

Thinking Christian Podcast

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Jesus' Birth and the Expectation of the Extraordinary

00:00:22 In the course of my work researching, studying, writing the book *Too Good to be False: How Jesus' Incomparable Character Reveals His Reality*, I encountered Jesus in a way that I never had before. People who read the book are saying that they too are encountering him in a way they've never experienced him before. He's extraordinary and his character in ways, and to a degree, that even Christians have hardly noticed.

I say that as one who followed Christ for more than 40 years before diving into this study, and again, others are saying the same thing. I can, and I will link to some of what they've said in the show notes here, just so you can get a taste of what they're saying. He's extraordinary to the degree that in the course of my studies, for my own spiritual health, even I had to remind myself that he's not so far above us, that he's unreachable. He's not inaccessible. He's not that distant.

00:01:23 And nothing reveals, nothing shows his closeness to us more than the fact of his incarnation, his coming to be with us. God with us. God in the flesh; the one who by the end of his years with the disciples could say to them, "I no longer call you servants, but I call you friends" — friends with a difference. They're not just buddies. Jesus says, "You're my friends if you do, when I command you."

But it's the incarnation of Jesus that reassures me that God, for all his holiness, his extreme difference from us, loves us and wants to be with us. And so here as I am going through the Gospel of Luke, I'm looking at some of the passages that have to do with Jesus' birth. His incarnation means his birth and his life as God in the flesh.

00:02:25 We're all familiar with the story of Jesus' birth. What I want to do here though, is look at some of the extraordinary things that were said about him and about his coming. In the gospel of Luke there are five or six specific things that are really interesting. And I'm just going to read them with short comments that really speak to Jesus' extraordinary nature, his extraordinary mission, his extraordinary arrival on earth.

The first one of these is the Magnificat. This is Mary's great song, after she meets with her cousin Elizabeth, and Elizabeth's baby in her womb, John the Baptist, leaped for joy on hearing Mary's voice. This is in Luke one, starting in verse 46. And Mary said,

"My soul magnifies the Lord,
47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
48 for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.
For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
49 for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
50 And his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
51 He has shown strength with his arm;

he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;
52 he has brought down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate;
53 he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.
54 He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
55 as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”

00:03:58 She mentioned there how he has “helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers.” This whole poem, this whole song is very reminiscent of the prophets and their expectation of deliverance, especially of the oppressed, the poor and Mary's response in this is to identify her herself, I think as one of those.

And to give thanks to God for his mercy. She didn't claim a proud position. She did recognize that all generations will call her blessed, but the blessing is from God, not from herself.

Now let's go on to Zechariah's prophecy. It's actually rather different. This is after John the Baptist was born, Zechariah's son. And after he finished confirming that he would be named John and his mouth was opened, and he could speak. And Zechariah was filled with the Holy spirit and prophesied beginning in Luke, one verse 68.

67 And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying,
68 “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has visited and redeemed his people
69 and has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David,

I need to interject here. He's talking about a horn of salvation in the house of David. In other words, he's not talking about his own son. His son was in the house of Aaron in the house of Levi. This is the house of David. So Zechariah is not talking about his own son. He does a little bit later on here, but let's pick it up.

70 as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,
71 that we should be saved from our enemies
and from the hand of all who hate us;
72 to show the mercy promised to our fathers
and to remember his holy covenant,
73 the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us
74 that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,
might serve him without fear,
75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

Now he switches and he speaks of his own son.

76 And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;

for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
77 to give knowledge of salvation to his people
in the forgiveness of their sins,
78 because of the tender mercy of our God,
whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high
79 to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

He was speaking of John there, but very quickly, very quickly switched back again to talking about the Most High, that John would go before the Most High, before the Lord. He equates the most high with the Lord here. John is going before God here. And this is to give knowledge of salvation to his people.

00:06:57 Earlier he talked about being delivered from the hand of enemies. This is a very Israel-oriented prophecy or blessing that Zechariah makes. This is very much oriented, perhaps even towards the common expectation then that the Messiah would deliver Israel from their physical political oppression under the Roman empire.

Except he does say the sunrise shall visit from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death. In the old Testament, and you'll see it also in the New Testament, when they speak of those who sit in darkness, they're not talking about Israel, they're talking about the Gentiles. So Zechariah is hinting at something that will become much clearer very soon: that Jesus was for everyone.

There's a very high expectation of a very special child coming, not John, but Jesus, a very high expectation of an extraordinary child. And that expectation is spoken even more emphatically in chapter two, verse 10, when the angel appears to the shepherds in the field and says to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior who is Christ the Lord, and this will be a sign for you. You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.

00:08:25 So here we have, we have angels reporting Great glory and a savior who is Christ the Lord. And he's coming in great glory, but he's coming in humility wrapped and swaddling cloths, lying in a manger. But don't miss: This is good news of a great joy that will be for *all* the people.

Sometime — I would think eight days later, based on the law — they took Jesus to the temple for the purification. And there they met a man whose name was Simeon, who is described in chapter two, verse 25 as a righteous and devout man, waiting for the consolation of Israel, to whom it had been revealed by the Holy spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord Christ. And when he saw Jesus, the young eight day old baby, he said, "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.

00:09:37 Jesus is now eight days old, certainly weighing less than 10 pounds. Not able to talk. He's coming in humility, God in the flesh. And yet he is a light for revelation to the Gentiles. When Simeon saw this, and here we see God, in the flesh, all of his godhood: The one on whom all humanity would depend, and yet a babe in arms. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mothe, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in

Israel and for a sign that is opposed, (and a sword will pierce or your own soul also) so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”

Jesus comes into the world, a babe with all these prophecies, with all these expectations. And so we open our look at him with this expectation. I suppose, if you were there at the time, it must have been a kind of a questioning expectation. Could this be real? Could this be true? Could this be the one on whom we've been waiting? Could this be the one on whom even the Gentiles without knowing it have been waiting their salvation as well? Could this be the one who brings light to the darkness? Could this be the one

00:11:04 As we follow Jesus through the pages of the gospels, we find out who he is. We find out that there's plenty of reason, not only to know that he's got that extraordinary nature, what it takes to be the one for all the world, we find incredible uniqueness, incredible power, incredible character beyond any other character ever lived, ever imagined. It's his incredible, incomparable character, as I say in *Too Good to be False*, that reveals his reality. We get a taste of it beginning at the time of his birth. Much more to come. I'm Tom Gilson for the Thinking Christian podcast. Thank you for listening.

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