCARNATION

Matthew 1 • Luke 1-2

MARY

Luke 1:46-48

We begin in Luke 1:46-48.

Let me set the context for you. Zechariah and Elizabeth were an older, childless couple. In their old age, God granted them the conception of a child, who would, in adulthood, become known as John the Baptist.

*Note: The conception of John could have been a **miracle** if, for some reason, either one had been physically sterile. It could also have been an act of **providence** if God had closed Elizabeth's womb so that she would only bear one child. While it would be very unusual, it is not unheard of for women in their 50s and 60s to conceive, and even for that to be their first child.*

Six months later, the angel Gabriel visited Mary, Elizabeth's cousin, in Nazareth and announced that she would miraculously conceive Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. This would be a true miracle since the Spirit would cause Mary to conceive apart from any involvement by a man. Gabriel also broke the news of Elizabeth's pregnancy, and Mary immediately left to visit her. When Elizabeth saw Mary, John leapt in her womb, and she greeted her as "blessed among women." Then Mary spoke a psalm of praise to God. It is sometimes known as The Magnificat, from the Latin word for *magnify*.

Let's look at the opening words.

46 And Mary said: "My soul magnifies the Lord,
47 And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.

48 For He has looked upon the humble state of His slave,
For behold, from this time on, all generations will count me blessed.”
(**Luke 1:46–48, 2022 LSB**)

Mary worships God as great and glorious and rejoices in God her Savior; that ends the idea that Mary was conceived without sin. She was aware of her need for a Savior and God’s provision for her salvation, and she knew that the Child she carried was that Savior.

Yahweh had looked upon her humble state. “Humble state” could also be translated as *low status* or *afflicted condition*. She wasn’t speaking of her lack of education or low social status. Mary knew her own sin as well as you know yours. That’s why she was troubled when the angel greeted her (Luke 1:29). The sight of a holy angel always terrified sinners. The angel called her *favored one*, meaning that she was the recipient of God’s grace and mercy. All generations recognize that Mary was blessed because she, being a sinner, had been chosen by God to bear His incarnate Son. Mary was not the “mother of God” but of the incarnate Son of God. This is why she considered herself to be enormously blessed.

And Mary believed.

JOSEPH

Matthew 1:20-21

Let’s turn to Matthew 1:20-21. Mary stayed in Judah for three months, probably until John was born to Elizabeth, and then returned to Nazareth three or four months pregnant. Joseph, her betrothed husband, discovered that she was pregnant (we aren’t told how) and contemplated quietly divorcing her. As far as he was concerned, she had committed immorality.

But Matthew writes,

20 But when he had considered this, behold,
an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying,
“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife;
for the One who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.

21 And she will bear a Son;
and you shall call His name Jesus,
for He will save His people from their sins.”

(Matthew 1:20–21, 2022 LSB)

This is a tremendous piece of news. Mary had not committed immorality at all; to the contrary, she had been the recipient of God’s grace and mercy, and blessed with the privilege of bearing His incarnate Son. Joseph was to take Mary as his wife and name the baby boy Jesus. The English name Jesus comes from the Greek name *Iesus*, which comes from the Hebrew name *Yehoshua*, which in English is *Joshua*, and means “Yahweh is Salvation.”

But Jesus wouldn’t be saving His people from the Romans, or Egyptians, or Syrians, or any other human enemies. He wouldn’t be saving them from political oppression or physical slavery. He wouldn’t be saving them from famines, crop failures, or diseases. He would save them from their sins. That is, He would save them from the judgment of God that inevitably comes upon sinners.

People suffer more from guilt over sin than from anything else. Guilt and shame destroy the soul. People use anything and everything imaginable to numb their pained consciences and forget the judgment that they know must one day come upon them. That little child, as yet unborn when the angel spoke to Joseph, would take away the greatest threat to human life and restore peace.

And Joseph believed.

ZECHARIAH

Luke 1:68-75

Let's turn back to Luke 1:68-75.

After the birth of John, Zechariah spoke out a psalm of praise. Remember, Jesus had not yet been born. But he knew something wonderful. He speaks here not of his son, John, but of the Savior whom John would announce.

68 “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
For He visited and accomplished redemption for His people,
69 And raised up a horn of salvation for us
In the house of David His servant—
70 As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old—
71 Salvation FROM OUR ENEMIES,
And FROM THE HAND OF ALL WHO HATE US,
72 To show mercy toward our fathers,
And to remember His holy covenant,
73 The oath which He swore to Abraham our father,
74 To grant us that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies,
Might serve Him without fear,
75 In holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.”
(Luke 1:68–75, 2022 LSB)

The as-yet-unborn Jesus, the Son of Mary, is Yahweh Himself. As Zechariah says, the Lord God of Israel “visited and accomplished redemption for His people.”

He has raised up a horn of salvation. That's a reference to Jesus. An ox's horn was a symbol of power and authority. King David said, “Yahweh is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation.” (Second Samuel 22:2-3).

In Psalm 132:17, Yahweh speaks: “In Zion I will cause the horn of David to spring up; I have prepared a lamp for My anointed.”

Zechariah spoke these words thinking of the Messiah, the Anointed One of God. He knows exactly why God's Son would be born: to bring salvation from enemies and all who hate Israel, to show mercy toward the fathers who had received the promises of God, to remember His holy covenant with Abraham, and to grant that those who are rescued would be able to worship (serve) Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness all their days.

All of this was wrapped up in the baby still in Mary's womb.

And Zechariah believed.

THE SHEPHERDS

Luke 2:8-12

Let's move down to Luke 2:8-12. After Jesus had been born in Bethlehem, we read that

8 In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night.
9 And an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened.
10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people.
11 For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.
12 And this will be the sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."
(Luke 2:8–12, 2022 LSB)

We don't know what time of day Jesus was born. We do know that it was

nighttime when the angel of the Lord came to the shepherds. The sheep were quiet and asleep. The shepherds were quietly watching over them, on guard against thieves and predators and listening for any sounds of distress.

Then, they were surrounded by tremendous light, the glory of God, which completely terrified them. The angel comforted them and preached the Gospel for the first time: “I bring you good news,” the *euangelion*, the Gospel. This Gospel is for all the people – Jews and Gentiles, male and female, rich and poor. It is news that will bring God’s people overflowing joy: a Savior has been born who is *Christ the Lord*. Jesus is *Christ*, the Anointed One of God, the One whom God sent to be Savior. And Jesus is Lord, Yahweh Himself incarnated, in human flesh, born as a human being.

The angel gave the shepherds a sign that would confirm his words. There was nothing miraculous about the sign, not in the least. With the animals in the fields the courtyard of a home would be quiet and restful and full of fresh air. The manger would be off the ground, filled with clean straw and protected from the wind, and a safe place for a newborn to rest.

These men went off to see the baby, told Mary and Joseph what the angel had said, and, Luke writes,

**20 ... the shepherds went back,
glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen,
just as was told them.
(Luke 2:20, 2022 LSB)**

The angel’s words were true; they found the baby just as they had been told.

And the shepherds believed.

SIMEON

Luke 2:25-32

Let's move down in Luke 2 just a few verses, to Luke 2:25-32, and read about Simeon. Eight days have passed, and Joseph and Mary have traveled to the Temple in Jerusalem – just three or four miles from Bethlehem – to have Jesus circumcised and registered.

25 And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the comfort of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

26 And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

27 And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to carry out for Him the custom of the Law,

28 then he took Him into his arms and blessed God, and said,

29 "Now Master, You are releasing Your slave in peace, According to Your word.

30 For my eyes have seen Your salvation,

31 Which You prepared in the presence of all peoples,

32 A LIGHT FOR REVELATION TO THE GENTILES,

And for the glory of Your people Israel."

(Luke 2:25-32, 2022 LSB)

It seems that Simeon is an old man – he speaks of his death in Luke 2:29 – who has been waiting for a promise to be fulfilled. Yahweh had promised him that he would not die before seeing the Christ, the Lord's Anointed One. And, at least, he saw! He saw the fulfillment of God's promises to the world.

- The seed of the woman who would crush the serpent's head.
- The seed of Abraham.
- The substitute lamb.
- The seed of Judah, Shiloh, to whom the people must be obedient.

- The Son of David, the rightful King of Israel, who would one day come again to Jerusalem mounted on a donkey, righteous, and endowed with salvation.

Every promise of God was wrapped up and swaddled in cloths and held safe in Simeon's arms. This Child was the comfort of Israel, the salvation of Jews and Gentiles alike, the glory of Israel. This Child was the hope of all the people, the source of life and peace.

And Simeon believed.

BRINGING IT HOME

Jesus came into a world no different from ours in most ways.

- It was a world filled with oppression, injustice, and violence. The powerful hated and abused the weak. The weak hated and sometimes violently retaliated against the powerful.
- It was a world filled with immorality. Gentile societies of the time were notoriously wicked in all sorts of ways. Even Jewish society was stained by immorality of all sorts, from drunkenness to prostitution to robbery and murder.
- It was a world filled with pain and suffering. Infant mortality was high. Babies were often born with infections and disabilities like blindness. Infections from relatively minor accidents could leave someone disabled for life or dead. Leprosy, a bacterial skin disease, was highly contagious and found virtually everywhere.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus addressed many of the problems in Israel. He healed the sick, including lepers and those born blind. He called sinners to repentance. He taught His disciples that His church would not operate on the

same principles of power and domination as human society.

But these problems are just the symptom of the most profound problem faced by men and women: sin. Oppression, injustice, and violence are symptoms of sin. Immorality and wickedness are symptoms of sin. Pain, suffering, disability, and death are symptoms of sin.

Jesus did not come to treat symptoms but to solve our sin problem.

This is why **Mary** rejoiced in God, her Savior, who looked upon her humble, sinful state with **lovingkindness** and mercy.

This is why **Joseph** was given the promise that Jesus, the as-yet-unborn Child, would save His people from their sins.

This is why **Zechariah**, the priest who had so many times felt the blood of a sin offering on his hands, rejoiced that Yahweh had visited His people and accomplished redemption from God's judgment so that His people could worship Him in holiness and righteousness, utterly free from fear.

This is why **the shepherds** had the good news of great joy preached to them, the news of their Savior, and the Savior of sinners everywhere, being born in Bethlehem.

And this is why faithful old **Simeon** rejoiced in Yahweh's salvation, the Savior who would bring light to the Gentiles and glory to Israel.

We know that the Man Christ Jesus would die on the cross for the sins of His people, rise in victory over death, and open the gates of paradise for those who believe in Him.

When Jesus returns, all of the effects of sin will be condemned and erased

from the earth. The new heavens and earth will be created in holiness and righteousness, uncontaminated by sin, unchanged by rebellion and wickedness. There will be no oppression, injustice, or violence. There will be no immorality or wickedness. There will be no suffering, pain, disability, or grief.

But we need to remember that Jesus' first reason for coming was to deal with the singular root cause of every one of these problems. He came to:

- give His life as a ransom for sinners (Matthew 20:28),
- to lay down His life for His sheep (John 10:17),
- to be delivered over to death for our forgiveness and raised from the dead for our justification (Romans 4:25),
- to rescue us from this present evil age (Galatians 1:4),
- and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good works (Titus 2:14).

Let's pray!