

## This is Jesus - Selected Scriptures

### Genesis 1

This time of year when people say the name Jesus they usually think of a baby born in a manger, in a feeding trough for animals. And that is true. We celebrate this time of year as the time when the Son of God, God the Son, came into the world in flesh. He was prophesied about in the OT, he was promised by God, he was alluded to constantly. And then in Matthew 1 he is born in Bethlehem, right on time and in the exact right place.

The reason, of course, that Jesus being born is because it was God who came into the world to save his people from their sins. I think everyone likes a good rescue story. The more dire the situation, the more heroic the effort, the more amazing the rescue story is. That's what the gospel message is. It's a rescue mission where people are enslaved by sin and Satan, all other means of rescue are futile, and God himself has to break into the world to rescue his people.

That's the making of any great story and that is the story of redemption. But how important is the birth story of Jesus. How important is it that God came into the world?

A lot of times when we talk about the gospel - or at least when I talk about the gospel - I mention that all people are sinners and deserving of God's wrath in hell forever. But through faith alone in the Lord Jesus Christ as the perfect Son of God who died for sins and rose again you can have your sins forgiven. You can have eternal life right now - this very moment - if you turn from your sins, turn from trusting that God will give you some sort of hall pass into heaven because you have some goodness within you. And instead you recognize and acknowledge that you are thoroughly wretched and in need of God's grace that only comes through trusting and following Jesus as your Lord, your master. That's the gospel, the good news. That God has made a way of salvation not by us being good, but Jesus being good for us.

I think most of us would frame the gospel in those basic kind of terms. And so when we come to the Christmas story where Jesus enters the world, it's almost like a prologue to the gospel. Or maybe background information.

But what I think we all need to be reminded of this time of year is that the way and circumstances of the Son of God coming into the world is not a prologue or background information. It is actually the very heart of the gospel message. The good news is that God the Son somehow took on flesh and died for the sins of the world.

The earliest believers understood just how important the birth of Christ was. We see it in several ways. One is that the great creeds of the faith all include belief in the incarnation. The Apostle's Creed, which is about as bare bones of a creed that you can have - it's only a paragraph long - makes belief in the incarnation essential:

*I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth*

*And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.*

*Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary.*

When you've only got a paragraph to write out the key doctrines of the Christian faith, every word is precious real estate. But the early church knew that Jesus being conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary - which is what we celebrate at Christmas - was not negotiable. It was also not inconsequential. When we say that Jesus lived a sinless life in our place, how was that possible? How was that achieved? It had to do with his miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit in the virgin Mary.

Now here's what happened as time went on: people realized that the Apostle's creed didn't provide a complete picture of who Jesus was. And so there were more creeds. They clarify just who Jesus was and is as God in relation to who he was as a man. And really, when you think of it that way, the point of many of the major creeds after the Apostles' Creed was essentially to clarify what exactly the Bible says happened at Christmas.

Why spend so much time on that? Isn't that minutiae? The answer is no: many people got it incredibly wrong. Some denying Jesus was a man, other denying he was God, others having weird ideas about how that

happens. See, here's the issue: at the incarnation you have the God of the universe taking on human flesh. This is what theologians call the hypostatic union. The hypostatic union is the union of the divine nature of God with the human nature of man in Jesus. I don't know if you've ever just sat and thought about that. How is that possible?

In the 1960s and 1970s the US and Russia were in the midst of the Cold War. No shots were fired, but there was the constant fear of nuclear war where each country would launch rockets the size of semi trucks thousands of miles away from each other and annihilate each other. Well in the middle of the Cold War a new threat was raised: what about the possibility of nuclear weapon that wasn't the size of a semi truck, but the size a back pack or suitcase. A nuclear warhead so small that no one would notice the awesome power and force it had to completely level a major city. To this day, suitcase nuclear weapons are supposedly hypothetical. According to nuclear physicists, it's not possible to contain to detonate a bomb like that in something as small as a backpack. They can't figure out how to do it.

That's the hypostatic union. How is it that God Almighty, maker of heaven and earth can take on human flesh? How can the infinite God dwell in a finite body? How is it that that the Son of God becomes fully man? The early believers knew it was true, and that to get it wrong was a denial of the gospel.

It wasn't long after the Apostles' Creed that it became apparent that more clarity was needed. So 350-400 years after Jesus the Church put out another Creed - the Nicene Creed - that further clarified who Jesus was. Here's part of the Nicene Creed:

*[We believe]...in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made; of the same essence as the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, and was made human.*

The Nicene Creed was developed as a summary for the Church to understand what the Bible teaches happened at Christmas. That Jesus was fully and truly God - not made or created. He did not stop being God, but he began to be a man with real flesh.

And you'd think: well, that settles it. You'd like to think so. But what happened was that the Nicene Creed caused people to ask more questions.

Later came a Creed called The Athanasian Creed. It wasn't written by Athanasius, the great Church theologian and pastor. But it was probably written by his followers. And the goal was to provide even more clarity about Jesus. And the Athanasian Creed was used all the through the time of the Reformers in the 1500-1600s:

*Anyone then who desires to be saved should think thus about the trinity. But it is necessary for eternal salvation that one also believe in the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ faithfully.*

*Now this is the true faith: That we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son, is both God and human, equally. He is God from the essence of the Father, begotten before time; and he is human from the essence of his mother, born in time; completely God, completely human, with a rational soul and human flesh; equal to the Father as regards divinity, less than the Father as regards humanity. Although he is God and human, yet Christ is not two, but one. He is one, however, not by his divinity being turned into flesh, but by God's taking humanity to himself.*

*He is one, certainly not by the blending of his essence, but by the unity of his person. For just as one human is both rational soul and flesh, so too the one Christ is both God and human.*

The issue here was how is the Son of God related to the man Jesus? Is the Son of God just using the body of Jesus like we use a car or a tractor? He's in there pulling levers and turning wheels and making things happen, but the flesh isn't really part of who he is? The answer is no. The Son of God takes on real human flesh and

becomes man. He's not just God using a man, God operating a fleshly machine. The Son of God becomes the God-Man, God who has taken on the same flesh you and I have and has added this flesh to his nature.

You can look up these creeds online and encourage you to do so. There is an excellent little book called *Know the Creeds and Councils* by Justin Holcomb that is a great resource on creeds and councils and why they are important.

This sounds technical and stuffy and maybe boring to you. But what I want you to understand is that all these creeds, all these church councils, all these statements about Jesus are really just trying to clarify what happened at Christmas. How do you get the nuclear device into the backpack?

And the reason so much ink was spilled - and blood was spilled, for that matter - is because what happened at Christmas wasn't just a footnote in the biblical storyline. It wasn't just an interesting part of biblical minutiae to banter about. How God came into the world is the very essence of the gospel message. It's the very essence of hope. A Jesus who is less than God is not a Savior. A Jesus who isn't fully human cannot save.

What I want to do then with the time we have left is assume that we know Jesus is fully human. We are celebrating the birth of Jesus, hopefully you understand that means that the baby in the manger is fully human. Jesus was fully human at his death, fully human at his resurrection, he is fully human now and will be fully human for all eternity. The Son of God took on flesh for all eternity going forward.

So I'm going to assume you know that. What I want to do is, as we think about Jesus in his conception and birth, look at some passages that might help us understand just who came into the world to rescue us. I want to focus on the divine nature of Jesus.

1) This is Jesus - the creator of the universe. **Read Gen 1:1-5**

When we read the Genesis account of creation we are reading about the works of Jesus. Some people might say "I thought we were reading about God." We are reading about God. "No, I mean the Father." We are reading about the Father. And the Spirit. And the Son. The Triune God is all present and active at creation.

But the Bible is clear that the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, takes a particular lead in creation. He is often referred to as the **agent** of creation. Not because he created and the Father and Spirit did nothing. But that what was done was done through Jesus.

**Col. 1:16:** By him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - all things were created through him and for him.

**John 1:3:** All things were made through Jesus and without him not anything was made that was made.

When Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born at the inn, he was coming into a world of atoms and particles and molecules that he had spoken into existence. The flesh that made up his body was flesh that he spoke into existence. The Creator comes into his creation.

### Turn to Exodus 3

This is the famous passage about Moses and the burning bush. If you remember, Moses was raised in Pharaoh's household but eventually found out he was a Hebrew. It may have been that he was circumcised and only Hebrews were circumcised. But in any case as a leader in Egypt he saw the oppression of his people, saw an Egyptian abusing a Hebrew man and so Moses killed the Egyptian and eventually fled into the wilderness. One day he's out taking care of the flocks of his father-in-law when he comes across this bush that's burning. **Read 3:1-12**

So there's a lot going on in this passage. On the one hand, it says that the Angel of the Lord was speaking out of the bush in **Vs. 2**. But in **Vs. 4** it says that it was the Lord who called out to Moses. So which was it? The answer is yes. The Angel of the Lord is none other than Yahweh himself. Moses takes off his sandals because he is on holy ground - any place where God is present is holy ground. So this is God and throughout the OT

the Angel of the Lord is shown to be God as well. The big term for this is called theophany - an appearing of God. Theo meaning God, phanos meaning appearing.

And I don't know what runs through your mind when you think of this passage. I think I just assumed that this was either the fullness of the Trinity talking to Moses, or more likely the Father who was speaking to him. But who was it that was speaking? Who was that Moses was talking to that promised to deliver a people out of the land of Egypt?

Well, there's a small tidbit in the little book of Jude that makes it super clear.

**Jude 5:** Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe.

The apostle Jude, who was Jesus' half brother who rejected Jesus until after the resurrection, says that it was Jesus who led a people out of Egypt. That's what Yahweh says here in **Vs. 8. Read**

Just as Jesus once saved his people out of slavery to Pharaoh in Egypt, so too Jesus saves all those who trust in him for eternal life from slavery to their sin. Jesus, true to the meaning of his name, is the ultimate, consummate Savior.

**Look** over at **Numbers 21**. It's interesting that Jude mentions that Jesus saved people out of Egypt almost in passing. His real point was more shocking: that Jesus later destroyed those who were disobedient. This is one of the instances of that. **Read 4-9**

What we're to understand here is that Jesus isn't a social justice warrior who just wants to release people from captivity - although that's a good thing to do. But what we need to understand is that Jesus has always - and even now - demands holiness from his people.

I mean, here, he sent serpents to kill people who were complaining about their food. Kids, think about that the next time your parents serve you something that's not your favorite meal. This might seem like a small thing, but complaining is really a rejection of God's supernatural provision and grace.

The apostle Paul actually uses this as a reminder to believer to not complain in the NT that "we are not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents" (**1 Cor. 10:8**). It was Christ who sent these serpents to destroy the people. It's not Jesus meek and mild. It's Jesus hot and holy. It's Jesus who defied when people complain against him.

And it's also Jesus merciful. Who provided the means to be healed? Jesus. You remember when Jesus was talking to Nicodemus in John's gospel about the New Birth? Here's what he says: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." (**John 3:14-15**)

That's amazing. Is Jesus holy and wants his people to be holy? Absolutely. But does Jesus offer people forgiveness of sin and pardon? Absolutely. He always has. In the wilderness, all people had to do was look to the bronze serpent and believe that they would be healed. They didn't have to work for it or earn it or pay restitution. It was free grace to all who believed. And that's what Jesus offers even now: free grace to all who believe. If you want your sins forgiven, if you want eternal life, if you want to escape wrath and hell, inherit the Kingdom of God, all you have to do is look to Jesus and believe.

Believe that you have no goodness to offer him. Believe that your good works could never outweigh your sins. But that on the cross Jesus took the penalty you deserve for your sins. He paid your fine and you can go free. And believe that when God asks you what good you have done to earn entrance into heaven that the only good you can claim is the righteous goodness of Jesus, who took your sins and gave you his righteousness.

Believe that and you will be saved just as these people were saved from the fiery serpents. And just as they were saved from their sin into a life of grace and obedience, so too God will save you from your sin and into a life of grace and obedience. This is the same Jesus we serve.

**Look** over to **Jeremiah 1**. This is often called the call of the prophet Jeremiah. It's where God first comes to Jeremiah and tells him that he will be a prophet for God. He is called into ministry.

And it's an interesting section because of what truths God tells Jeremiah to prepare him for this ministry. These were important truths because whatever we might think about the life of a prophet, it was a difficult life. It was a life of opposition, and preaching repentance, and danger at the end of which you were usually killed for serving God. Jesus says he has to die in Jerusalem because that's basically what happens to all the prophets. They all get slaughtered, why should he be any different?

And what God tells Jeremiah is just as needed now as it was then. Life has purpose and meaning because life is given by God. A lot of times this time of year is very difficult for people. People are wrestling with the loss of family, loss of friends, loss of purpose. And while many rejoice over gifts and family, many are exceedingly lonely and depressed and lost and sad. When we are celebrating the dawning of indescribable joy, there is emptiness.

Even as God is laying the foundation for Jeremiah's call, we are reminded of precious truths. **Read 4-8**

These are precious truths. God has known us eternally. Before God formed Jeremiah - and us - he knew us. Not just know about us, he knew us intimately. Every little bit about us, every struggle, every hurt, every joy, our personality. It's not like when we read some sort of science fiction about what it might be in the future although we don't really know it. No, God knew us infinitely more deeply than you know your best friend.

And then he formed us. Knit us together in the womb. As much as it is a natural process of biology, conception is a supernatural process because it is brought about by God. And people often come to this passage to show why we should be pro-life and protect the unborn and that's good and right. But the primary purpose here isn't so that we are reminded that God forms babies out there somewhere in the womb. The primary purpose is so that we're reminded that God formed **us** intimately in the womb. He formed me and he formed you.

My wife and I recently switched internet services. And they try to sign you up for all these TV channels at the same time. Some of the packages are crazy: 500 channels of which only about 5 are any good. Do we really need three Hallmark Classic movie channels? No, they know no one will watch those, they just throw them all into a big package so the deal looks impressive. It's just a big package deal where most of the parts are useless.

I think sometimes we think we're just channel 268 in a 500 channel package deal. We're really useless and he doesn't care. Listen, you're not just part of some package deal. That's not how God operates humanity. He intimately put you together and you are designed to bring him glory - and you will one way or another. You will bring glory to God because he will be shown to be just in your judgment or you will bring glory to God because he will be merciful in your salvation through Jesus Christ.

And while he probably hasn't consecrated you to be a prophet of the nations. If you are a follower of Christ, before you were born he did consecrate you. He did set you apart. He set you apart to be an object of his love and mercy. In love he predestined you to be an heir of his Kingdom and reign alongside his Son Jesus Christ. He set you apart to be filled with his Spirit, empowered to serve for his glory, for your good, and for the upbuilding of the church. It doesn't matter if you're a single lady, a middle-age dad or four years old, in Christ God has designed you to proclaim the excellencies of him because he called you out of darkness into the wonderful light of the gospel.

Who set Jeremiah apart? Jesus. The baby in the manger - who fashioned his own body in the womb - knew him, formed him, consecrated him and sent him.

That's how Jesus still works to this day.

**Turn to Revelation 22.** We know, of course that Jesus would go on to an amazing life. His ministry of preaching and miracles confirmed to all that he was the Son of God. Through his death and resurrection three days later and his ascension into heaven where he sat down at the right hand of God he secures the forgiveness of sins for all who trust in him alone for salvation.

What is Jesus doing now? Jesus is reigning on the throne of God in heaven. And one day he will come back.

**Read 12-16**

Jesus is coming and judgment with him. For all who follow Jesus - who who wash he brings reward, he brings compensation. For all who don't he brings judgment.

What does it mean when he says blessed are those who wash their robes? The imagery is that we walk around this sinful world in sinful robes that need to be cleaned. They are cleaned with the blood of Christ. It's something of an ironic twist that blood - one of the most stain causing elements there is - is actually the way we become clean. Obviously this is not literal, this is that we are cleansed with the blood of Jesus when we trust in him, when we follow him as his disciples.

He says that's the only way to take of the tree of life in heaven. Just like in the Garden of Eden that gave eternal life, there's a tree of life in heaven and we want to eat of that tree. And the only way to enter the gate and eat the tree is to be washed with Jesus' blood. To trust in his sacrifice.

And listen, it's not just an intellectual message. It's not just some neat theory about God. It's something God is inviting you to take part in. **Read 17**

Jesus bids you to come. Whether you know a lot about Jesus or a little about Jesus. Whether you like church or you don't. If you are thirsty for righteousness, to have your sins forgiven and made clean, to know the God of the universe, you can. The Holy Spirit and the Bride - that's the Church - say come! Come to Jesus, trust in Jesus, follow Jesus and take of the eternal life he offers without price.

**Pray**