



Part 18: Christmas Eve

Word ALIVE



The Author enters His story



Background Notes -

PURPOSE: To present the infancy narratives, the stories about the Annunciation, birth, and childhood of Jesus Christ. Matthew seems to address the Jews, quoting Scripture to link the prophecies to Christ, and Luke sets out to present an orderly account of the events surrounding Jesus' life.

AUTHOR: Of the four gospels, it is Matthew and Luke which provide the infancy narratives, Matthew from the point of view of Joseph, Jesus' foster father, and Luke from the point of view of Mary, the chosen mother of Jesus.

DATE: Our calendar is based on Christ's birth. Current calculations place Christ's birth somewhere between 7 and 3 BC.

STYLE: Contrary to the opinion of certain self-appointed "scholars," the Gospels do not present themselves like their apocryphal counterparts, but as historical records.



Opening Quotes -

“Just as they were handed on to us by eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus.” Lk 1:1

“She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’ All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet.” Mt 1:20

“Rejoice, O highly favored one! The Lord is with you.” Lk 1:28

“Let it be done to me according to Thy word.” Lk 1:38

“Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me?’ Lk 1:38

“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior... all generations will call me blessed.” Lk 1:38

“He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we would be saved from our enemies... and you [John] will be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins.” Lk 1:66

“Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?.” Lk 2:49

| the BIG PICTURE | | ← : LAW, History, Writings, Prophets | | ← : key covenants in our Father's plan | |
|-----------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|--|---|--|
| 12 Periods ▼ | Plot ▼ | Other books related to period ▼ | | stories in each period ▼ | |
| BC | 🌐 THE BEGINNINGS | GN 1-11 | Ps 8, 104 | Creation, Adam & Eve, Cain & Abel, Noah's ark, Tower of Babel | |
| 1850 | 👤 THE PATRIARCHS | GN 12-50 | | Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (Israel), Joseph, Melchizedek | |
| 1250 | ⚠️ EXODUS FROM EGYPT | EX | | Moses, the burning bush, the plagues, passover, exodus | |
| 1200 | ♣️ JOURNEY TO CANAAN | NM, Jos | LV, DT | Sinai desert, 10 commandments, Levites, Law, Joshua | |
| 1100 | 👤 THE JUDGE CYCLE | Jg | Ruth | 12 tribes, Gideon, Samson, Ruth, Samuel | |
| 1030 | 👤 KINGS & PROPHETS | 1 & 2 S | 1 Ch, Ps, Prov | Saul, David, Solomon, Jerusalem, the Temple | |
| 1000 | 👤 THE DIVIDED KINGDOM | 1 Kg | 2 Ch, Prov, | Israel (N), Judah (S), Elijah & Elisha, Isaiah, Assyrian exile | |
| 721 587 | 👤 BABYLONIAN EXILE | 2 Kg | 2 Ch, Tob, Hos, Am, Hab, Is, Jer, Lam, Jl, Mic, Zp, Jon, Nah, Ob, Ez, Dan, Bar | Babylonians, "major" prophets, Isaiah (to Israel), Jeremiah (to Jerusalem), Ezekiel (to the Exiles) | |
| 538 | 👤 THE RESTORATION | Ezr, Neh | Est, Judith, Hag, Zech, Mal, Job, Ecc, Songs | Cyrus, 2nd temple, 2nd Law, "minor" prophets, new writings | |
| 163 63 | 👤 THE REPURIFICATION | 1 Mac | Dn, 2Mac, Sirach, Wisdom | Greeks, Maccabean revolt, Hasmonean Dynasty, Romans, Jewish sects (Pharisees, Saducees, Zealots, Essenes) | |
| AD | 👤 JESUS CHRIST | LK | MT, MK, JN | Incarnation, Good News, New Law, Cross & Resurrection | |
| 33 70 | 👤 APOSTOLIC CHURCH | Acts | Rm, 1&2Co, Ga, Ep, Phil, Col, 1&2Th, 1&2 Tm, Ti, Phm, Hb, Ja, 1P, 2P, 1,2&3J, Jd, Rv | Pentecost, council, journeys, epistles, Body/Bride of Christ | |



The Story of Part 18: Christmas Eve



The fullness of time had been reached. Two figures are going to usher in the New Testament: the Precursor and the Second Eve, that is, John the Baptist and Mary of Nazareth. The Angel Gabriel, whom we have already met in Daniel, visited a righteous man, Zechariah, and then later his wife's cousin, a Jewish girl named Mary, announcing to them that they were going to have sons, both empowered by the Spirit of God himself. Zechariah could not believe his barren wife Elizabeth could conceive, and was made mute throughout her pregnancy. Mary, on the other hand, after asking how she could conceive without having relations with a man, was informed by Gabriel that the Holy Spirit would "overshadow" her. Amazed but docile, she declared herself the handmaiden of the Lord with her *fiat*: "Let it be done to me according to thy word." The Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth today has inscribed under the altar the words taken from John's Gospel, adding one word that says it all: "The Word was made flesh – here."

The pregnant Mary went to visit her pregnant cousin Elizabeth to share the good news. The instant they met, Elizabeth's baby John leapt in her womb with joy! Their boys were about to change the world.

Mary then spoke a beautiful collage of Old Testament passages we call the *Magnificat* to express her joy, acknowledging that all generations would call her blessed. When John was born, Zechariah could speak again, and also spoke what would become a beautiful prayer, the *Benedictus*, blessing his son John as the forerunner who would preach the forgiveness of sins.

Thanks to a census mandated by Augustus Caesar to take a headcount of his vast Roman Empire, Mary and her betrothed Joseph of Nazareth went to Bethlehem, the birthplace of Joseph's ancestor, King David. In doing so, Caesar unknowingly assisted in fulfilling the prophecy of the Messiah being born in Bethlehem.


After an angel announced to some local shepherds the birth of Jesus, Luke's Gospel recounts a whole multitude of heavenly host proclaiming glory to God, pronouncing peace to those whom he favors. Meanwhile, Matthew's Gospel recounts the three wise kings from the East (perhaps Persians or Babylonians) who came following a star, looking to pay homage to a boy king born in a time and place according to their calculations (one may have been an astronomer). Between the shepherds and the three kings, we see the poor and the Gentiles drawn towards this baby Jew born in a manger.

Meanwhile, King Herod intended to nip in the bud any alleged Messiah and savagely ordered the slaughter of the newborn males in the region, reminiscent of the slaughter of Hebrew boys mandated by a Pharaoh many centuries earlier. As Moses was spared, so was Jesus, for an angel informed Mary and Joseph to stay in Egypt until Herod's death.

When it came time to present Jesus in the Temple as was the Jewish custom, an elderly man Simeon came forward to lay his eyes on the boy, for he was promised by God that he would not die until he saw the Messiah. After having seen him, he turned to Mary and proclaimed that a "sword would pierce her own heart," for her son, a "light to the Gentiles," would mean the rise and fall of many in Israel. A prophetess named Anna, who had been praying constantly in the Temple, also began preaching to the people that redemption had arrived.

Luke's Gospel then relays to us the single canonical episode we have of Jesus' boyhood. One Passover, when he was twelve, Mary and Joseph lost him. Desperately they looked for him and finally found him back in the Temple, dialoguing with the teachers there, amazing them with his questions and his knowledge. "How could you do this to us?" asked his mother. "Did you not know that I would be in my Father's house?" was the boy's response. Mary pondered this in her heart. They went home, and he was obedient to them, and he grew in wisdom and stature. Just like that, we have in its entirety all of the detail of Jesus' youth before his public ministry which would result in his execution! It is too easy to forget that of all the world-changing preaching and miracle-working that Jesus would later do, it was simple obedience to his parents which comprised the greater part of his life. Yet how can we overlook this lived teaching of his?

Now the Gospels present him not merely as the Messiah, but as the only Son of God, begotten, not made, one in being with the Father, *God from God*. How, then, could he "grow in wisdom and stature"? Because, the Church teaches, he was both fully God and fully man. This "hypostatic union" means that *as a man* he shared our sense perceptions. Being God, he entered the world without sin. But by assuming a human nature, he felt in his body the full effects of sin, and what it was like to struggle against it. In this way he "grew in wisdom and stature" and found "favor with God." But why on earth would God knowingly subject himself to suffering?

So that we could join our suffering to his as a form of *repentance*. Jesus' cousin John began announcing from the desert that the kingdom of God was at hand. Reconciliation with God was just around the corner. But before going there, G.K. Chesterton sums up the ineffable mystery of the Incarnation: "Any agnostic or atheist whose childhood has known a real Christmas, whether he likes it or not, associates in his mind two ideas that most of mankind must regard as remote from each other; the idea of a baby and the idea of unknown strength that sustains the stars." 



Defending the Faith: Something About Mary

"What's up with the whole Mary thing? Why do Catholics glorify her so?"

First let's be cognizant of the fact that the meanings of words change. Catholics *venerate* Mary, they do not worship her as a goddess. If by glorify you mean honor her as the greatest of creatures short of God himself, then yes, we glorify her. Why? The key to understanding the whole "Mary thing" is found in the term "Second Adam" applied to Christ by St. Paul. As sin entered the world through one man, Adam, so our redemption from sin is found through one man, Christ. Notice, though, that Eve sinned *before* Adam, though Adam takes the blame for bringing sin into the human race. In a very real way, Adam was responsible for Eve's fall before his sin. In a role reversal, Mary, seen as a second Eve, was saved by Christ before his birth. She was literally filled with Christ before his birth, his precious blood mingling with her own. Now, just as the first virgin in question freely consented to sin and in doing so opened the door for the condemnation of the human race, so the second Virgin freely consented to God's word and in doing so opened the door to salvation for herself and the whole human race.

Like her role in our redemption, the fancy titles given to her depend entirely on the unique mediation of Jesus Christ (Catechism, 969, 970). St. Louis de Montfort says that compared to God she is less than an atom, in fact, "nothing." But then he calls her "mediatrix". How can he call her this when there is only one mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ (1 Tim 2:5)? It is because Paul's term doesn't exclude intercessory prayer (read the verses before it). To intercede means to mediate on behalf of someone, which is what we do whenever we pray for them. Paul commends this and

then goes further by saying that this is possible in the end only because of the one mediator between us and God, Jesus Christ.

"But Mary is like any other woman," some might object. A moment's thought will reveal the absurdity of such a comment. How can we call the woman whose womb held the very One the heavens cannot even contain "just another woman?" Of all the human race, God picked this humble Jewish girl to depend on for his own milk, to help him take his first steps, and to whom he freely chose to submit as a good Jewish boy. It was at her insistence that his public ministry began, and she was with him at the end, at the foot of the Cross, when all but one of his disciples left him. Just another woman?

She is also unlike any Christian in that she is the world's first Christian! People have wrongly thought that Jesus was knocking his own mother when someone said "Blessed are the breasts that fed you," and he responded, "Blessed rather is the one who hears the word of God and keeps it." But what does the Bible tell us about Mary and keeping God's word? "Let it be done to according to Thy word!" Jesus wasn't knocking her, he was praising her! It's as if he was saying "This woman is not blessed just because she fed me. Any mother would do the same. Rather, she is blessed for believing in God's word!"

If you stop to consider that Jesus is God, what creature was exalted by God more than Mary? "Greater than you," St. Josemaría Escrivá once said, "No one but God!"



Expressing the Faith: Say the Word

Rory Cooney has somehow managed to capture the simplicity and profundity of the scene which is the first joyful mystery – an angel, a Jewish girl at her prayers, and a message – the Annunciation.

Gabriel:

*Full of life, full of God,
Hail, full of grace!
You who bring Love to earth,
hope to your race.
"Where is our God?" the people will cry
Searching the world, scanning the sky
in vain.
It couldn't be clearer.
It's plain –
look in the mirror.*

Mary:

*Who could have planned it?
Who'd understand it?
Who but my one Love,
the God of surprise?
Old was Sarah, David small,
And yet God chose us all.
Since He chose me, I choose Him,
I cannot refuse Him.
What must I do?
Say the word!*

↗ **Next time: "Behold the Lamb"** ↖