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What You Need to Know About The Miracle of the Manger: Part 2

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`THE MIRACLE OF THE MANGER
(PART TWO)

On July 20, 1969 President Richard Nixon made a statement on national television that no evangelical Christian could agree with. He said:

> "Today, July 20, 1969, may well prove to be the greatest day in human history."

Mr. Nixon was wrong. That day was NOT the greatest, but we can understand his enthusiasm, for just a few hours previous to his statement Neil Armstrong had just set foot on the moon! Actually, many theologians would contend that the greatest day in human history occurred some 2,000 years ago when a young virgin girl gave birth to a baby boy and laid him in a Bethlehem manager!

And why was this event so great? Simply this—the infinite, holy, sovereign God had just wrapped around His eternal frame flesh and bone and entered our finite, sinful and fallen race as a human being! What other event could even remotely compare to that? John 1:14 aptly summarizes this event:

> *"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."*

Someone paraphrased this verse to read—

> *"And God became man and moved into the neighborhood!"*

Of course the devil probably thought—

> "There goes the neighborhood!"

Today we want to briefly examine this truly mind-boggling event by a simple two-fold plan:

- Those events preceding the birth of Jesus
- Those events accompanying the birth of Jesus

All this can be found in Luke, chapters one and two.

THOSE EVENTS PRECEDING THE BIRTH OF JESUS—Here we read of three angelic announcements and three human songs of praise.

THE THREE ANGELIC ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **To Zacharias in regards to the birth of John the Baptist**

  "And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. And thou shalt have

joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turned to the Lord thy God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:11-17).

One of the most well-known passages in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* can be found in the second scene of the second act. As the story opens, Juliet is lamenting the fact that her parents (the Capulets) intensely dislike the parents of her lover, Romeo (the Montagues).

In an attempt to play down the situation, she sighs, "What's Montague? It is nor hand, nor foot, nor arm, nor face, nor any other part belonging to a man. O, be some other name! What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet."

Thus, to Juliet a person's name meant little or nothing. This is, however, decidedly not the case as one approaches the Bible. In fact, to the contrary, one may learn a great deal about a person simply by examining the names ascribed to him or her.

For example, consider the meaning of the three names I have just read to you:

The child was to be called **John**, which means *the grace of Jehovah.* The name **Zacharias** means *God remembers,* and the name **Elisabeth** means *his oath.* Thus, at the birth of John the Baptist, God was remembering his covenant of grace made in Psa. 89:34-37 concerning David's seed, Jesus, to which John would serve as a forerunner. Note:

> *"My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me. It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven"* (Psa. 89:34-37).

- **To Mary in regards to the birth of Jesus**

"*And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favor with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. For with God nothing shall be impossible. And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her"* (Luke 1:28, 30-33, 37, 38).

Note three phrases in this passage:

1. ***Blessed art thou among women*—**v. 28

The angel did ***not*** *say, 'above women,"* but rather, '*among women.'* In other words, although Mary was indeed a morally pure and godly woman, she too, like all other humans, needed a Savior!

2. ***For with God, nothing shall be impossible***—v. 37
   This little verse in and by itself aptly summarizes the Christmas story. As the little chorus says:

   Got any rivers you think are impossible?
   Got any mountains you can't tunnel through?
   God specializes in things thought impossible.
   What He's done for others, He'll do for you!

3. ***Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy Word—***v.38
   Why did God use Mary? The answer is simple—because Mary had made herself *usable.*

- **To Joseph in regards to the purity of Mary**

"Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us" (Matt. 1:18-23).

Note especially several key phrases in this passage:

1. ***Thou shalt call his name JESUS***—v. 1:21a
   This name, meaning, *Jehovah is salvation,* is found over 800 times in the New Testament which both opens and closes its pages with it!

   "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matt. 1:1).
   "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen" (Rev. 22:21).

2. ***He shall save his people from their sins—***1:21b
   Thus, Jesus would come to rescue us—NOT from our errors, or our shortcomings—but from our SINS!

THE THREE SONGS OF PRAISE

- **The praise of Elisabeth to God**

"And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda; And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth. And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord" (Luke 1:39-45).

Never in the history of childbirth did two expectant mothers have more to talk about than these two women.

1. Here was Elisabeth, well past the childbearing years, but anticipating a baby.
2. Here was Mary, a young virgin, but now with child. This was the case because *"with God nothing shall be impossible"* (Luke 1:37).

It should be noted that Elisabeth's unborn child is referred to twice as *"the babe"* (Luke 1:41, 44), indicating Scripture's position on abortion. From the beginning, John was not looked upon as a developing mass of human tissue or a fetus, but as "the babe."

Let me contrast this passage with the present day abortion holocaust—*Read:

But what about a therapeutic abortion? Consider the following: A therapeutic abortion occurs when a pregnant woman is persuaded (often by her doctor) that her unborn child presents an emotional or mental threat to her general well-being. Therefore, the most practical and painless solution (for the mother at least) is simply to kill the offending baby. There are two well-known instances in history in which this attitude toward unborn human life could certainly have been applied.

The first case involved that of an older woman, the wife of a respected religious leader, living in a large southern city. Present-day advice to her would have been: "Do you really feel it wise to complete this birth? Consider your age. The psychological strain upon you will be much greater than it would be to this infant? I mean, it might even affect your relationship with your husband. No, all things considered, it would be far better to terminate the potential problem right now."

The second case had to do with a teenage girl, engaged to a struggling young tradesman, living in a small northern town. Here there could be no doubt. A quick abortion would immediately solve the embarrassment and downright hostility which would certainly develop if the unborn baby was not destroyed.

Two simple and clear-cut cases for the therapeutic abortion. Not quite. Could even the most calloused present-day abortion mill operator stomach the thought of Elisabeth (the older woman) and Mary (the teenager) with trembling hands and hearts awaiting the sharp instrument of some ancient abortionist?

- **The praise of Mary to God**

"And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation. He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away" (Luke 1:46-53).

In these verses Mary quotes from at least fifteen Old Testament sources and worships God for displaying His manifold characteristics! She refers to:

1. His grace (Luke 1:46-48)
2. His power (Luke 1:51)
3. His mercy (Luke 1:50)
4. His holiness (Luke 1:49)
5. His goodness (Luke 1:53)
6. His faithfulness (Luke 1:54-56)

- **The praise of Zacharias to God (at the circumcision of John)**

"And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began: That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; The oath which he sware to our father Abraham, That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life. And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, To give light to them that sit in darkness and [in] the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace" (Luke 1:67-79).

In this marvelous passage the old priest thanks God for keeping his promise regarding the fulfilling of two all-important Old Testament covenants, the Abrahamic Covenant (verse 73) and the Davidic Covenant (verse 69).

1. The Abrahamic Covenant had to do with the seed and soil. God promised Abraham he would father a great nation (seed) and be given a special land (soil). (See Gen. 12-15.)

2. The Davidic Covenant had to do with a Sovereign God. God promised David that a male descendant from his line (Christ) would someday rule over that seed upon that soil (see 2 Sam. 7). *He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord god shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end"* (Luke 1:32-33).

Zacharias predicted that his son would be called "*the prophet of the Highest,"* as contrasted to Gabriel, who referred to Jesus as *"the Son of the Highest."*

THOSE EVENTS ACCOMPANYING THE BIRTH OF JESUS

"*And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn"* (Luke 2:1-7).

So there you have it—those events preceding and accompanying the greatest day in human history!

Gospel song writer Cecil Alexander's beautiful (but somewhat unknown) Christmas hymn perhaps says it best. Note his descriptive words:

Once In Royal David's City

Once in royal David's city—Stood a lowly cattle shed,
Where a mother laid her baby in a manger for His bed;
Mary was that mother mild, Jesus Christ her little Child.

He came down to earth from heaven—Who is God and Lord of all,
And His shelter was a stable, and His cradle was a stall:
With the poor, and mean, and lowly—Lived on earth, our Savior holy.

Jesus is our childhood's pattern, Day by Day like us He grew;
He was little, weak, and helpless, Tears and smiles like us He knew:
And he feeleth for our sadness, And He shareth in our gladness.

And our eyes at last shall see Him—Thro' His own redeeming love;
For that Child so dear and gentle—Is our Lord in heav'n above,
And He leads His children on—to the place where He is gone.

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