

Christmas 2022

“The Story of Christmas-Part 1”

A message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier
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As you are all painfully aware—we are ‘knee-deep’ into the Christmas season!

I remember years ago when my oldest son Phil was only about 5 or 6 years old, he came to me a couple of weeks before Christmas and asked me to read him the Christmas story from the Bible.

My initial reaction was to turn to the Gospel of Luke and read to him the first part of chapter two when the Lord spoke to my heart and reminded me that—that really wasn't where the Christmas story began—in many ways that was the culmination of the story of Christmas.

You see the Christmas story didn't begin in Bethlehem or in a manger or even with the angel announcing to Mary that she had been chosen by God to be the mother of the Messiah.

The Christmas story actually began four thousand years earlier in a Garden—the Garden of Eden.

Why do I believe this?

I believe it because that's where the first sin happened, that's where man fell—and that's where the story of redemption begins. And you see—the story of Christmas is really the story of *redemption*!

The story of redemption begins (on earth, in time not in eternity) right after man fell in the Garden with a **promise**—a promise from God in Genesis 3:15 that someday He would send a Redeemer to save us from our sin and give us eternal life.

Then, to keep that **promise** alive down through the centuries—the story of Christmas continues with many *prophecies*.

As we all know—the story of Christmas is the story of Jesus' First Coming to the earth.

When we talk about the prophecies surrounding Jesus' First Coming—you need to understand that there are over 300 of them that give us a detailed look into Jesus' life and earthly ministry.

Now let me stop here and say that skeptics believe that Jesus simply read the prophecies in the Scriptures concerning the Messiah—and then went about trying to fulfill them so He could claim to be the Messiah.

He could do that with some of the prophecies—but with most of them that would be extremely difficult—like getting Judas to betray Him for exactly 30 pieces of silver or getting the Romans to cast lots for His outer cloak.

Then with others—it would be absolutely impossible!

For example—Jesus fulfilled three prophecies by just being born—He didn't do anything!

1. **2 Samuel 7** tells us that Messiah would be a descendant of King David which would eliminate every other family on the face of the earth—as the old saying goes “*you can pick your friends but not your family.*”
2. **Micah 5:2** tells us He would be born in Bethlehem in the region (county) of Ephrathah (there was another Bethlehem up in Galilee).

In Jesus' day this Bethlehem was a small town which meant the number of baby boys born there was very small and therefore the odds against Messiah being born in such a small town were astronomical!

3. **Daniel 9:24-27** tells us that Messiah would be born sometime before the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple (which took place in 70 AD).

Between the time of Daniel and 70 AD—there is only a five-hundred year window for the birth of the Messiah out of all of human history—again greatly increasing the odds against the timing of the Messiah's coming to the earth.

Now this evening, I'd like to focus on just one of Jesus' First Coming prophecies—the one that I feel could be the most important of them all.

It's the one prophecy that is at the very heart of the Christmas story because—it's the one implied in the promise that started the whole story of Christmas in the first place.

Genesis 3:14-15 (NKJV)

¹⁴ So the LORD God said to the serpent: "Because you have done this, You *are* cursed more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you shall go, And you shall eat dust All the days of your life.

¹⁵ **And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel."**

Verse 15 is known as the *protevangelium* (prōt, ē, van'jelēəm\), meaning “*the first gospel*”—or in other words—the first place in Scripture where the gospel appears.

In Genesis 3:15 God promises that the woman's **Seed** (Messiah) would someday crush the **Serpent's** (the Devil's) **head**—a mortal wound spelling absolute defeat—but first Satan would ‘*bruise the Messiah's heel*’. This is a reference to the suffering and physical death that Jesus would endure on the cross—but which would not result in His ultimate demise or defeat.

That's of course because (as the gospels tell us) three days later He rose from the dead victorious as He conquered over sin, Satan and death itself.

The fact that He is called the *woman's 'Seed'* is a reference to His virgin birth.

Every 6th grader knows that the ‘*seed*’ (sperm) in conception comes from the man not the woman—the woman provides the egg (ovum) that the man's seed fertilizes.

For centuries Christian theologians have taught that the “**Seed of the woman**” is a clear reference to the fact that this Deliverer (Messiah) would be *virgin* born.

Are we reading too much into this?—Well here's where the prophecy comes in that we want to spend the rest of our time this evening focusing on—

Isaiah 7:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.

Much controversy has swirled around this prophecy of the virgin giving birth. Liberal theologians, who deny the virgin birth, are quick to point out that the Hebrew word translated 'virgin' is *almah*. They say the word *almah*, strictly speaking, means 'a young woman of marriageable age'—and therefore doesn't *have* to mean 'a virgin'.

In fact, the RSV translates Isaiah 7:14—“Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son...”—completely destroying one of the most important verses in the Bible! However, the word *almah* is never used in the O.T. to speak of a married woman—only a young single woman.

So, this leaves only two options—the *almah* prophesied about in Isaiah 7:14 must either be:

- 1) *A young woman who conceived a child out of wedlock; or*
- 2) *A virgin.*

The fact that Isaiah uses the definite article “**the virgin**” (not “a virgin”) indicates that this woman and this conception would be something unique and therefore would be a clear *sign* that God was at work.

Look, the birth of a child to a young unmarried woman is so common—it could hardly be a “sign” of anything! Furthermore, the word *almah* always indicates a *virgin* every other place it's used in the O.T.

In fact, Martin Luther offered a hundred guilders (equal to \$100 dollars) to anyone who could show any other place in the O.T. where the word *almah* is translated “*young woman*” rather than “*virgin*.”

No one took him up on his offer.

Finally, for evangelical Christians, all controversy is put to rest by Matthew, who under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, when he quoted from Isaiah 7:14 (Matthew 1:23) chose the Greek word *parthenos* which no one disputes—always refers to a virgin.

The question is—why would this Deliverer need to be virgin born?

It's because, as the Bible teaches, the sin nature (and therefore the curse) is passed down from the *father* to the children—not from the *mother* to the children (“In Adam all die”—not “in Eve all die”—1 Corinthians 15:22).

If Messiah would have had an earthly father—he would have inherited a sin nature from him (passed down from Adam)—and therefore couldn't have died for sinners since he himself would have also been a sinner.

Scripture teaches that sinners can't die for sinners—it would have to be the innocent dying for the guilty—therefore, this Redeemer couldn't have been a mere mortal man (a man yes—but not a fallen man) which means—He would have to be virgin born!

The only possibility for that would be if this Messiah could be supernaturally implanted into the womb of a virgin—by God Himself!:

Luke 1:26–37 (NKJV)

²⁶ Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored *one*, the Lord *is* with you; blessed *are* you among women!" ²⁹ But when she saw *him*, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. ³⁰ Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. ³² He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. ³³ And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴ Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" ³⁵ And the angel answered and said to her, "*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God...* ³⁷ For with God nothing will be impossible."

Matthew 1:23 (NKJV)

²³ "*Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,*" which is translated, "God with us."

Jesus was no mere man—He was and is the Son of God—God in human flesh—fully God and fully Man (the hypostatic union)! Mary was His mother and God the Father was His Father—and as such He was the only Man ever born without sin—and therefore the only One who could have died for sinners.

John 1:1-3, 14 (NKJV)

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made...¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...

The Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us speaks of the incarnation which is the climax of the story of Christmas—but not the climax of the story of redemption.

The whole purpose of redemptive history is so that 'paradise lost' could become 'paradise found'—or in other words fellowship with God that was lost in the Garden of Eden through man's sin could be fellowship restored—forever!

You see it was God's desire from the very beginning to have deep personal fellowship with us which started in the Garden—but which sin interrupted by separating us from Him—

Isaiah 59:1–2 (NKJV)

¹ Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear. ² But your iniquities have separated you from your God...

Restoring this fellowship so that man could once again worship God and enjoy Him for all eternity was always the goal of redemptive history (not primarily keeping fallen man from going to hell)—that God could be our 'Immanuel' (God with us) forever.

In the O.T. God called the nation of Israel to be the illustration of this—a people that would be in fellowship with Him—a nation He would be with—a nation that would be the recipient of His love, provision, protection and blessings.

Unfortunately, Israel eventually turned its back on Him and got into idolatry and gross immorality—and their sin separated them from Him. (Ezekiel 10—John 8:12)

Sin has always been the problem of broken fellowship with God and no matter how much man tried to walk in obedience to the laws of God he failed—because as Jesus told Peter *“The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”*

So, God instituted a new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-33) that basically took fellowship (positional, salvation fellowship) out of man’s hands altogether and placed solely upon God. He did this by sending His Son to die for our sins and give us a new nature once we received Jesus as our Savior (2 Peter 1:4)—which broke sin’s hold on our lives and made us new creations. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Our relationship with God was restored, we became His children—and it allowed Him to say to us, *“I will never leave you nor forsake you”* and *“I will be with you always even to the end of the age”* (through His Spirit and then when Jesus returns forever in Person).

Yet in the meantime we are living in dark and troublesome times politically, morally and spiritually.

➤ *How are we to cope with all the stress, fear and uncertainty of the future?*

By clinging to God’s promises!

God sent Isaiah to His people living in the southern Kingdom of Judah to promise them that He would send *Immanuel* to be with them and that promise comforted them—but only if they believed it and clung to it.

But listen, what they had to *hope for*—we have seen the *fulfillment of* because for us Immanuel has come—that’s what Christmas celebrates!

Jesus gave us the same promise to hold onto to bring comfort to our hearts in these difficult and troublesome days we’re living in—*“I am with you always”*.

Keep reminding yourself that God is with you—and that He will never stop being with you.

You’re not going through any problem or crisis alone—no matter how black things look keep reminding yourself that He is there with you and that nothing shall be impossible with God.

Isn’t that what the angel Gabriel said to Mary when he first announced to her that she had been chosen by God to be the mother of the Messiah and she said, *“How can this be possible—I’m a virgin and have never been with a man in that way?”* And the angel answered her—*“With God nothing is impossible!”*

That’s the message of Christmas—a message of hope in an impossible situation!

Let’s spend the rest of our time looking at Mary and Joseph since they are so pivotal to the story of Christmas.

God’s announcement to Mary—Luke 1:26-37 (which we just read)

What do we know about Mary?

We know that she was a Jewess from the tribe of Judah, a descendant of David—and a virgin. We know she was engaged to a carpenter in Nazareth named Joseph (Matthew 13:55)—and apparently both of them were *poor* (Leviticus 12:8; Luke 2:24).

It is possible that both Joseph and Mary were quite young when they were betrothed—girls were often betrothed as young as thirteen or fourteen, and boys when they were fifteen or sixteen. According to Jewish custom, a betrothal signified more than an engagement in the modern sense—a Hebrew marriage involved two stages, the *kiddushin* (betrothal) and the *huppah* (marriage ceremony).

The marriage was almost always arranged by the families of the bride and groom—often without consulting them. A contract was made and was sealed by payment of the *mohar* (the dowry or ‘bride-price’) which was paid by the groom or his family to the bride’s father.

The *mohar* served to compensate the bride’s father for wedding expenses and to provide a type of insurance for the bride (“alimony in advance”) in the event the groom became dissatisfied and divorced her—or died leaving her a widow and destitute.

The contract was considered binding as soon as it was made and the man and woman at that point were considered legally married. Even though the marriage ceremony (*huppah*) and consummation often did not occur until as much as a year later—since the groom had to go to his father’s house to prepare a place for them to live.

Given the maturity with which Mary handled herself in the face of this incredible encounter—I’m going to guess she was no younger than 16 yrs. old.

Mary’s response was to surrender herself to God as a willing servant—

Luke 1:38 (NKJV)

³⁸ Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

All this took more trust than we might think—she was agreeing to a "*suspicious pregnancy*" in a society that had a death penalty for adultery—at very least she risked losing Joseph.

Did Mary fully comprehend at that moment all the implications of what the angel was saying—probably not—but she would in the weeks and months to follow for this blessing would not be without cost—great cost to her personally.

Philip Yancey in his book, *"The Jesus I Never Knew"* had this to say concerning Mary—

"Often a work of God comes with two edges, great joy and great pain: and in that matter of fact response, Mary embraced both. She was the first person to accept Jesus on His own terms, regardless of the personal cost."

Cost Mary it did—it cost her her reputation (if she had lived in Puritan times, she would have been forced to wear the scarlet letter “A” for the rest of her life).

One author put it this way—

"We all dream of being used by God for some great work for His glory; and we fancy ourselves, like Mary saying, ‘Behold, the servant or the maidservant of the Lord’ not realizing that it’s often a two-edged sword in that the greatest blessings often go hand in hand with the deepest sorrows."

And yet that is the cross that Jesus commands all of His followers to carry if they are truly going to be His disciples—total surrender regardless of the cost.

God's pronouncement to Joseph

Matthew 1:18 (NKJV)

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit.

So, verse 18 tells us that during this betrothal period, before Joseph and Mary had consummated their marriage—she was found to be pregnant.

We know from Matthew and Luke's gospels that the Holy Spirit had impregnated Mary with the Seed (the Son) of God—but Joseph didn't know that at first. He naturally thought she had been unfaithful to him—even after Mary told him what had happened.

I mean think about it—you guys ***put yourselves in Joseph's sandals!***

What would you have thought if your fiancée came to you pregnant and saying she was still a virgin but had been impregnated with the Seed of God by the Holy Spirit—supernaturally without sex?

One author put it this way—

"Can you think of a greater test of a man's love for a woman? On the one hand, he might have imagined a wicked tryst with another man—but this was not the Mary that Joseph knew and loved. On the other hand, how could he really believe the story she'd told him about the angelic announcement? Joseph didn't know what to think. His heart was broken. His plans ruined. His pride bruised, but he still loved this Hebrew maiden..."

In fact, he loved her so much that he didn't demand his rights—he didn't seek revenge.

You see Jewish law said that adultery was punishable by stoning and so legally Joseph had every right to accuse Mary openly and publicly as an adulteress—and then to demand justice by having her stoned!

Instead, we read—

Matthew 1:19-21 (NKJV)

¹⁹ Then Joseph her husband, being a just *man*, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. ²⁰ But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. ²¹ And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower— ***you can experience the richest Christmas of your life!***

Please, reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Reach out to us [here](#).

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