



## **An Extended Sermon Series**

**Grace Christian Church – LeRoy MN  
December 2009**

December is the month that Pearl Harbor was attacked and 2009 is the 65th year since the invasion of Normandy that signaled the beginning of the end of the Great War.

A greater war has been going on since the beginning of human existence and the great invasion of God into our world signals to Christians that if we remain true to our faith, we will prevail.

Scripture quotes included come from various translations, but more are from the New International Version (NIV) or the related New International Readers Version (NIrV). Instances where other versions are quoted have been cited within the text.

These are my notes used to deliver these sermons, not the exact text because I never just read my prepared notes and sometimes I wander away from them. I hope your faith has been expanded if you heard these and perhaps it will also increase by reviewing these notes.

Of course, the four topics in this document only partly tell the story. An extension of this series is planned for the Easter season of 2010

Brian Thiel,  
January 2010

- I. An Ancient Plan
- II. Centuries of Preparation
- III. The Big Surprise
- IV. A Tragic Failure? (Or An Unlikely Victory?)

Plus...

"Can a Virgin Give Birth" essay by Melinda Wenner in Slate Magazine

Isaiah's prophecies set to music by G.F. Handel

"Tell Me the Story of Jesus" by Fanny Crosby condenses the whole story.

## An Ancient Plan

### Part 1 of 4

**Genesis 3:14-15** (at the very beginning of human existence -- ??? years before Christ)

14 So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this,  
"Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals!  
You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life.

15 And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

**Genesis 12:1-3** (2xxx years before Christ)

1 The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.

2 "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you;  
I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse;  
and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

**Isaiah 53** (8xx years before Christ)

1 Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

2 He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

3 He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

4 Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.

5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

7 He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken.

9 He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.

10 Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.

11 After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.

12 Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

Intro: History books and war colleges talk about many invasions, but not the one that matters most!

-- 68 years ago this very day, 100s of carrier pilots were getting their final instructions for the attack on Pearl Harbor. This "Day of Infamy" was NOT the greatest invasion. Really not even an invasion.

-- On 6June1944 the largest invasion force in history began at Normandy. 150,000 US, Brit, Canadian landed 1st day, 1M troops in 1st month, 7000 ships, 1000 planes, 50% casualties 1st wave on the beaches. But this was not the greatest invasion, either.

-- The greatest invasion -- the colossal and ultimate invasion -- is God's plan to rescue mankind from the grip of Satan!

-- It took hundreds and thousands of years in the planning and preparation and the process is still going on.

-- This whole book (raise the Bible) is the story of how it began and the manual for how we continue to do our part in the battle.

-- None of us must ever think the battle is over. The victory is assured, YES. But every life... yours, mine, everyone else's is still involved in the process.

All invasions have 4 components:

planning,  
gathering resources,  
action,  
follow-up pressing to victory.

A successful invasion is never the goal, it is just the beginning of the victory. This will be a 4-part series of messages for these 4 Sundays this December.

Today's scriptures and topic look at the PLAN for the GREAT INVASION.

Remember: 2 things:

The **goal** of the GREAT INVASION was to completely change the expectations of life, the experience of life, the satisfactions of life, from the conditions we know and understand very well... conditions that are NOT the best.

The **present status** is: the invasion was successful, but the war is not over!

## I. The PLAN began at the beginning of time.

John 1:1-4 <sup>1</sup>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was with God in the beginning. <sup>3</sup>Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. <sup>4</sup>In him was life, and that life was the light of men. <sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

- a. The plan was there from the very first.
- b. It ALWAYS included Jesus coming to save us all.  
(v. 14- the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.)
- c. The PLAN was designed to crush evil (Satan – serpent)  
Genesis 3:15
- d. Yet there would be substantial injury to mankind wielded by the power of Satan (he will bruise the heel of the offspring of woman)

## II. The PLAN was first revealed to Abram.

Genesis 12:3 – “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

This promise was repeated (reinforced) by various experiences over the many years of subsequent descendents. At first it was a small clan, over time it became a number of large sub-clans and finally a nation.

Yet, God's PLAN was also misunderstood to imply some special blessing irrespective of the sinful and disobedient lives people lived.

There was always an expectation of ethical and faithful lives. Purity and fidelity to the God of this promise was often forgotten with a resulting calamity and disaster. (Chron: blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.)

## III. The scope of the PLAN was expanded to Isaiah.

800 years before the actual invasion, God gave this great prophet an amazing foretaste of the triumph of all time.

Like all battles, there is a terrible price to pay for the TRUTH.

Today, we live AFTER the invasion, the beachhead.

But that doesn't mean we get a free ticket to paradise.

The battle continues... we are called to volunteer.

There is no draft. Every major war has its share of draft dodgers. But not this time. This is an ALL-VOLUNTEER army.

I have a friend (in Austin) who was just 15 or 16 when he enlisted (illegally, of course, but successfully never-the-less) in the US Navy to fight in WW II. About that same time in his life he volunteered for the Lord's army, too.

Will you volunteer? Right now?

## Centuries of Preparation

### Part 2 of 4

Texts: 1st Chapter of Luke, Matthew (especially vv 18-24) and Mark 1

Intro: Last week we talked about the world's greatest invasion -- the coming of Jesus Christ in human form.

This invasion goes far beyond even the greatest invasion of history -- the Allies at Normandy in WW II.

Like ALL invasions there are 4 components:

PLANNING

PREPARATION

LANDING

FOLLOW-UP (*pressing to victory*)

A successful invasion is never the goal, it is just the beginning of the victory. This is part 2 of a 4-part series of messages this December.

Remember: 2 things:

The **goal** of the GREAT INVASION ...WAS/IS...

to completely change the expectations of life possible for EVERY person, no matter what their current circumstances or past misdeeds.

The **present status** is:

the invasion was successful, a beachhead was secured,  
the eventual result is secured...

but the war is not over...

we are called to join the volunteer army of Jesus Christ!

Today's scriptures tell about the PREPARATION for the GREAT INVASION.

I. Years and Years and Years of Building Up a People of God who are READY for the man Jesus as God's Son, the Messiah, the LORD.

From Abraham - to Isaac - to Jacob - to Joseph  
to Moses & Joshua  
to the Kings of Israel - Saul, David, Solomon, etc.

The prophets (Samuel - the originator of the prophets) all look for Messiah  
Isaiah is the most prolific predictor.

II. The One Who Will Prepare the Way for the Lord -- John the Baptist  
Luke 1:17 - He will prepare the way for the Lord...

A. Zechariah's Experience with the angel, Gabriel - Luke 1:5-22

B. Zechariah & Elizabeth become expectant parents in old age Luke 1:23-25

C. In Elizabeth's last trimester, her cousin Mary also is told by Gabriel

she will have a child (although still a virgin) and must name him Jesus.

Luke 1:26-38 --

She accepts her embarrassing situation joyfully.

D. Joseph learns his betrothed, Mary is expecting a baby.

Matthew 1:18-25 --

Joseph also accepts the embarrassing situation.

D. Mary comes to visit Elizabeth for 3 months -

BOTH REJOICE for their blessing

Luke 1:39-56

E. Elizabeth's baby is born and is named, John (*the Baptist*) - Luke 1:57-80

The child grew normally and became a powerful person.

III. The Lessons for US:

A. Readiness of Elizabeth & Zechariah to bring up John was essential to the invasion.

Luke makes sure we know they were both good and faithful believers.

B. Mary & Joseph readily accepted their embarrassing situation, after initial uncertainty, even disbelief it was happening to them.

C. John also grew up and fully accepted the divine mission set for him that his parents surely trained him fully understand and engage.

Mark chapter 1 begins with the adult John as a greatly respected, but non-conformist yet true prophet.

D. The people, too, receive and believe God's great preparer... to the point that as adults they stepped down into the Jordan River to be put under the water as a sign of their true belief and repentance. (Hence the title, John the Baptist.)

YOUR CALL TO ACTION:

Will you take the time to prepare YOURSELF to listen to the Word of God, like Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary & Joseph?

Will you let God work out the facts of your life, even if they are embarrassing, inconvenient, not KEWL?

Would stepping into a river, lake, or a small indoor pool to receive baptism be too much for you?

At the immanence of Jesus birth, all sorts of people come to the world stage, shepherds, seers from a far away land, hosts of angels, the star, ....

But none of them was just a spectator...

All were involved. That is what preparation is all about.

## LUKE 1 -- THE PROVIDENTIAL BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST & MARY'S CONNECTION

### LUKE WRITES AN ORDERLY REPORT

- 1 Many people have attempted to write about the things that have taken place among us. 2 Reports of these things were handed down to us. There were people who saw these things for themselves from the beginning and then passed the word on.
- 3 I myself have carefully looked into everything from the beginning. So it seemed good also to me to write down an orderly report of exactly what happened. I am doing this for you, most excellent Theophilus. 4 I want you to know that the things you have been taught are true.

### THE COMING BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

- 5 Herod was king of Judea. During the time he was ruling, there was a priest named Zechariah. He belonged to a group of priests named after Abijah. His wife Elizabeth also came from the family line of Aaron. 6 Both of them did what was right in God's eyes. They obeyed all the Lord's commandments and rules faithfully. 7 But they had no children, because Elizabeth was not able to have any. And they were both very old.
- 8 One day Zechariah's group was on duty. He was serving as a priest in God's temple. 9 He happened to be chosen, in the usual way, to go into the temple of the Lord. There he was supposed to burn incense. 10 The time came for this to be done. All who had gathered to worship were praying outside.
- 11 Then an angel of the Lord appeared to Zechariah. The angel was standing at the right side of the incense altar. 12 When Zechariah saw him, he was amazed and terrified.
- 13 But the angel said to him,  
"Do not be afraid, Zechariah. Your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will have a child. It will be a boy, and you must name him John. 14 He will be a joy and delight to you. His birth will make many people very glad. 15 He will be important in the Lord's eyes.  
"He must never use wine or other such drinks. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit from the time he is born. 16 He will bring many of Israel's people back to the Lord their God. 17 And he will prepare the way for the Lord. He will have the same spirit and power that Elijah had. He will teach parents how to love their children. He will also teach people who don't obey to be wise and do what is right. In this way, he will prepare a people who are ready for the Lord."
- 18 Zechariah asked the angel,  
"How can I be sure of this? I am an old man, and my wife is old too."
- 19 The angel answered,  
"I am Gabriel. I serve God. I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. 20 And now you will have to be silent. You will not be able to speak until after John is born. That's because you did not believe my words. They will come true when the time is right."
- 21 During that time, the people were waiting for Zechariah to come out. They wondered why he stayed in the temple so long. 22 When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple. They knew this because he kept motioning to them. He still could not speak.
- 23 When his time of service was over, he returned home. 24 After that, his wife Elizabeth became pregnant. She stayed at home for five months. 25 "The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days, he has been kind to me. He has taken away my shame among the people."

### THE COMING BIRTH OF JESUS

- 26 In the sixth month after Elizabeth had become pregnant, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee. 27 He was sent to a virgin. The girl was engaged to a man named Joseph. He

came from the family line of David. The virgin's name was Mary. 28 The angel greeted her and said, "The Lord has given you special favor. He is with you."

29 Mary was very upset because of his words. She wondered what kind of greeting this could be. 30 But the angel said to her,

"Do not be afraid, Mary. God is very pleased with you. 31 You will become pregnant and give birth to a son. You must name him Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High God. The Lord God will make him a king like his father David of long ago. 33 He will rule forever over his people, who came from Jacob's family. His kingdom will never end."

34 "How can this happen?" Mary asked the angel. "I am a virgin."

35 The angel answered,

"The Holy Spirit will come to you. The power of the Most High God will cover you. So the holy one that is born will be called the Son of God. 36 Your relative Elizabeth is old. And even she is going to have a child. People thought she could not have children. But she has been pregnant for six months now. 37 Nothing is impossible with God."

38 "I serve the Lord," Mary answered. "May it happen to me just as you said it would." Then the angel left her.

### **MARY VISITS ELIZABETH**

39 At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in Judea's hill country. 40 There she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby inside her jumped. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42 In a loud voice she called out, "God has blessed you more than other women. And blessed is the child you will have! 43 But why is God so kind to me? Why has the mother of my Lord come to me? 44 As soon as I heard the sound of your voice, the baby inside me jumped for joy. 45 You are a woman God has blessed. You have believed that what the Lord has said to you will be done!"

### **MARY'S SONG**

46 Mary said,

"My soul gives glory to the Lord.  
 47 My spirit delights in God my Savior.  
 48 He has taken note of me even though I am not important.  
 From now on all people will call me blessed.  
 49 The Mighty One has done great things for me.  
 His name is holy.  
 50 He shows his mercy to those who have respect for him,  
 from parent to child down through the years.  
 51 He has done mighty things with his arm.  
 He has scattered those who are proud in their deepest thoughts.  
 52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones.  
 But he has lifted up people who are not important.  
 53 He has filled those who are hungry with good things.  
 But he has sent those who are rich away empty.  
 54 He has helped the people of Israel, who serve him.  
 He has always remembered to be kind  
 55 to Abraham and his children down through the years.  
 He has done it just as he said to our people of long ago."

56 Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months. Then she returned home.



**JOHN THE BAPTIST IS BORN**

- 57 The time came for Elizabeth to have her baby. She gave birth to a son. 58 Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had been very kind to her. They shared her joy.
- 59 On the eighth day, they came to have the child circumcised. They were going to name him Zechariah, like his father. 60 But his mother spoke up. "No!" she said. "He must be called John."
- 61 They said to her, "No one among your relatives has that name."
- 62 Then they motioned to his father. They wanted to find out what he would like to name the child. 63 He asked for something to write on. Then he wrote, "His name is John." Everyone was amazed.
- 64 Right away Zechariah could speak again. His first words gave praise to God. 65 The neighbors were all filled with fear and wonder. All through Judea's hill country, people were talking about all these things. 66 Everyone who heard this wondered about it. And because the Lord was with John, they asked, "What is this child going to be?"

**ZECHARIAH'S SONG**

- 67 His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit. He prophesied,
- 68 "Give praise to the Lord, the God of Israel!  
He has come and set his people free.  
69 He has acted with great power and has saved us.  
He did it for those who are from the family line of his servant David.
- 70 Long ago holy prophets said he would do it.  
71 He has saved us from our enemies.  
We are rescued from all who hate us.  
72 He has been kind to our people.  
He has remembered his holy covenant.
- 73 He made an oath to our father Abraham.  
74 He promised to save us from our enemies,  
so that we could serve him without fear.  
75 He wants us to be holy and godly as long as we live.  
76 "And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High God.  
You will go ahead of the Lord to prepare the way for him.  
77 You will tell his people how they can be saved.  
You will tell them that their sins can be forgiven.  
78 All of that will happen because our God is tender and caring.  
His kindness will bring the rising sun to us from heaven.  
79 It will shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death.  
It will guide our feet on the path of peace."
- 80 The child grew up, and his spirit became strong. He lived in the desert until he appeared openly to Israel.

**Matthew 1 -- THE GENEALOGY OF JESUS THRU JOSEPH & A BRIEF STATEMENT OF JESUS' BIRTH**

- 18 This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. His mother Mary and Joseph had promised to get married. But before they started to live together, it became clear that she was going to have a baby. She became pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit. 19 Her husband Joseph was a godly man. He did not want to put her to shame in public. So he planned to divorce her quietly.
- 20 But as Joseph was thinking about this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. The angel said,  
"Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary home as your wife. The baby inside her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She is going to have a son. You must give him the name Jesus. That is because he will save his people from their sins."

- 22 All of this took place to bring about what the Lord had said would happen. He had said through the prophet, 23  
"The virgin is going to have a baby. She will give birth to a son. And he will be called Immanuel."—(Isaiah 7:14) The name Immanuel means "God with us."
- 24 Joseph woke up. He did what the angel of the Lord commanded him to do. He took Mary home as his wife. 25 But he did not make love to her until after she gave birth to a son. And Joseph gave him the name Jesus.

### **MARK 1 -- JOHN THE BAPTIST PREPARES THE WAY FOR JESUS**

- 1 This is the beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
- 2 Long ago Isaiah the prophet wrote,  
"I will send my messenger ahead of you. He will prepare your way." —(Malachi 3:1)
- 3 "A messenger is calling out in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord. Make straight paths for him.'" —(Isaiah 40:3)
- 4 And so John came. He baptized people in the desert. He also preached that people should be baptized and turn away from their sins. Then God would forgive them. 5 All the people from the countryside of Judea went out to him. All the people from Jerusalem went too. When they admitted they had sinned, John baptized them in the Jordan River. 6 John wore clothes made out of camel's hair. He had a leather belt around his waist. And he ate locusts and wild honey.
- 7 Here is what John was preaching,  
"After me, one will come who is more powerful than I am. I'm not good enough to bend down and untie his sandals. 8 I baptize you with water. But he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

### **JESUS IS BAPTIZED BY JOHN AND BEGINS HIS MINISTRY**

- 9 At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee. John baptized him in the Jordan River. 10 Jesus was coming up out of the water. Just then he saw heaven being torn open. He saw the Holy Spirit coming down on him like a dove. 11 A voice spoke to him from heaven. It said, "You are my Son, and I love you. I am very pleased with you."

## The Big Surprise

### Part 3 of 4

Texts: Luke 2:1-12, Isaiah 9:6-7, 11:4

Intro: Past 2 weeks we talked about the world's greatest invasion -- the entire Bible is the description of the GREAT INVASION

From 1st - plan for redemption and defeat of evil

Preparations went on for centuries

A line of redeemed people, Abram, Moses, the prophets - culminated w/ John the Baptist.

Today- we discuss the actual invasion – “God with us”, (*Emmanuel*).

**THAT IS THE POINT -- GOD LIVES IN ACTUAL HUMAN FORM**

John 1 - in beginning was Word who participated in creation, in every sense is God. v14 - Word became flesh (a real human being) and dwelt among us.

John personally witnessed all aspects of His life -

so much so he was convinced Jesus was in every respect FULLY - ACTUALLY God.

But Jesus did not just parachute onto this planet as a Master Teacher...

JUST LIKE US... he began his human phase as a baby.

### THAT IS THE SURPRISE

It shows the genius of God...

EVERYTHING we understand about the character of God can be contained in a human being, STARTING as a baby.

Life is full of surprises... some not so nice... like the woman who found out her late husband left her out of his will. So was so angry she added words on his tombstone. After it said, “Rest in peace” she added ... “until I come.”

Every great military commander knows his enemy is expecting an invasion, but he tries to keep it secret and disguise his plans so the enemy won't know just when, where, how, it will come.

But not God. His prophet, Isaiah, predicted the great invasion would begin with a child's birth... In fact when the wise men came from the East seeking the birth of the new king, the place of the birth was told the evil King Herod that it would be in Bethlehem.

Perhaps the evil one thought that was just some of God's flak put out to get him off the track.

But God's plan was so improbable to Satan (-- AND to many of the people who follow his way, yet today.) that there was no need to try to fake him out. He wouldn't believe the truth if you put it right under his nose.

To be fair, part of Isaiah's prophecy WAS believed... in a literal sense... the part about his government never ending.

But the bigger message in Isaiah was about HOW his kingdom would be ruled... with fair and equitable judgments, with justice always.

Neither Satan, nor certainly many of the people who were there during Jesus' time, seemed to care that Christ's style and actions would always be righteous, never prejudicial. In fact, his rule would bring doom to those who practiced evil.

**ISAIAH [9:6-7, 11 ] MESSIAH IS COMING [NIRV]**

6 A child will be born to us. A son will be given to us.

He will rule over us. And he will be called  
Wonderful Adviser and Mighty God.

He will also be called Father Who Lives Forever  
and Prince Who Brings Peace.

7 The authority of his rule will continue to grow.

The peace he brings will never end.

He will rule on David's throne and over his kingdom.

He will make the kingdom strong and secure.

His rule will be based on what is fair and right.

It will last forever.

The Lord's great love will make sure that happens.

He rules over all.

**ISAIAH [11:1-5] - MESSIAH WILL COME FROM JESSE'S FAMILY LINE & IN KING DAVID'S STYLE OF RIGHTEOUS RULE [NIRV]**

1 Jesse's family is like a tree that has been cut down. A new little tree will grow from its stump.

From its roots a Branch will grow and produce fruit.

2 The Spirit of the Lord will rest on that Branch. He will help him to be wise and understanding.

He will help him make wise plans and carry them out. He will help him know the Lord and have respect for him.

3 The Branch will take delight in respecting the Lord. He will not judge things only by the way they look. He won't make decisions based simply on what people say.

4 He will always do what is right when he judges those who are in need.

He'll be completely fair when he makes decisions about poor people.

When he commands that people be punished, it will happen.

When he orders that evil people be put to death, it will take place.

5 He will put godliness on as if it were his belt. He'll wear faithfulness around his waist.

God's invasion, of course, first involved righteous and faithful people...

Zechariah & Elizabeth, parents in their old age of John.

John (the fearless preacher who called people to repentance & baptism)

Mary, the young woman who had never been with a man, but is carrying a baby

Yet, she accepted the public scorn that surely was to come and rejoiced.

Joseph, the man who planned to take Mary as his wife, he, too, accepted a tough

job to believe Mary had not been messing around and followed through

in marrying her and in helping to rear the child, Jesus.

As the moment of the birth comes, a number of other people, too, come onto the great stage of eternity for their brief moment of time.

This is not just a quaint story, certainly not just a moral tale... "Once upon a time..."

Luke is not a novelist or moralist... Luke is a theologian and historian foremost, but he also reveals the true Jesus with a fabulous ability to tell the story.

Because it was the decree of the Caesar, nobody could ignore it, no matter what circumstances they were in.

Mary, has to walk/ride several days, 10-20+ miles per day AND she is almost ready to deliver her first child. But she must do so away from home, away from her customary midwife, with no particular place to stay when they got to Bethlehem. (Apparently, although this was the ancestral home of Joseph, he had no close family there any more.)

Joseph must help Mary, to whom he is NOT yet married, on her difficult journey.  
(Here is a note to any man... here is a true example of manhood... strength with gentleness. )

When they get to Bethlehem, they cannot find any normal place to stay... and Mary's time to deliver cannot wait. So they take shelter in a cattle shed.

In a masterful case of understatement, Luke simply tells that there was no room at the inn.

The only visitors to the cattle shed that we know about was the shepherds. Any others came later and they are described as coming to the "house" where they were.

Put yourself into the place of a shepherd... YOU are out in the pastures lying down on the ground WITH the sheep, not in your home. Something appears in the sky unlike anything you ever saw in your whole life lying on the ground, looking up at the night sky.

There was an angel who appeared...

AND his appearance caused "light" or something called "the glory of the Lord" that they sensed.

THEY were scared, really scared

the angel soothed them, "don't be afraid, I am here with GOOD news."

In fact, this news is so fantastic, it is not just for you, but for everybody.

Here is the news....

In the nearby town of Bethlehem (city of David) the MESSIAH was just born.

Just in case you don't believe me... look for yourself.

There is a newborn baby in town, but not in a house. He is in a manger.

## **LUKE 2 (NIRV)**

### **JESUS IS BORN**

- 1 In those days, Caesar Augustus made a law. It required that a list be made of everyone in the whole Roman world. 2 It was the first time a list was made of the people while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 All went to their own towns to be listed.
- 4 So Joseph went also. He went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea. That is where Bethlehem, the town of David, was. Joseph went there because he belonged to the family line of David. 5 He went there with Mary to be listed. Mary was engaged to him. She was expecting a baby.
- 6 While Joseph and Mary were there, the time came for the child to be born. 7 She gave birth to her first baby. It was a boy. She wrapped him in large strips of cloth. Then she placed him in a manger. There was no room for them in the inn.

### **ANGELS APPEAR TO THE SHEPHERDS**

- 8 There were shepherds living out in the fields nearby. It was night, and they were looking after their sheep. 9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them. And the glory of the Lord shone around them. They were terrified.
- 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy. It is for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord. 12 Here is how you will know I am telling you the truth. You will find a baby wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger."
- 13 Suddenly a large group of angels from heaven also appeared. They were praising God. They said, 14 "May glory be given to God in the highest heaven!

- And may peace be given to those he is pleased with on earth!"
- 15 The angels left and went into heaven. Then the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem. Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."
- 16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and the baby. The baby was lying in the manger.
- 17 After the shepherds had seen him, they told everyone. They reported what the angel had said about this child. 18 All who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.
- 19 But Mary kept all these things like a secret treasure in her heart. She thought about them over and over.
- 20 The shepherds returned. They gave glory and praise to God. Everything they had seen and heard was just as they had been told.

YOUR CALL TO ACTION:

Are YOU ready to listen to God's word in whatever form it comes TODAY?

Are YOU willing to set aside your regular daily life and switch to something new... whatever God instructs?

Are YOU ready to join the heavenly crowd?

Joseph was dreaming when a bizarre truth came to him.

Zechariah was doing his duty in the temple when his purpose for God came to him.

Mary heard a very strange word and experienced an incredible pregnancy, but she accepted it, in fact she rejoiced in it.

The shepherds heard the call in the dark of night.

It came upon the midnight clear.

So they got up and went to town to find the Christ.

*The following page contains an essay describing how modern science believes a virgin birth could occur although with a very, very small probability that it did. Maybe it will help some person who has difficulty believing the Bible events.*

from Slate Magazine -- Explainer\*

## Can a Virgin Give Birth? Yes—but it's very, very, very, very unlikely. By Melinda Wenner

During the holidays, Christians celebrate the birth of a human baby to his virginal mother. We know that female wasps, fish, birds, and lizards can produce healthy offspring without having sex, but what about people?

### Are natural human virgin births possible?

**Yes, in theory.** However, a number of rare events would have to occur in close succession, and the chances of these all happening in real life are virtually zero. For a virgin to get pregnant, one of her eggs would have to produce, on its own, the biochemical changes indicative of fertilization, and then divide abnormally to compensate for the lack of sperm DNA. That's the easy part: These two events occur in the eggs or egg precursor cells of one out of every few thousand women. But the egg would also need to be carrying at least two specific genetic deletions to produce a viable offspring.

An egg will only start dividing once it senses a spike in cellular calcium. This normally occurs as a result of a sperm's entry during fertilization. But if the egg happens to experience a spontaneous calcium spike, it will start reacting as if it's been fertilized. A defective sperm that lacks DNA can produce a spurious calcium spike. In the lab, scientists can coax unfertilized eggs into beginning the post-fertilization process by simply injecting them with calcium.

Once fertilization—or faux fertilization—occurs, an egg can complete the final stage of a cell division known as meiosis II, during which it loses half of its genetic material to make room for the sperm's DNA. But if there's no sperm, each half of the divided egg cell will end up short, and both will die. In order for our virgin birth to proceed, the faux-fertilized egg must, therefore, not complete meiosis.

Both of these events—the calcium spike and the division mistake—could occur as the result of random dysfunctions or genetic defects. Assuming they do, the egg cell may then begin the process of "parthenogenesis," or virginal development. When this happens to an egg-precursor cell, it can give rise to a tumor made up of many different types of tissue—liver, teeth, eye, and hair, for example.

Parthenogenesis in humans never produces viable embryos, though, because unfertilized eggs lack specific instructions about gene expression from the sperm. In general, our cells have two functional copies of each gene—one inherited from the mother and one from the father. For some genes, however, only one copy is ever used, while the other remains dormant. Some of the signals for which copies should be turned off come from the sperm cell. So, if there's no sperm, certain genes will be overexpressed, and the "embryo" will die when it is only about five days old.

There's a way around this problem, too. By eliminating a pair of maternal genes, a Japanese team was able to create, via parthenogenesis, a viable baby mouse that was seemingly unaffected by its lack of paternal imprinting. Although the scientists engineered these changes in the lab, there's at least a theoretical possibility that this could happen spontaneously via random gene deletions.

So, while it's possible for a human baby to be born of a virgin mother, it's very, very unlikely: These two genetic deletions might each have a one in 1 billion chance of occurring, and that's not counting the calcium spike and division problem required to initiate parthenogenesis in the first place.

### Are there any case reports of virgin births in the medical literature?

**Sort of.** According to a 1995 report in the journal *Nature Genetics*, a mother brought her infant boy to the doctor after noticing that his head was developing abnormally. When doctors analyzed his blood, they found something truly bizarre: Despite his anatomically male features, the boy's blood cells were entirely female, consisting only of genetic material from his mother. Some of his other cells—such as those found in his urine—were normal, consisting of a combination of both maternal and paternal DNA. No one knows exactly how this occurred, but the best guess is that immediately after being fertilized, one of his mother's eggs fused with a neighboring unfertilized egg that was dividing parthogenetically. This gave rise to a boy who was considered half-parthenogenetic, since approximately half of his cells were derived from a "faux" conception, containing no remnants of his father's DNA.

\* Source: [www.slate.com](http://www.slate.com) -- Updated Friday, Dec. 21, 2007

## A Tragic Failure? (Or an unlikely victory?)

### Part 4 of 4

#### Intro

In Dec 1944 the crucial battle that finally decided the outcome of World War II took place in a mountainous forest on the Belgium/France/Germany border called Ardennes. We know it as the Battle of the Bulge.

Two of my friends of years past were there, Chaplain Bill Boice, later pastor of 1<sup>st</sup> Christian in Phoenix and one of his fellow 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne officers, General John Ruggles, who also settled in Phoenix and was a member at 1<sup>st</sup> Christian.

They are heroes to me... for incredible endurance and courage.

War is terrible. Being in the military makes one always uncertain. My granddaughter tells her husband every day as he goes off to fly his F18 out over the ocean off San Diego, "don't feed the sharks." One day recently he came close. He lost his sense of equilibrium on a night flight and did not know he was flying upside down. Without his wingman, he very well may have not come home.

**Mark 1 (NirV) Tells how Jesus began his public ministry... just 3 short years.**

#### JOHN THE BAPTIST PREPARES THE WAY

<sup>1</sup> This is the beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

<sup>2</sup> Long ago Isaiah the prophet wrote,  
"I will send my messenger ahead of you.  
He will prepare your way." —(*Malachi 3:1*)

<sup>3</sup> "A messenger is calling out in the desert,  
'Prepare the way for the Lord.  
Make straight paths for him.'" —(*Isaiah 40:3*)

<sup>4</sup> And so John came. He baptized people in the desert. He also preached that people should be baptized and turn away from their sins. Then God would forgive them. <sup>5</sup> All the people from the countryside of Judea went out to him. All the people from Jerusalem went too. When they admitted they had sinned, John baptized them in the Jordan River.

<sup>6</sup> John wore clothes made out of camel's hair. He had a leather belt around his waist. And he ate locusts and wild honey.

<sup>7</sup> Here is what John was preaching. "After me, one will come who is more powerful than I am. I'm not good enough to bend down and untie his sandals. <sup>8</sup> I baptize you with water. But he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

#### JESUS IS BAPTIZED AND TEMPTED

<sup>9</sup> At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee. John baptized him in the Jordan River. <sup>10</sup> Jesus was coming up out of the water. Just then he saw heaven being torn open. He saw the Holy Spirit coming down on him like a dove. <sup>11</sup> A voice spoke to him from heaven. It said, "You are my Son, and I love you. I am very pleased with you."

<sup>12</sup> At once the Holy Spirit sent Jesus out into the desert. <sup>13</sup> He was in the desert 40 days. There Satan tempted him. The wild animals didn't harm Jesus. Angels took care of him.



## JESUS CHOOSES THE FIRST DISCIPLES

<sup>14</sup> After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee. He preached God's good news. <sup>15</sup> "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Turn away from your sins and believe the good news!"

**BUT... like John, the Baptist, the prophet of God who was Jesus' forerunner... Jesus, too, was killed.**

A reporter from The Times of Rome in AD30 after the death of Christ might have written this opening paragraph...

*'Today a hopeful story ended in the tragedy of crucifixion. God just visited earth, but in the end nothing really changed.'*

*The story had an amazing opening where an expectant mother hid her shame and a step father accepted the responsibility. Even after an amazing series of feats in a brief three year span of exciting the hopes of his people, Jesus is dead. And the hopes of the people died with him under the crushing power of the offended religious leaders and the government.*

**IF.... if our faith is just in Christmas, God only visited.  
In the end the usual brutal forces of evil prevailed:  
disappointments, betrayals, DEATH TO ALL.**

### I CORINTHIANS 15:12-20

12 We have preached that Christ has been raised from the dead. So how can some of you say that no one rises from the dead? 13 If no one rises from the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. 14 And if Christ has not been raised, what we preach doesn't mean anything. Your faith doesn't mean anything either. 15 More than that, we would be lying about God. We have given witness that God raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if the dead are not raised.

16 If the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith doesn't mean anything. Your sins have not been forgiven. 18 Those who have died believing in Christ are also lost.

19 Do we have hope in Christ only for this life? Then people should pity us more than anyone else.

20 But Christ really has been raised from the dead. He is the first of all those who will rise.

**YES, something extraordinary took place. Like every invasion, military, literary, social, or spiritual there are difficult battles along the way. The only way to assess the result is to wait awhile to see which side in a great confrontation prevails. Apparent losses by the forces of good can become can be turned into victories if the battle is waged fearlessly. Might does not conquer right. Right will prevail.**

"By normal human standards," says theologian J.B. Phillips, *"this is a tragic little tale of failure, the rather squalid story of a promising young man from a humble home, put to death by the envy and malice of the professional men of religion. All this happened in an obscure, occupied province of the vast Roman Empire. It is fifteen hundred years ago that this apparently invincible Empire utterly collapsed, and all that is left of it is ruins. Yet the little baby, born in such pitiful humility and cut down as a young man in his prime, commands the allegiance of millions of people all over the world. Although they have never seen him, he has become friend and companion to innumerable people. This undeniable fact is, by any measurement, the most astonishing phenomenon in human history."*

National columnist, Michael Gerson writes (*Washington Post* 25Dec2009), *"The message of Christmas seems scandalously unlikely to us, just as it did to sophisticated Romans at the time. But if it is true, nothing is more important. If it is true, poverty and suffering have been shared and dignified by God Himself. If it is true, hope and memory do not end in a gash of Earth. God, let it be true."*

George Frederick Handel wrote what is the greatest piece of music (IMO), The Messiah, oratorio. After the "Christmas part ends with the Hallelujah chorus, the final part begins with the magnificent Soprano air, *"I know that my redeemer liveth."* That leads to the end with the incomparable climax...

*"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and hath redeemed us to God by His blood, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory and blessing. Blessing and honour, glory and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever.*

*\_\_ Amen."*

In Revelation, John writes of hearing the multitudes of heaven singing the great hallelujah to the Messiah. I think Handel had a divine vision of that scene, too. Because he was a composer he could write down the music so we can all hear it, too.

#### **THE THRONE ROOM OF HEAVEN [NKJV]**

##### **REVELATION 4**

1 After these things I looked, and behold, a door *standing* open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard *was* like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this."

2 Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and *One* sat on the throne...

<sup>8</sup> And they do not rest day or night, saying:  
"Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty,  
Who was and is and is to come!"

<sup>9</sup> Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, <sup>10</sup> the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who

sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying:

<sup>11</sup> " You are worthy, O Lord,<sup>[a]</sup>  
To receive glory and honor and power;  
For You created all things,  
And by Your will they exist<sup>[b]</sup> and were created."

#### **REVELATION 22**

<sup>8</sup> I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things.

<sup>16</sup> "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this witness for the churches. I am the Root and the Son of David. I am the bright Morning Star."

<sup>17</sup> The Holy Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" Let those who hear say, "Come!" Anyone who is thirsty should come. Anyone who wants to take the free gift of the water of life should do so.

**Without this whole story, the magical coming of the Messiah ends as a tragic failure.**

**Without the life, death AND resurrection of Jesus...  
we have N..O..T..H..I..N..G..!**

**Because HE Lives... WE get to share the victory of Jesus!**

## Isaiah's Prophecies Are Featured in Handel's Messiah

### Isaiah 7: 10-16

- 10 Moreover the LORD spake again unto Ahaz, saying,  
 11 Ask thee a sign of the LORD thy God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above.  
 12 But Ahaz said, I will not ask, neither will I tempt the LORD.  
 13 And he said, Hear ye now, O house of David; Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also?  
 14 Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.  
 15 Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good.  
 16 For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings.

### Isaiah 9: 6-7

- 6 For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.  
 7 Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

### Isaiah 11: 1-10

- 1 And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots:  
 2 And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD;  
 3 And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears:  
 4 But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.  
 5 And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.  
 6 The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.  
 7 And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.  
 8 And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den.  
 9 They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.  
 10 And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious.

### This Fanny Crosby hymn condenses the whole story... "Tell Me the Story of Jesus"

Tell me the story of Jesus, Write on my heart ev'ry word;  
 Tell me the story most precious, Sweetest that ever was heard.  
 Tell how the angels, in chorus, Sang as they welcomed His birth,  
 "Glory to God in the highest! Peace and good tidings to earth."

Refrain:

*Tell me the story of Jesus, Write on my heart ev'ry word;  
 Tell me the story most precious, Sweetest that ever was heard.*

Fasting alone in the desert, Tell of the days that are past,  
 How for our sins He was tempted, Yet was triumphant at last.  
 Tell of the years of His labor, Tell of the sorrow He bore,  
 He was despised and afflicted, Homeless, rejected and poor.

Tell of the cross where they nailed Him, Writhing in anguish and pain;  
 Tell of the grave where they laid Him, Tell how He liveth again.  
 Love in that story so tender, Clearer than ever I see:  
 Stay, let me weep while you whisper, Love paid the ransom for me.