

## ADVENT 2021

### 4. Christmas Reveals God's Nature, Purposes and Promises

#### Luke 1:46-56

For the past three Sundays we have been preparing our hearts to celebrate ADVENT — the coming of Jesus by looking at how the Bible answers two questions that have life changing and eternal implications

**What Child Is This** whose arrival has been celebrated for nearly 2,000 years?

**What this child come to do** that makes His arrival so important that we celebrate Him 2,000 years later?

**Our starting point** was the first chapter in the Gospel according to Matthew. Matthew didn't start with "Once upon a time...". Matthew began by saying:

*Matthew 1:1 NLT This is a record of the ancestors of Jesus the Messiah*

*Matthew 1:1 HCSB The historical record of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham:*

As a prelude to the story of this child's birth Matthew gives us a seventeen verse long genealogy! He anchored everything he was going to write about the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus in real history. The Christmas Story is not some story — it is History.

The birth of this child is not a stand-alone moment. In fact, the birth of this baby boy in a dark alley of 1<sup>st</sup> century Bethlehem is THE point of Old Testament history — it is the culmination of the record of Scripture leading up to it. The meaning of this child's birth is explained by the Scriptures leading up to it.

**Christopher Wright** — *"The Old Testament tells the story that Jesus*

*completes.”<sup>1</sup>*

I want encourage you to get the resources of that study to get the big picture of the story Jesus completes.

In our second study we looked at a prophetic promise made 700 years before the coming of the child whose birth we going to celebrate.

**Isaiah 9:6–7 (ESV)** <sup>6</sup>For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder.... <sup>7</sup>Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

The *child born* in a back alley of the 1<sup>st</sup> century town of Bethlehem is *the son of God*. The child whose first bed was a stone feeding trough is the King of creation who came to inaugurate His Kingdom through His atoning death on the cross.

Last Sunday we looked at the first chapter of the Gospel according to Luke where we are introduced to an angelic being (Gabriel). He was sent **by the God of Glory**, sent **from** the glory of heaven, **to** the most inglorious town in 1<sup>st</sup> century Israel — Nazareth. He was *sent from God* to a virgin named Mary to announce earth shattering — eternity shaping news: AT that very time God Himself was going to break into this world through the womb of this unwed, Jewish teenage girl.

**Galatians 4:4 (NIV)** <sup>4</sup>*But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law,*

Remember — the Old Testament is the record of God at work throughout human history to THIS very moment!

**Christopher Wright** — *“The Old Testament tells the story that Jesus*

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpt From: Christopher J. H. Wright. “Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament.”

completes.”<sup>2</sup>

Mary’s response to this announcement preaches to us! In her response we see the picture of the perfect union between faith and worship. She said

***Luke 1:38 (CSB)** <sup>38</sup>“See, I am the Lord’s servant,” said Mary. “May it happen to me as you have said.”*

**Faith is an act of worship.** Faith is **bowing** before the **unsearchable complexities** of God's wisdom and ways. Faith is living as though God really is infinitely wise and perfect in love — even in the face of what we do not and cannot understand; even in the face of personal loss and suffering! She said, *God, I surrender myself to everything you desire to do in me and through me — whatever you want, whatever you say — whatever the cost.*

She **bowed** before the **unsearchable complexities** of God's wisdom and ways.

***Luke 1:38 (CSB)** “.....I am the Lord’s servant,”*

**Luke tells us** that on the heels of Gabriel’s appearance Mary did a really wise thing: She didn't isolate herself. Instead she made a 70 mile journey to the south of Israel to spend time with her cousin Elizabeth. Gabriel had told Mary (Luke 1:36) that Elizabeth had received a life-altering Word from the Lord — and had experienced the supernatural touch of God on her life.

How many here have ever had a time when you were sure God had spoken to you and then found yourself wondering if that was really the Lord, or something you imagined to be the Lord? I’m pretty sure Mary had that conversation with herself too. But the Holy Spirit let Elizabeth in on all that had happened to Mary. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke words that confirmed to Mary all that the angel had said to her. That encounter between Mary and Elizabeth is a living illustration of the Biblical vision for the Christian life: We know God **best** in community! We know ourselves **best** in community.

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<sup>2</sup> Excerpt From: Christopher J. H. Wright. “Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament.”

**ALL OF THOSE THINGS** were the prelude to the famous passage of Scripture that we are about to listen to and study. This passage is called The Magnificat. It's taken from Mary's opening words — "*My soul magnifies the Lord*". Her entire being had been shaken and shaped by Gabriel's announcement. God had become her **whole life** — He had become the center of her entire being! That is at the core of what it means to be a Christian! Christianity is not a matter of "What do I get?" It's a matter of "Who's got me!"

**LUKE 1:46-56** <sup>46</sup>And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, <sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, <sup>48</sup> for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; <sup>49</sup> for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. <sup>50</sup> And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. <sup>51</sup> He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; <sup>52</sup> he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; <sup>53</sup> he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away. <sup>54</sup> He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, <sup>55</sup> as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever." <sup>56</sup>And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.

**Let's start with two broad stroke observations** — <sup>1.</sup> Mary is somewhere between the age of 14-16. In **ten** verses she quotes **twenty-three** separate passages from the Old Testament. This teenage girl *knew* the word of God. And it was the Word of God that began to define her experience.

AGAIN — we cannot understate the reality that the event we celebrate at Christmas is not a stand-alone moment. The birth of Jesus is the culmination of the record of Scripture leading up to it. It's meaning is explained by the Scriptures that promised and anticipated His advent.

**MARY KNEW THE WORD OF GOD!**

This teenager is an amazing example of how we need to be in the Word of God; how we need to be treasuring it up in our hearts and how the Holy

Spirit will bring to our remembrance the Word of God at just the right time to inform us, define us, and direct us in a situation or circumstance.

<sup>2</sup> **Eight** times Mary says **he has** — *He has done this, or he has done that*. She understood that God was at work in human history.

DON'T MISS THIS — ***Christmas reminds us that human history is all about God and what God is doing.*** Christmas teaches us that **THAT** is the God in whom we trust!

Let's keep driving deeper into that! Mary not only understood that **God was at work** in human history; she understood that **God was at work** in **HER STORY to fulfill** His **redeeming** plans and purposes.

Christmas is so incredibly relevant to every-day Christianity. Follow me here.

It's easy for 21<sup>st</sup> century American Christians to **confuse** Christian subculture with Christ. But there are a lot of Christians who truly understand that the Christian faith at its core about a person! They understand that Christianity is an objective faith. They have placed their faith in a person — not an idea! Jesus is the object of their faith. Everyone believes something — Is Jesus the OBJECT of your faith?

BUT — our **objective** faith in the person of Jesus results in a **subjective experience** of Jesus!

I began my pastoral ministry as the high school pastor at Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa. For about eight years Valerie and I got to watch the Lord do some amazing things in the lives of high school aged kids. When we started there was a guy in the group named Adam. Adam would *always* come up to me and ask me — *“What's the Jesus doing in your life?”* That question was always a reality check for me. It always brought me back to the reality that my Christian life was not about what I knew *about* Jesus or what I could tell others *about* Jesus. It was a matter of me having a genuine, personal, living, experience of Jesus.

He is the Son of God who came into the world to stand in our place — to do what we could not do — to defeat what we could not defeat — to die in our place and to rise again on our behalf. Jesus lives! He speaks to us. He sits with us. He comforts us. He fills us. He leads us.

**Those two broad stroke observations frame the great theme of the Christmas message.** Mary is the first person whose life was radically changed by the message of Christmas. She understood that message and she sings about it!

Everywhere we go at this time of year we get fallen culture's take on the meaning of Christmas. Fallen Culture tells us that Christmas is all about man. If you take your cues from the songs, the countless "Lifetime" channel movies and countless children's books you conclude that Christmas is the time when people stop mistreating each other. It's the time when the rich think about the poor. It's a season that bridges the gulf and binds the wounds between people. It's the time when we go out of our way to be more human!

**DON'T MISS THIS** — All of that is not the meaning of Christmas. All of that is actually **the result** of Christmas. Big difference!

HOW did Christmas totally transform Mary's life? Let me paraphrase what Mary says: She said that Christmas showed her who God is. In Mary's Song we learn that Christmas is all about God making Himself known! **In the birth of Jesus we learn about the Nature of God, the Purposes of God and the Promises of God**

## **1. THE NATURE OF GOD**

**Christmas Tells Us That God Is Mighty**

**<sup>49</sup> for he who is mighty has done great things for me**

When I come to grips with who God is, I'm transformed from the inside out. He grips my life. That is when I begin to become truly and fully human!

Christmas is an ultimate manifestation of **the might** — **the omnipotence** of God. There is NOTHING impossible for Him! A teenage Jewish girl is three months pregnant — without ever having sex. The baby born in a stable and laid in a stone feeding trough is truly the Creator — the one who has no beginning and no end! The infinite has come as an infant.

Do you see Christmas as an expression of such might — or do you see Christmas as a sentimental story? If God is not all-powerful, songs like “Silent Night” and “O Come All Ye Faithful” are nothing more than sentimental old tunes that make you feel good. Listen — Mary didn't surrender herself to a future filled with shame and sorrow for a sentimental story. Mary wasn't pouring out her entire being to exult and rejoice in a sentimental story.

By the way — It's possible for us to believe in God, believe the Bible is the Word of God, and believe that God came in human flesh — and yet find ourselves afraid to express that faith openly, or live in a way that is consistent with our faith. The problem beneath that problem is that we intellectually believe God is mighty, but we don't **really** believe He's mighty. My intellectual faith becomes a living faith when I know it will cost me in the short run to stand *for* Jesus, stand *with* Jesus and speak *for Jesus* — yet I'm truly convinced that *He who is mighty* is on my side — and *if God is for me, who can be against me?*

**He who is mighty** came so that we could rest in His power to deal with the world that is broken outside of us and everything broken inside of us.

### **Christmas Tells Us That God Is holy!**

**and holy is his name** — That word — **holy** — is so important! There is no understanding of God apart from it. Yet it is so misunderstood. So, I'll start with this: **holy** is more than absolute moral perfection. The root meaning of this word is **other than**. It means that God is totally separate from His creation. That means that God doesn't see sin like we see sin. He isn't confused about right and wrong. He's not uncertain about what is sin and what isn't sin. He knows what sin is and He is totally opposed to it! That

also means God will never be comfortable sin! Unlike us — God will never get used to sin. We get used to it. We're desensitized to lust and pride and abuse of power. We're used to seeing pride in the workplace and pride in the media. We get used to the reality that people cheat and lie. God will never get used to it.

His name is holy. Gabriel didn't tell Mary that her son was coming into the world to die on the cross — yet she knows that His coming is wrapped up in the holiness of God — that the holiness of God confronts sin and deals with sin.

Christmas tells us God became man *because* He is holy. Think about this — The created universe is nothing but a speck to God. In His incarnation — God became a speck in the speck the universe. He became a single cell. WHY such infinite condescension? Because He is holy! Because the one whose **name is holy** had to do something about my sin — my guilt. Christmas tells me the length to which God went to deal with **my** sin and **my** guilt, to deal with my flaws **because** He is holy!

**There's one more attribute of God that Mary sings about** — and I'm so glad she did.

Christmas tells us that God is mighty. Christmas also tells us that God is holy! The mighty One — the Holy One — is also the **Merciful One!**

### **Christmas tells us that God Is Merciful**

Hostile takeovers are standard fare in corporate culture. A smart corporation or group of investors sees a company that is losing money — it's an ocean of red ink because it's been grossly mismanaged. The smart guys buy it for pennies on the dollar — and then they blot out the old management. And they are perfectly legal to do it. They have the right to do it. They have the power to do it. They're smart.

God created this world for man. The world is a mess because man has mismanaged it — and man has mismanaged it because man refused to be managed by God. The world is morally incompetent from top to bottom.



God has the right and the power and the holiness to assess us as a total loss and blot us out.

Christmas tells us that God is not just powerful and holy. God is also merciful. Merciful = compassionate. In [Exodus 34](#) God declares His name — YHWH — and then makes it clear what He is all about. The first thing He says about Himself is that He is merciful, very merciful, full of mercy and grace.

He will restore us. He will redeem us. He will blot out our sins so He won't have to blot us out.

He will restore us. He will redeem us. He will blot out our sins so He won't have to blot us out.

**1. Christmas tells us about God's Nature:** Mighty, Holy, Merciful

**2. Christmas tells us about God's Purposes**

For sure, Mary does sing about the great things God has done for her. But she sees all of that in the context of what God has been up to in this world since [Genesis 3](#). She magnifies God because of things He's done in history *outside* of her.

**THIS IS HUGE** — Christianity is a historical religion. Other philosophical and religious systems are so subjective, so private.

Christmas proclaims that God has done something outside of you in history — God sent His Son, Jesus Christ into this world.

*Acts 26:25-26 (ESV) But Paul said, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words. <sup>26</sup>For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner.*

**QUOTE: C.S. Lewis** — *"Human history is the long terrible story of man trying to find something other than God which will make him happy."*

**THAT** is the story of man. But Timothy Keller said this

**QUOTE: Timothy Keller** — *Deep heaven has punched a hole with an omnipotent fist in the ceiling of history.*

I love that language — because this thing that God has done in human history is not a secret! The nature of God’s breaking into human history calls every man and woman to a moment of decision! You can receive Him, and be received by the Father — or else you are left without God and without hope in this world. **That** is the message of Christianity. 21<sup>st</sup> century American culture **hates** that — but that is exactly what Mary is singing about!

**1. Christmas tells us about God’s Nature:** Mighty, Holy, Merciful

**2. Christmas tells us about God’s Purposes**

**3. Christmas tells us about God’s Promises**

Christmas is about the unchanging, historical purposes of God. And in **verse 55** Mary says that Christmas **is the result** of the promises God had made to Abraham and his descendants. We did an entire series titled THE RESUCE. In that series we walked through the promises and prophecies God made concerning the coming of Jesus to rescue us. In **Genesis 12** God promised Abraham that through his descendants all the nations of the earth would be blessed. God made that promise to Abraham 2,000 years before Mary sang this song. It would have been normal for any rational person to say, *“God must have forgotten His Promise to Abraham. He must have forgotten His promise to Abraham’s descendants. None of these things will ever come true.”*

Christmas tells us that God never forgets. He will never forget. We can’t box God into our concept of time because He’s outside of time. We view history like spectators at a parade. You sit in a place and you watch the progression of bands and floats as they pass by your spot along the parade route. God sees the events of history all at once; He relates to them all at once, He has an immediate relationship to every one of them. For God, all of history is in the now. So when it comes to **when** God is going to do what He promised

— it might take a long time by our standards — but He will **always** do what he said. Here's the deal — Christmas teaches us to never try to expect God to work in our timeframes. When you and I are wondering why God's not coming through — we need to remember that He **always** comes through, but not always in our time. Christmas means that He will always come — but in his time!

**QUESTION** — Do you see Christmas as an expression of the unchanging historical purposes of God to intervene in history? Do you see Christmas as the expression of the faithfulness of God to always do what he said?

THIS HAS HUGE IMPLICATIONS in our everyday walk with God. The Bible tells us that in the moment we believe with our hearts on the Lord Jesus that God begins a good work in us! And God promises to bring it to completion on the day of Christ. If you're a Christian — every flaw, every grudge, every sadness, every fear, every bitterness, every bad habit in your life will fall before His amazing, triumphant grace. He **will** have triumph over every one of them. He said so. His first Advent assures the certainty of His second Advent.

**CLOSE WITH THIS —**

**Christmas upends the self-righteousness and pride of man**

<sup>51</sup> He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; <sup>52</sup> he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; <sup>53</sup> he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away.

Mary anticipates the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.

*Matthew 5:3 (ESV) "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."*

Jesus said that those who are blessed — those who will enter the Kingdom of heaven — are those who know they are spiritually bankrupt — know

they have no way to pay their spiritual debts. They know that only God can save them, only God can pardon such a debt.

That is antithetical to the self-help books that sell in the millions. They sell by the millions because they appeal to man's sense of self-sufficiency. They resonate with the pride of man by asking the question: *Do you know what's wrong with you? You don't believe in yourself. You don't see that you have what it take to change yourself and change the world!*

Everyone is in agreement that the world is broken. Christmas — the account of the Incarnation — tells us that the Most High had to become most low because man doesn't have what it takes to save himself! Christmas tells us that God will not work with people who think they have what it takes to be right with God.

People will embrace the sentimental, man-centered version of Christmas and reject the Bible's view of Christmas because by virtue of His nature the child born in Bethlehem is an affront to the pride of man. Let me read to you an excerpt from a letter written by a president of Harvard about a hundred years ago. He was married, and neither he nor his wife were believers. In his letter he referenced a letter his wife wrote to one of her friends who attended an Episcopalian church.

*"My dear, every Sunday, do you get down on your knees with your children and confess that you're miserable sinners? Neither my children nor I will ever do such a thing."*

The gospel differs from every supposition and expectation of fallen man — it turns every human expectation of how God will save and who God will save on their heads.

Christmas tells us that there is great news for this broken world (that would be you and me). Christmas tells us that God has what man needs. Christmas tells us that the Lord sees the lowly heart. Christmas tells us that the Lord is mighty to save — that He's Holy and wants to defeat sin. Christmas tells us that God did something — He did it for the whole world to see — He invaded history — became man — just as He promised — so that He could

rescue rebels — you and me — who are totally incapable of saving themselves.

**QUOTE: Paul Tripp** — *That baby in the manger would be what we'd never be; righteous without spot, so he'd be the acceptable Lamb of the once-for-all sacrifice.*

Christmas tells us that those who know that they have nothing to contribute to their salvation will receive the gift of eternal life through Christ Jesus.

**QUOTE: Spurgeon** — *I'm throwing all my good works overboard and lashing myself to the plank of free grace; for I hope to swim to glory on it.*

By contrast — Those who lash themselves to the plank of their own righteousness — their own religious and moral efforts to save themselves — are essentially booking passage on the Titanic!

They might have a fine time along the way — but they will never make port.

Christmas tells us that the one and only hope of all of humanity was born in a stable and laid in a manger because He came to deliver us from the one thing we could not escape — sin.