

Christmas 2013

*³⁵And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.
(Luke 1:35. ESV)*

Son of God And Son of Man

December 22nd, 2013

Luke 1:26-35

Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Good morning! Open your Bibles to Luke 1:26-38. While you are finding that let me read to you some words written by the Apostle Peter late in his life. He said:

¹³I think it right, as long as I am in this body, **to stir you up by way of reminder**,¹⁵And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things. (2 Peter 1:13-15. ESV)

There is a sense in which Christmas can feel like a pause in our forward progress as a Christian. As a preacher I identify with that feeling. I have a list in my mind of things we need to study together, doctrines we need to wrestle with, issues we need to be prepared to address in culture – and Christmas always feels like a bit of an interruption to me as I know it does to some of you. Christmas introduces no new doctrines. Christmas dispels no mysteries, stretches no horizons and addresses no timely issues or concerns. Rather it drags us back to the centre and to the simple. God became flesh. The Word that was with God and the Word that was God took on flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a Father’s Only Son, full of grace and truth. Those are old truths. Those are foundational truths – chapter 1 truths that we learned in Sunday School and that we hold to still. And Christmas, as it were, says with the Apostle Peter, “I think it right to stir you up by way of reminder.” I think it right. As a Christian, now in my middle years, I have come to agree. I think it is right to return to these truths often and with regularity. I think we need Christmas more than we realize. I think that even as we press forward, even as we with the Apostle Paul “press on to know”, we also need, as with the Apostle Peter to return from time to time, to the start and to the simple. So, as we read Luke 1:26-35, let me assure you that I do not intend this morning to teach you anything new. I mean to

teach you old things, simple things, and to stir you up by way of reminder. Hear now the Word of the Lord.

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" ²⁹But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³²He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

³⁴And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

³⁵And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. (Luke 1:26-35. ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

This is a story from which two of the most foundational Christian truths emerge. We teach these truths to our children and so I thought I would ask one of our children to teach them back to us this morning but unfortunately because of the bad weather this morning he was not able to be with us. So instead of a student from our Friday morning catechism class teaching us these central truths, all of us are going to go to catechism class and learn them together. I will read the question and then Nathan will display the answer and we will read it together. I don't have enough M&Ms for everyone so you will have to self motivate. Here we go.

Who is Jesus Christ?

"Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God".

How did the Son of God become a man?

"He was born of the Virgin Mary".

Well done class.

Those two truths lie at the very heart and centre of Christian theology. They are among the first things that we teach to our children about Christian theology. We believe that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God. He existed before the creation of the world. Before Mary and Joseph took a single breath on planet earth, Jesus reigned over all things as the second person of the God-head. This is why Jesus could say:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, **I am.**” (John 8:58. ESV)

Jesus Christ is the Eternal Son of God AND YET, he is also fully human. He did not ride down to earth on a lightning bolt or a chariot of fire. He did not step off a cloud and alight on planet earth – no, he was born of the Virgin Mary – he had a human mother! He looked like Mary! He shared her DNA! He took on flesh - he became one of us! Hebrews says:

¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. (Hebrews 4:15. ESV)

Jesus – the Eternal Son of God – took on flesh, shared our weaknesses, yet without sin. Central truths – foundational to the Gospel – buried in a story we first heard as little children. Now, you know that, you believe these truths, and yet, perhaps there is benefit in revisiting them again. Christmas is straddled this year by two Sundays and so we will divide this topic into two parts. This morning I want to help us remember why it matters that Jesus was fully human.

Why Does It Matter That Jesus Is Fully Human?

It matters first of all because:

1. Only a human Jesus proves that God is faithful to his promises

The entire story line of the Bible, from start to finish, hangs upon the promises of God. Most of you will know that there are two sides or parts to your Bible, there is “The Old Testament” and “The New Testament”. The word “testament” is a synonym for the word “covenant”. A covenant is a binding set of promises and obligations between a greater and a lesser party. In the political realm a King or a Pharaoh would make a covenant with lesser lords or chieftains. The Great Pharaoh would promise to defend the chieftain should he be attacked by enemies and in return the chieftain was required to send so many bushels of wheat or so many heads of cattle. Promises and obligations. Similarly in the Bible we see that God makes covenants with his people as a way of addressing the brokenness of the world and restoring the hope of the kingdom of God. The message of the Old Testament could be summarized in this way: “The promise of

God is the hope of the world”. The promise of God is the substance of Old Testament faith. People believed and trusted in the promise of God to fix what they had broken, to heal the world of the curse, to heal their hearts, to undue injustice and to establish righteousness and peace. God said he would do it, he promised to break the power of sin and to restore to us all that has been lost. The chain of promise goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden. After Adam and Eve sinned and fell into alienation from God and conflict with one another and with the earth itself, God made a promise; interestingly he made this promise TO SATAN in the hearing of the man and the woman:

¹⁵ And I will put enmity
Between you and the woman,
And **between your seed and her Seed;**
He shall bruise your head,
And you shall bruise His heel.” (Genesis 3:15. NKJV)

Do you think Eve’s ears perked up when she heard that? Do you think she lifted her head from her posture of shame? She knew that she had opened the door that let the devil in and that cast the world under the shadow of darkness and curse and now she hears the Lord promise the devil that his days of dominion will be numbered. A seed of the woman – Eve was the only woman on the earth at that time – a SEED OF THE WOMAN would come and he would make everything right again. He would defeat the devil, crush his head and take us all back to Eden; back to God. A child would come. A child born of a woman.

That is why when Eve gives birth to her first son Cain she cries out:

“I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD.” (Genesis 4:1. ESV)

The name “Cain” seems to mean something like “Got it”, or “to get it”. Eve believes that this is the child of promise! I’ve got it! With the help of the Lord, I have received the child of promise! But Cain was not Jesus.

The promise carries forward and is renewed and enlarged and clarified over the years. The promise narrows from all humanity to one nation for all the nations. The child of promise will come from the body of Abraham. The child of promise will be a Jew. God develops his promise by saying to Abraham:

I will make you a great nation;
I will bless you
And make your name great;
And you shall be a blessing.
³ I will bless those who bless you,
And I will curse him who curses you;
And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (Genesis 12:2-3. NKJV)

The family of Abraham is now the line of blessing. God speaks to him again and says:

¹⁸**In your seed** all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.” (Genesis 22:18. NKJV)

The child of promise will be born to the people of Abraham through Isaac. He will be a Jew and in this Jew all the nations of the earth shall be blessed. Later we learn that he will be a king of the Jews, born to the House of David.

¹²“When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, **I will set up your seed after you**, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³He shall build a house for My name, and **I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever**. (2 Samuel 7:12-13. NKJV)

Many years after the death of David the child of promise had still not come and yet God had not forgotten his promises. He said through the prophet Isaiah:

⁶ For unto us a Child is born,
Unto us a Son is given;
And the government will be upon His shoulder.
And His name will be called
Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
⁷ Of the increase of *His* government and peace
There will be no end,
Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom,
To order it and establish it with judgment and justice
From that time forward, even forever.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this. (Isaiah 9:6-7. NKJV)

The child of promise would come! He would be born of a woman, just as God promised. He will be called Mighty God and yet he will be of the House and line of David and will sit on his throne forever. The zeal of the Lord will do it.

That is why the angels said:

Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. ¹¹For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. (Luke 2:10-11. KJV)

The good news - the Gospel – is that God has kept his promises. He has not left mankind to perish in a state of sin and misery – he has done as he said he would do. A child has been born OF A WOMAN, in the nation of Abraham and in the line of David, he is Christ the Lord. Jesus had to be human – he had to be born of a woman because God is a God who is faithful to his Word and who always keeps his promises. Thanks be to God!

Secondly, Jesus had to be human because:

2. **Only a human Jesus could fulfil the covenants and unlock the blessings**

This truth may be less well known to you than the first one. One of the things I find very curious is the North American Evangelical obsession with truncation and editing. North American Evangelicals are convinced that people need things kept very brief and that breadth is boring and so everything gets trimmed and in that trimming a few pretty important things have been left on the cutting room floor. Probably the most important of those things is what theologians call the active obedience of Christ. Back in the day – your grandparents day –we use to understand and preach that we were saved not just by the death of Christ but also by the LIFE and OBEDIENCE of Christ. The Apostle Paul said:

¹⁹For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, **so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.** (Romans 5:19. NKJV)

When was the last time you heard that as part of the Gospel presentation? We usually just say now: "Believe that Jesus died for your sins and you shall be saved". What about believing and trusting in his life and obedience? Why is the obedience of Jesus so important?

It all goes back to those covenants we were talking about. Covenants are about the promises of God and the obligations assumed by the lesser partner. Sometimes you will hear people chattering on about which covenants in the Bible are conditional and which covenants are unconditional but that is to miss the mark entirely. All of the covenants contain interwoven

aspects of conditionality and unconditionality. The covenants are unconditional in the sense that God promises to bring the blessings to pass. They will happen. They will come. God is faithful and he himself guarantees the covenant. That is the whole point of Genesis 15. In Genesis 15 when God confirms the covenant to Abraham, they go through this strange custom of covenant cutting. In those days, when you made a covenant, the Pharaoh would have sacrificial animals cut in two and the lesser party would walk through the cut pieces as a solemn warning that so shall it be done to you if you do not fulfil your end of the bargain. If you don't send Pharaoh those sheep then he will butcher you like a sheep is sort of the idea. Anyway, God has Abraham cut up a bunch of sacrificial animals and Abraham knows what is coming. He is going to have to walk the aisle of blood so as to be reminded that if he breaks the covenant – if he fails to respond with covenant loyalty and obedience – then God will cut him to pieces. And then this utterly amazing thing happened:

¹⁷When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. (Genesis 15:17. ESV)

I know this doesn't jump out at us but this is incredible. Who was supposed to walk through the pieces? Abraham, the lesser party. But what happens? God himself in the sign of fire and torch, passes through the pieces as though to say: "I myself will guarantee your side of the bargain. I will obey for you, I will keep both sides of this covenant." That's the Gospel my friends! This is God promising to be both sides of the covenant of promise. How will that happen the OT wonders; in the person of Jesus Christ, the NT answers; God in the flesh come to do for us what we could never do for ourselves.

You see over and over again the promises are renewed and guaranteed in the Old Testament but are not realized BECAUSE of the disobedience of the lesser partner. The covenants are in some sense conditional. Even the covenant with Abraham was conditional; look carefully at Genesis 17:

¹When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; **walk before me, and be blameless,** ²**that I may make my covenant between me and you,** and may multiply you greatly." (Genesis 17:1. ESV)

That sounds conditional to me. It sounds like Abraham needs to walk before God in a holy manner and that in some way the covenant is conditional upon that appropriate response. The

covenant with David is also conditional. People sometimes say it isn't, you will sometimes hear preachers say that the covenant with Moses was conditional but the covenants with Abraham and David were unconditional but that is just not true. Solomon certainly understood that the promise God had made to his father was not entirely unconditional. When he was praying at the dedication of the temple he said:

¹⁶Now therefore, O LORD, God of Israel, **keep for your servant David my father what you have promised him**, saying, 'You shall not lack a man to sit before me on the throne of Israel, **if only** your sons pay close attention to their way, to walk in my law as you have walked before me.' ¹⁷Now therefore, O LORD, God of Israel, let your word be confirmed, which you have spoken to your servant David. (2 Chronicles 6:16-17. ESV)

The promises made to David require an obedient Son to be activated. Solomon was not that son. He fell into idolatry late in his life because of his love for foreign women. An obedient Son was yet required. Here is the quandary of the Old Testament. The covenants are guaranteed by God. In that sense they are unconditional. They will come to pass. The child of promise will come and bring blessing to Israel and through Israel to all the earth. The dominion of the devil will be shattered, the power of the grave overcome and mankind shall be returned to fellowship with God and peace with one another as they reign as sons and daughters over all creation as they were destined from the first. BUT. All of the covenants of God require an obedient Son. They are in that sense conditional. Think of it like this, obedience is the means by which and determines the timing wherein all the covenant blessings are released. They are certain and yet deferred until the Son of promise keeps our end of the bargain so that all the blessings of God can be released on humanity through the means of God's choosing. An obedient human Son.

That is why the Apostle Paul said:

¹⁹For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, **so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.** (Romans 5:19. NKJV)

You heard Emma Smith, another of our catechism students, recite these words just a few weeks ago:

How did Jesus Christ redeem His people?

He kept the whole law for His people and suffered the punishment their sins deserved; our propitiation.

We teach that to our children because only a human Jesus could unlock the blessing of God in the way that God intended – through obedience to his commands. God promised the end but he also ordained the means.

Thirdly, Jesus had to be human because:

3. Only a human Jesus could suffer as a substitute for our sins

We will be more economic with our words here because this is the part of the Gospel that has been retained in modern Evangelicalism so we know it well. Hebrews 2:14-17 says:

¹⁴Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. ¹⁶For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but **He does give aid to the seed of Abraham.** ¹⁷Therefore, **in all things He had to be made like His brethren,** that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things *pertaining* to God, **to make propitiation for the sins of the people.** (NKJV)

I don't think I can add anything to the clarity of that passage. Jesus had to be made like his brethren – that is all the children of God chosen from before the foundation of the world – in order to make propitiation – that is a sacrifice that satisfies the wrath of God appropriate to our transgressions – for the sins of his people. An angel cannot pay for human sin. Only a human – only Jesus, God in the flesh, could pay for the sins of men and women. He became like us to pay for us what we could never pay for ourselves.

Fourthly, Jesus had to be human because:

4. Only a human Jesus can fulfil God's plan for humanity to exercise dominion

God doesn't change his mind and way back in the beginning God said clearly:

²⁶Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And **let them have dominion** over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." (Genesis 1:26. ESV)

The plan of God from the beginning was to establish humanity as his vice regents over all the cosmos. The idea was that humanity would be under the rule of God and would be over all that

God created. Good plan. The problem was that humanity did not want to be under God's rule – though they did intend to exercise dominion over the earth. History from that point on reflects the disaster that is the rule of man apart from submission to God. What do we need? We need a human – a king – who is fully submissive to God. Give us that and you give us back the world as it meant to be. Enter Jesus. He kept the whole law for his people. He was holy, blameless and pure. He did not nothing of his own will but only what he saw the Father doing. This is why when the purposes of God are fulfilled upon the earth the angels of heaven declare:

“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever.” (Revelation 11:17. NRSV)

The problem introduced in Genesis is solved and celebrated in Revelation because Jesus came and he obeyed and he has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God and HE REIGNS.

Lastly, Jesus had to be human because:

5. Only a human Jesus could be our true example and model for life

The Apostle John said:

⁶whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. (1 John 2:6. ESV)

If Jesus were an angel or if he walked upon the earth as God and not also as man then these words would be cruel and unreasonable. But the Bible says:

¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. (Hebrews 4:15. ESV)

Therefore church, let us fix our eyes on Jesus:

the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

³For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. (Hebrews 12:1-3. NKJV)

Conclusion:

Behold the babe in the manger! Born of the Spirit of God and born of the Virgin Mary. Son of God and Son of Man. This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.