

What Child is This?

Luke 1:26-38

Introduction

It was dubbed the Christmas Truce of 1914 – by later historians

The world had been at war for 5 months

Beginning on Christmas Eve – on into Christmas Day – the guns went strangely silent at a couple of battlefields

It began when – the Germans began placing candles in some of the trees near their trenches – decorating them for Christmas. then one could hear the echoes of a Christmas carol wafting thru the early morning sky in German. The British responded with a Christmas hymn of their own. Then several men from the German lines went out into no-man's land – the land between the opposing trenches – where generally you were shot immediately - - - but not this day – no one fired a shot

Some British approached – and stuck out their hands – wishing one another a Merry Christmas

It was a strange spectacle – to see soldiers from opposing sides – offering one another chocolate / cigars / food items / other various gestures of good-will on this Christmas day

One British man wrote to his mother the following day

'Yesterday the British & Germans met & shook hands in the Ground between the trenches, & exchanged souvenirs, & shook hands. Yes, all day Xmas day, & as I write. Marvellous, isn't it?'

Another man recorded:

'The thing started last night - a bitter cold night, with white frost - soon after dusk when the Germans started shouting 'Merry Christmas, Englishmen' to us. Of course, our fellows shouted back and presently large numbers of both sides had left their trenches, unarmed, and met in the debatable, shot-riddled, no man's land between the lines. Here the agreement - all on their own - came to be made that we should not fire at each other until after midnight tonight.'

Some accounts even stated that a football game was played between the two sides

In 2008 – The French put up the Christmas Truce Memorial – at a spot where on Christmas Day 1914 – their ancestors laid aside their guns to play football with German soldiers from the other side

The last known participant in the Christmas Truce was Alfred Anderson – who died in 2005 – at the age of 109 – 91 years after that memorable day

The Christmas Truce reminded the men of the power of God to ultimately bring peace thru the Bethlehem miracle

The Christmas Truce reminded men that there was a greater force in the world than the spirit of hostility and bloodshed and death - - - but rather – the spirit of One who came to give us life

Isaiah 9:6 - 'For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.'

Millions of Christians will celebrate the Christmas holiday this week

Christmas is celebrated to honor the birth of our Savior – who left the glory of heaven – that He might come and give His life an atonement for sinners

Jesus – the long awaited / long expected Messiah came to be born of a virgin - - - to Mary – the young Jewish maiden – engaged to be married to Joseph

Out of all the billions of women who have walked this planet - - - Mary was chosen to be the vessel – to carry God’s own Son

This morning – we will go back and listen in on the historic encounter which took place in the town of Nazareth – when Gabriel the angel – revealed to Mary that she was chosen for this role

I. *Gabriel, the Messenger of God - vv. 26-30*

Many believe that Luke got the details for this account directly from Mary

He has already told us in the prologue [vv. 1-4] – that he has investigated everything carefully that he might give an accurate accounting of the things concerning Jesus Christ

Luke 1:1-4 - 'Since many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting to me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in an orderly sequence, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.'

Luke says – ‘I have investigated – I have talked to people – the eyewitnesses – so you may know

This is what I've found - - - He writes for us the Gospel of Luke

In the 6th month – of Elizabeth's pregnancy – the mother of John the Baptist

We are stepping into history

The Christian faith is rooted in history - - - it is not legend or myth

This took place at a moment in time – in the town of Nazareth – Israel

Gabriel – was sent from heaven to give a message to Mary of Nazareth

The holy angels – they do God's bidding – they are His servants and carry out tasks often on behalf of God's people

Angels show up at all the important events in Jesus' life – we find them at the empty tomb

Matthew 28:2 - 'And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it.'

The angels dwell in heaven – give praise to God – but come to earth on occasion as Gabriel does here

Why has Gabriel been sent to Mary?

She has been chosen to bring the Messiah – the baby Jesus into the world – the event we celebrate this time of year

Carl Bloch: 'she may have been in the middle of morning chores, or perhaps escaping the heat of the day in the family garden. But wherever Mary was, she was most certainly dreaming of the future - of Joseph, her fiancé . . . their home . . . a family. Suddenly Gabriel, God's heavenly messenger, stood before her announcing that she was going to have a baby! Mary's thoughts, plans, dreams - the entire course of her life - changed in a moment.'

'Like every Jewish teenage girl, she had heard about the promised Messiah but never dreamed that she might be the one chosen as His mother. Now, Gabriel announced His imminent arrival - God would do the impossible in her body.'

Mary in this encounter with an angel – finds out the role she will play in the drama of redemption

Mary was selected in the providence of God – for her role

You and I are also selected for various purposes

Romans 8:28 – 'And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.'

Some people like to emphasize the burdens Mary carried – particularly in having to witness the crucifixion of her Son

In the end – I don't think she would have traded her life for anything

It was God's calling for her – and God used it all for ultimate good

The Bethlehem Baby would go to the cross of Calvary and make atonement for our sins

In 1946 – Cameron Townsend – founder of Wycliffe Bible translators – needed to be transported from the mission station in Peru to Mexico City – along with his wife, Helen, and their six week old daughter – they were going to Mexico City to visit recruits at one of their training centers

A young, inexperienced pilot came to pick them up in a Piper Super Cruiser – and the young family squeezed into the cabin. They went bouncing down the runway and took off – but the pilot banked the plane too soon – and struck the top of a tree – sending the aircraft into a ravine.

The pilot survived but was unconscious for several days / Cameron survived with injuries. His wife – Helen survived but her leg was nearly severed. And the baby was unhurt. As Cameron waited for emergency help to arrive – a powerful thought struck his mind. There's got to be a reliable and safe missionary aviation service for Bible translators going into the jungle. During his recuperation – his plans took shape and later the organization known as Jaars – was born from that event [Jungle Aviation and radio service]

Had there been no crash – Jaars would never have been born

God is in the details – of our lives – He is working all together for good – towards His good purposes in our lives

His purpose for Mary is about to unfold – Gabriel greets her with the words: 'Hail – favored one' – or blessed one

Luke 1:30 – 'Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you.'

R.C. Sproul: 'The word 'hail' is not a statement of adoration or worship or anything like that - it's simply the old Roman form of greeting. It's like saying, 'Hello, Mary.'

The angel – Gabriel - recognizes the great privilege being given to this young Israelite woman

Nazareth was looked down upon as a kind of backwater village

Nathanael – the disciple expressed upon hearing of Jesus

John 1:46 - 'Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?'

Mary did not come from wealth or high society

She was a lowly Israelite girl [probably 12 or 13] – engaged to be married to Joseph

RCC theology builds up a whole system around this verse arguing that Mary is so filled up with grace that she dispenses the grace of God to the church

The rosary – prayer

'Hail Mary, full of grace. Blessed art thou among women. Blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners, now, and at the time of our death.'

As Protestants – we recognize quickly that Mary is elevated to a platform in RCC not warranted by Scripture

R.C. Sproul: 'Mary is not the mother of grace, bestowing favor upon others, but the daughter of grace. She does not bestow favor; she receives it.'

All the Marian heresies [sinlessness of Mary / bodily assumption of Mary to heaven] - - - they obscure the glory of Christ and ignore what the Scriptures say

Jesus is not enough – we must also have Mary and her prayers / intercession / etc.

What saith the Scriptures?

Colossians 2:9, 10 - 'In Him all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete.'

In Jesus we are made complete – Jesus is our Savior!

II. The Incarnation - vv. 31-33

C.S. Lewis: 'The central miracle asserted by Christians is the incarnation. They say that God became man. Every other miracle prepares for this, or exhibits this, or results from this.'

This baby is God's own Son

He will be great – μεγας

We use *great* to describe a lot of things – [that was a great movie! / that was a great restaurant!] but in the ultimate sense of the word – greatness is a description of God

God is great

His power and wisdom are great
His mercy and love are great
His faithfulness is great
His power over sin and death is great

Jesus is so great – He can raise the dead back to life – [Lazarus / daughter of Jairus / etc.]

John 5:28-29 – 'Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.'

That is great power – the power of the resurrection

In 1918 – a special service was written for the choir of King's College at Cambridge

It was called the 'Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols'- and in the bidding prayer that calls individuals to worship the great Christmas truths are declared

"Let us hear again the message of the angels'

The prayer closes with these words:

The Bidding Prayer: 'Let us remember before Him them who rejoice with us, but upon another shore, and in a greater light, that multitude which no man can number, whose hope was in the Word made flesh, and with whom, in this Lord Jesus, we forever more are one.'

Al Mohler: 'Those who are in Christ, though dead, celebrate Christmas with us – just upon another shore, and in greater light.'

If you have lost a loved one in the Lord – it is the greatness of Jesus that assures you – you will see them again

Jesus will be the Son of the Most High

Both Matthew and Luke emphasize the fact that Jesus was born to a virgin – this was a supernatural / miraculous birth – unique – this drew attention to the fact that this was no ordinary child

Many have choked on the Virgin Birth

Thomas Jefferson once wrote a letter to John Adams [1823] – in which he said Jesus was a reformer of human errors – but certainly not conceived in the womb of a virgin / by divine miracle

Jesus would derive His human lineage and human body from Mary – who was of the line of David and Abraham

He would share genetic traits and features with Mary

But – as the Son of God – He existed from eternity past

John 17:5 – 'And now, glorify Thou Me together with Thyself, Father, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was.'

III. The Virgin Birth - vv. 34-38

One might expect Mary to say: 'Why me?' - - - but instead she asks, 'How?'

God is not bound by the laws of nature – He put those laws into place – and can set them aside when He wills

If you accept Genesis 1:1 - - - every other miracle in the Bible falls into place

This is God's world – He can do what He pleases

Jesus' conception by the Holy Spirit points to His deity
His birth from a woman points to His true humanity

v. 37 – nothing is impossible with God

Mary shows humble faith and acceptance of God's purpose for her

Mary responded with: 'Thy will be done.'

She didn't ask what all this job would involve or what kind of sorrow might come upon her

She simply embraced the will of God

Darrell Bock: 'There is risk in agreeing to go God's way, but as the Lord's servant, she willingly goes.'

We often don't understand 'how' God will accomplish something – but faith takes Him at His word

God accomplishes His purposes thru His willing and obedient servants as He did thru Mary

J.C. Ryle: 'Let us be willing to go anywhere, and do anything, and be anything, whatever be the present and immediate inconvenience, so long as God's will is clear and the path of duty is plain.'

Sometimes we need a little nudge by God!

Stephen Olford was one of the premier pastors in the southern Baptist church in the 20th century

When he passed away in 2004

Adrian Rogers: "Stephen Olford was indeed a theological giant, a great Christian leader, and a preacher without peer. His impact on evangelical preachers is absolutely without dispute. He has left for the church of the Lord Jesus Christ an incalculable treasure of preaching materials."

Olford was the son of missionaries in Africa – and as a young man – he moved to England to study and pursue a career in engineering – but apparently that was not what God had called him to do

For his college thesis – he was working on engines and carburetor designs - - - He took up motorcycle racing to try out some of his theories. On his way home – one blustery night – he crashed and lay injured on the road in the rain for several hours. Pneumonia set in and doctors said he wouldn't last two weeks.

As he lay on his death bed – a letter from his father arrived – from Africa – sent long before the accident occurred. In the letter – the elder Olford repeated the line of C.T. Studd – 'Only one life, 'twill soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last.'

Those words gripped his heart - - - he dropped out of bed / fell to his knees and prayed - - - 'Lord – you have won . . . and if you will heal my body, I will serve you anywhere, anytime, and at any cost.'

God healed him – re-directed his path to the ministry - - - and the rest is history

Conclusion

One of our great Christmas Carols asks the question;

'What child is this who laid to rest in Mary's lap is sleeping?"

In His book, 'More than a Carpenter', Josh McDowell wrote:

'Almost 2000 years ago Jesus entered the human race in a small Jewish community. He was a member of a poor family, a minority group, resided in one of the smallest countries in the world. He lived approximately 33 years, of which only the last 3 comprised His public ministry.'

Yet people almost everywhere still remember Him. The date of our morning newspaper or the copyright date of a university textbook bears witness to the fact that Jesus lived one of the greatest lives ever." [More than a Carpenter, p. 7]

More books are written about Jesus than any other figure

More songs are written about Him than any other figure

Jesus has been the subject of more artwork / paintings than any other figure

The Bible has been translated into more than 2500 languages – no other book comes close

Cities are named to reflect our Christian heritage

St. Paul MN

Bethlehem PN – named after the birthplace of Christ

St. Augustine, FL – one of the famous church fathers

What child is this?

This is Christ the King – the babe / the Son of Mary

The Son of God who came into the world to redeem sinners

John 3:17 - 'For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved.' [kjv]

The whole reason He came was that you and I might be saved by putting turning from our sins – putting our faith in Him