

**The Birth of the Lord Jesus Christ
with an emphasis upon
the Names and Titles of our Lord**

Sunday Morning Services

11/29/98 – The Angel’s Message to Zacharias (Luke 1:5-23).

12/6/98 – Mary and the Heavenly Messenger (Luke 1:26-35).

12/13/98 – Joseph and His Dream (Matt. 1:18-25).

12/20/98 – The Prophecy of Zacharias (Luke 1:57-80).

12/27/98 – The Shepherds and the Angel’s Message (Luke 2:8-20).

THE ANGEL'S MESSAGE TO ZACHARIAS

Luke 1:5-23

Intro: Today I am beginning a brief series of five messages on *The Birth of Christ*, and I am doing this with a special emphasis on the Names and Titles that are given to the Lord in these passages. In my message for today we will be looking into the announcement which "an angel of the Lord" gave to Zacharias concerning the son which the Lord was going to give to Zacharias and his wife, Elisabeth. The Lord willing, I expect to follow this message with the angel Gabriel's message to the virgin Mary. The third message will be on the message the angel of the Lord gave to Joseph who was engaged to be married to Mary, but this message was in a dream. The fourth message will be that which Zacharias gave after the birth of his son, John, who is known to us as John the Baptist. And then I will conclude with the message given to the shepherds after the birth of our Lord. In four of the five messages we will be concerned with the message of angels – all probably the same angel, Gabriel, with the addition of the heavenly host who appeared to the shepherds saying, or probably singing, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14).

This, of course, does not include all of the historical records given in the four Gospels concerning the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, but, as I have said, my purpose is really to focus upon what was said in these passages regarding Who the Lord was, and what He came to do – in other words, His Names and His titles. And I have focused mainly on the ministry of angels to help us to see the solid testimony which was given concerning our Lord as a Person, as well as the work which He came to do. I hope that these messages will be beneficial to all of us spiritually, and that we will profit in many ways as we focus attention upon our Lord Jesus Christ. *We live in a commercialized and an increasingly pagan society where Christmas can be observed with little or nothing said about Christmas. Merchants are concerned about selling their goods and people are concerned about buying what they have to sell. But as little attention as possible is given to Christ. May we be careful not to set the Lord aside in all of the activities of the Christmas season.*

When the angel appeared to Zacharias in the passage before us today, an amazing thing was happening. *God was breaking a silence that had lasted approximately four hundred years!* I don't mean by this that God has not been doing anything during those years. I do not mean that He has not been answering prayers. I do not mean that God had not been transform-

ing lives. All of that and much more had continued during those four hundred years, often called, *silent years*.

They are called *silent years* because from the time of Malachi until the events leading to the birth of the virgin Mary's son *there had been no new revelation from God. No prophet had been raised up by God to give us another book of the Bible.* The NT has been completed, but that was all.

The Gospel records show that during that time a great deal of corruption had developed in Israel. The Pharisees and the Sadducees arose, and there were synagogues built many towns where the Jewish people gathered for their services. But what was worse was the fact that additions were made to the Old Testament Scripture, and much that was written was often corrupted and overruled by those who were in charge. So the religious life of most people was at a very low ebb.

And yet there was a godly remnant. There were people who knew the Lord, and who were concerned about the hope of Israel. And it is about some of those people that we learn in the opening chapters of the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke.

One of them was:

I. A PRIEST NAMED ZACHARIAS (Luke 1:5-7).

The times in which Zacharias and Elisabeth lived were not good times. The nation Israel was under the heel of Rome, and so Judea was actually ruled by a foreigner, Herod. But this made no difference to Zacharias and Elisabeth as far as their relationship to God was concerned. They both were descendants of Aaron, and when we are introduced to Zacharias we find that at that particular time he was acting as a priest. He was of the course of Abia, or as the name is given in 1 Chron. 24:10, "Abijah." It was his responsibility to offer incense for that specific day about which we are told in our text.

Verse 6 of our text speaks volumes of the spiritual character of both Zacharias and Elisabeth.

In the first place Luke made it very clear that both were really saved. He wrote, "They were both righteous before God." This is a very clear statement that they knew the Lord. They did not believe that they were saved because he was a priest and both were descendants of Aaron, in the

nation Israel. But they knew that salvation was by faith in the promises that God had given throughout the history of Israel of a coming Redeemer. They knew that it was not because of Zacharias' priestly work that he was saved, or that she was saved because she was also a descendant of Aaron, and married to Zacharias. They both understood that salvation was a matter of personal faith in the coming Redeemer. They knew that salvation was by faith, and not by works. This is the Holy Spirit's testimony to the genuineness of their faith. "They both were righteous before God."

Often when people talk about salvation, or getting to heaven, they mention what they are *before men*. However, all of the goodness that man can produce before his fellow men, will never be enough to make us acceptable to God. And Zacharias and Elisabeth understood this very well.

As proof of their salvation, they were "walking in all the commandments." This refers to those commandments given to Israel in the Law, not to obtain salvation, but as evidence that they were saved. Whether we are speaking of the commandments given to the nation Israel under the Law, or the commandments given by our Lord Jesus Christ, or those given later in the epistles, true obedience was only possible in the lives of those who were right before God, and who were therefore trusting the Lord to make it possible for them to live in obedience to the will of God.

But they were also "walking in all the . . . ordinances of the Lord." This probably is a reference to the offerings that were required of them under the Law. It would include the observance of those holy days which were required of the people under the Law. And note that they paid attention to "all the commandments and ordinance of the Lord"! That showed that they were knowledgeable of the Scriptures in a days when the religious teachers of Israel had so mixed the Word of God with the regulations that men had added, that most people did not know what really was the Word of God. But Zacharias and Elisabeth knew, and it was their purpose in life to find out what *the Lord* wanted them to do, and then they did it – not just at certain times or on certain days, but it was the way they lived day by day.

And, in regard to the Word and its bearing upon their lives, they were "blameless." This does not mean that they were perfect, but it does mean that they could not be charged with any willful violation of God's Word.

This is a remarkable testimony to be given to any child of God at any time in his or her life, but with conditions as they were in the nation Israel in

Zacharias' day, this was an outstanding witness to the godliness of their lives. And it is all to the Lord's glory. Regardless of how bad things can get, the Lord always has people who know Him, love Him, trust Him, and who are living for Him. Zacharias the Elisabeth were two people in whose hearts the Lord had done a deep work of grace.

However, there was one great sorrow in their lives: they had no children. And their situation, humanly speaking, was hopeless because Elisabeth was barren. And at the moment to which Luke was referring, they were "well stricken in years," *i.e.*, beyond the ages where they could have children. Undoubtedly, like Elkanah and Hannah before them, this matter had been laid before the Lord for years, but God had not been pleased to bless them with a family, and especially with a son.

This leads in Luke's account to:

II. THE APPEARANCE OF THE ANGEL, GABRIEL (Luke 1:8-17).

In spite of their long-standing disappointment, Zacharias was faithfully doing the work that the Lord had appointed for him to do. We don't know how many priests there were who were doing what he was doing, *i.e.*, doing the will of God from the heart. There certainly were not many, but Zacharias was one of them. He teaches us to trust the Lord even when our prayers are not answered. Our obedience to the Lord must not have any conditions attached to it.

It is really a beautiful picture that we have here at a time when the nation had sunk to the depths spiritually. Outside, because the people were not allowed to come in where the priest was, there were many people, and they were praying. Again, we do not know how many of them were really praying, and how many were only saying prayers. At any rate they appeared to be praying, and we must give them the benefit of the doubt. God was their Judge.

Suddenly something very unexpected happened. "There appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense." This angel, whose name we learn from verse 19, was "Gabriel." He didn't make himself known to the people. He appeared to Zacharias alone.

We can well understand Zacharias' reaction. He was "troubled, and fear fell upon him." Zacharias had been going about his work calmly and

carefully when the appearance of the angel disturbed him greatly, and made him afraid. To say that "fear fell upon him" means that it took possession of him, fear controlled him. He was beside himself with fear. Nothing like this had ever happened to him before, and he did not know how to handle it.

Gabriel sought immediately to calm his fears. He spoke those words from the Lord which have often calmed the worst fears that people can have. And the angel went on to say that what he and Elisabeth had been praying about for years, was finally to take place. *They were going to have a son!* And the angel even told Zacharias what his son's name was to be: "John"!

So before his child was even conceived, and without the aid of an **ultra** sound, Zacharias knew that he was to be the father of a son. Thayer tells us that John means, "God is a gracious Giver." And this idea carries over from the Hebrew. God is the One Who named John the Baptist, because his very birth as well as his ministry had to do with *the grace of God in salvation!* This was a truth which Zacharias and Elisabeth understood to some degree, but now that truth was to be impressed upon them as never before.

We can understand why Gabriel said what he did in verse 14. That would have been true of any son that he and Elisabeth might have had. And the fact that "many shall rejoice at his birth" would also be easy to understand. There may have been many of their friends who had been praying with them that God would give them a child. But the "joy and gladness" which the angel had in mind was completely beyond that "joy and gladness" which normally accompanies the birth of a child, and the "many" would include countless numbers of people, people whom Zacharias and Elisabeth would never meet, because this was a son whose ministry of the grace of God would touch countless numbers of people in Israel, and even down to the present day we rejoice in what God was doing then through His two faithful and devoted servants.

Now I said at the beginning of my message that my special emphasis in these messages which have to do with the birth of Christ, would be in the *names* and *titles* that are given to the Lord Jesus Christ in the Scripture passages we will be considering together. Let me point out to you three statements in our text that I want you to notice in particular:

- 1) In verse 15: "For he [John] shall be great in the eyes of the Lord."
- 2) In verse 16: "And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God."

3) And then at the end of verse 17: "To make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

— Sometimes, it is true, the name, or title, "Lord," (whichever you want to call it, is used of God the Father, but it seems clear that here the angel was speaking of the one who would go before the Lord, preparing a people for the Lord, and that could be none other than the Lord Jesus Christ! John's ministry was a ministry that pointed to Christ. His passion was the glory of Christ. He pointed even his own disciples to the Lord Jesus.

Now these words of the angel Gabriel meant that the One Whom John the Baptist would go before, was the Lord. This meant that He, not John, but the Lord, would be a Member of the Godhead. It meant that in coming He would not cease in any way to be the Lord. It meant that the Lord would be absolutely sovereign in what He was coming to do. For the angel to call our Lord Jesus, "Lord," meant that He was coming to minister the goodness of God to the people He would gather to Himself. That idea is contained in the Greek word for Lord. And for the forerunner of our Lord, to be named John, meant that John's ministry and his message would be evidence that God is a gracious Giver.

— So the birth of John the Baptist was like salvation itself. He was a gift, a gift of a gracious God, and that gift of God's grace would be manifested in One Who rightly carries the name, "Lord." And the whole ministry of John the Baptist was not for him to exalt himself, but for him to exalt the Lord.

Years later when John the Baptist preached, what was his message? "Behold, the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). And speaking of our Lord, John said, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). But when John baptized the Lord Jesus, the Spirit descended upon Him in the form of a dove, and the Father spoke from heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17). And then what did John say? "And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God" (John 1:34).

— Oh, in these days when many religious teachers try to humanize the Deity right out of the Lord, let us be firmly convinced in our own minds that Jesus of Nazareth was none other than the Lord of Glory Who came in human flesh that He might save His people from their sins. No one but the Lord could offer the perfect sacrifice that was required to save Zacharias and Elisabeth and their son, John, from their sins. And no one but the

Lord, the Son of God, could possibly offer a sacrifice that would be sufficient for your salvation and mine. Many things will be said about Jesus again at this Christmas season, but anyone who does not declare that He is the Lord, is uttering blasphemy!

What was the effect upon Zacharias? The remainder of our text tells us.

III. THE UNBELIEF OF ZACHARIAS (Luke 1:18-23).

We have seen that Zacharias was a true believer, but sometimes we as believers can be guilty of not believing God. Gabriel made it clear that he was not declaring his own message, but that he had come with a message from God, which he called "these glad tidings."

I am not going to try to excuse Zacharias' unbelief because Gabriel didn't excuse it. But I can understand it. I am sure that the truth of salvation became clearer to Zacharias, the longer Gabriel spoke. But it seemed impossible to him because he did not see how he and Elisabeth could possibly have a son. It had been impossible all along, but at their ages it seemed more impossible than ever. What was the Lord seeking to teach Zacharias? That the things that are impossible with man (including his own salvation), are impossible with God.

But even those nine months, or a little more, of silence, was an act of God's grace. When Zacharias could not speak, he had to do a lot of what? Listening. And in one of the messages we will have in this series, we will see how much Zacharias learned during those days when he was unable to say a word.

Concl: May we always remember that when we speak of Jesus as the Lord Jesus, we are not only declaring that He was the Son of God manifest in human flesh, but that His very coming was a testimony that God is a gracious Giver, and that the gift of salvation which He provided in His Son was an expression of the infinite goodness of God. He is the sovereign Lord, calling sinners to Himself. And all who hear, come. I close with Isaiah's words of appeal uttered so long ago, and yet just as needed today as ever -- Isaiah 55:6-7:

6 Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near:

7 Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

MARY AND THE HEAVENLY MESSENGER

Luke 1:26-35

Intro: Last week we considered the mission of the Angel, Gabriel, to a priest in the temple in Jerusalem. He broke the silence of about 400 years during which time there had been no additional revelation from God. But at that time things began to move again in the most important way. Gabriel announced to Zacharias that he and Elisabeth, both too old to have children, that after many years of praying and waiting, they were going to have a child, a son, and that his name would be John, which means, *God is a gracious Giver*.

Our text for today in Luke 1:26 begins with the words, "And in the sixth month." This means six months since Elisabeth had conceived. But now the scene has changed from Jerusalem to Nazareth. One was one of the most prominent cities on earth (and it still is); the other, Nazareth, was not even mentioned in the OT. This may mean that it was a city at that time of fairly recent origin. Although our Lord was born in Bethlehem, He was raised in Nazareth, and the city was highly honored by the fact that our Lord became known as "Jesus of Nazareth." That Name and Title of our Lord is used once in the Gospel of Matthew (26:71); four times in Mark (1:24; 10:47; 14:67; 16:6), three times in the Gospel of Luke (4:34; 18:37; 24:19); three times in the Gospel of John (1:45; 18:5, 7); five times in the book of Acts (2:22; 6:14; 10:38; 22:8; 26:9). The name Jesus was a fairly common name, and, even though there may have been other boys and men by that name, none could lay claim to that title, "Jesus of Nazareth," but our Lord Himself. Even when the Lord spoke to Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus, He called Himself, "Jesus of Nazareth."

This is not one of the Names of our Lord which we will be considering in this series, but I mention it because Nazareth is mentioned here, and because it appears to have been a part of the humiliation of our Lord. It was the Lord Who gave prominence to Nazareth; Nazareth did not add a single thing to Him. You probably remember the incident recorded by the Apostle John in which Philip went to tell Nathanael that they had found the Messiah. Cf. John 1:45-46:

45 Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.

46 And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see.

There have been accounts written of this city in the past that showed that it

was not only insignificant, but that it was a morally degenerate place. So it was no credit for the Lord that He was raised there, but it was to their credit that it was His home on earth, the place where He was raised.

— The reason that Gabriel went there was because a young woman by the name of Mary lived there. Her name is the equivalent of "Miriam," who was Moses' sister. Mary was unmarried, a virgin. But she was, as our text says, "espoused to a man whose name was Joseph." This meant that they were engaged, but not married. They were, however, married before the Lord Jesus was born, but Matthew has recorded for us that after they were married, Joseph "knew her not until she had brought forth her firstborn Son: and he called His Name Jesus" (Matt. 1:25).

And so from the account about Zacharias to the message given to Mary, we have moved from Jerusalem to Nazareth, from all of the splendor and glory of the Temple, to the humble home of a very godly woman, whose name was Mary.

And so J. C. Ryle commented, "The Heir of all things not only took our nature upon him, but took it in the most humbling form in which it could have been assumed" (*Luke*, Vol. I, p. 22).

— Now it seems that the appearance of angels was as rare in those days as it is today. Zacharias had apparently never experienced anything like that. And it is certain that the virgin Mary had never had an angel appear to her before. But we have to agree with Alfred Edersheim in his writings in his two-volume work called, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, that it was not so much the appearance of the angel that startled her, but it was what the angel had to say to her. Let me re-read for you verses 28 and 29. **(Read vv. 28, 29.)**

Mary not only lived in humble surroundings, but she was humble of heart. Although she would not have had any way of knowing what God's will would be for her, yet it is apparent that in God's hands she had been made a fit vessel to become the mother of our Lord. It is ridiculous to say that she was divine, and she herself would have been astounded at such teaching. But she truly was a most wonderful person, made so by God Himself, and as such she was "highly favoured" and blessed above all other women in that she was ordained to become the mother, according to the flesh, of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ.

— Gabriel honored Mary, but He did not worship her. God had truly hon-

ored her in choosing her to be the human instrument through whom the Lord would come into the world. "The Lord is with thee" are words found often in the OT. They do not just mean that the Lord's presence is with you, but that the Lord's blessing is upon you. The Lord was on her side to qualify her for such a sacred task. We would feel that no honor could be higher. And yet let us remember the conversation that the Lord had with a woman. The incident is recorded for us in Luke 11:27-28. The Lord had just completed some of His teaching, and this woman seems to have been especially blessed. And so this is what we read:

27 And it came to pass, as he spake these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked [or, *the breasts that nursed you*, as in the NASB].

28 But he said, Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it (Luke 11:27-28).

Without doing any disservice to His mother, the Lord placed an even higher honor upon those who hear the Word of God, and obey it. We have almost the same emphasis in Matt. 12:46-50 which also followed a time when the Lord had been teaching the people. Listen to what we have in that passage:

46 While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him.

47 Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee.

48 But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?

49 And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren!

50 For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother (Matt. 12:46-50).

The Lord was not showing disrespect for His mother, but while we are inclined to look upon human matters as those which are chiefly important, the Lord is always directing us to the spiritual truths. Being the mother of the Lord Jesus will not get you to heaven, just as being a prophet or a priest or a pastor will not get you to heaven. Mary was obviously saved and walking with God long before the angel Gabriel appeared to her. And she was honored first of all because she was a child of God, and secondly because she was ordained of God to be the mother of our Lord according to the flesh.

Brown in the JFB commentary pointed out that the Greek word translated

"highly favored" appears on one other time in the NT, and that is in Eph. 1:6 where it is translated "accepted." So this means that all believers are "highly favored" because they have been chosen for salvation, as the Apostle Paul was showing in his Doxology in Ephesians 1.

Verse 29 tells us that Mary was not so much troubled by the appearance of Gabriel as she was by what he said. She was not only "troubled," but *greatly troubled!* Zacharias' initial reaction had been the same. But the Lord knew that Zacharias was not believing the message of the angel. Mary, instead, was wondering how the Lord could honor her any more than He already had honored her by saving her. To a child of God, salvation is always the greatest blessing. For her to "cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be," means that she was thinking first of one reason, and then of another, and then of another. She couldn't imagine what the angel would address her in those words.

And so, in a sense, in verse 30 we see that Gabriel repeated his greeting. Both "highly favored" in verse 28 and "favor" in verse 30 are words that have to do with *grace*. In fact, "favor" in verse 30 is the word *grace*.

It is important that we notice these words because they do away with any idea that Mary had earned this privilege. It does not mean that she was chosen to be the mother of our Lord because she was such a good and godly person – although she was all of that. Instead, those two words mean that God's choice of Mary to be the mother of our Lord was an act of sovereign grace of God's part. It was like Mary's salvation. She had not been chosen because the Lord knew that she would believe. Nor was she chosen because He knew that she deserved to be saved. Mary, like all of the rest of us, was chosen in pure grace, sovereign grace, and that is the same basis upon which she was ordained by God to be the mother of our Lord. And the angel Gabriel inserted those words so that would all know that God's choice of Mary was a gracious choice.

But now we come to the names used by the angel in speaking to her about the son which she would bear. There are four:

- 1) Jesus (v. 31).
- 2) The Son of the Highest (v. 32).
- 3) King (although the word itself is not used) -- (v. 32).
- 4) The Son of God (v. 35).

Let us spend the rest of our time today considering these names and titles. This will be good preparation for us as we come to the Lord's Table.

I. "JESUS" (Luke 1:31).

Jesus is the same name as Joshua in the OT. Next Sunday, the Lord willing, we will consider Gabriel's appearance to Joseph. And it is in that passage in Matthew 1 that we are told why the Lord was named "Jesus." It was, "for He shall save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). The Lord's mission to earth was a mission of salvation. He came to save His people from the penalty of their sins. "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). But He also came to deliver us from sin's power. Salvation means deliverance from the bondage of sin. Salvation means that we are free not to sin. But salvation will ultimately mean that we are delivered from sin itself, and we will no longer even be capable of sinning.

If you were here last Sunday night, you will remember that I spent a considerable amount of time on the three tenses of salvation, past, present, and future. Or justification, sanctification, and glorification. And Jesus indicates that He came to guarantee all three for "His people."

Jesus, or Joshua, means *Jehovah is salvation*, or *Jehovah is Savior*. It indicates that salvation is not a work which is partly done by God, and partly done by man, and that if we do our part then God will do His part, but if we don't do our part, then He won't do His! That is not what the Name Jesus indicates. It indicates that the work of salvation is all of God, from start to finish. He is the Savior; we are the saved. And notice that it is a work on behalf of a particular group of people, called "His people." They are a special, chosen people. And when the Lord died He did not die just to provide salvation for them if they wanted it; He died to guarantee the salvation of all of His people. Perhaps some of the other Names and Titles given to our Lord will help us understand the grandeur and glory of Jesus, our Savior.

Next the angel, Gabriel, called our Lord:

II. "THE SON OF THE HIGHEST" (Luke 1:32).

In this expression, "the Highest," is a reference to God. This speaks of God's "majesty and sovereignty" (Hendriksen, p. 86). There is no angel nor man whose glory is greater than that of our God. He is supreme. He rules over all. He is the Lord of life, and He is the Lord of death. He works all things out according to the counsel of His own will. His promises never fail. His purposes will all be fulfilled. He is the Lord of heaven and earth. He is greater than all. And our God is just as sovereign in

salvation as He is in everything else. We do a great injustice to God when we say that He has provided salvation, but now is waiting to find out who is going to accept His offer of salvation. He knows who is going to be saved because He has chosen those who will be saved. In the early days of the church when the Jewish believers were disturbed over the salvation of the Gentiles, the Apostle James made a statement which ought to be written on all of our hearts. These were his words:

Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world (Acts 15:18).

It is ridiculous to say that God is sovereign in all things *except in salvation*. If He were not sovereign in salvation, you and I would not be here today. And I say that because, being sinners by nature, and in bondage to our sins, we would not, and we could not, have trusted Christ if we had been so inclined. No He chose us. And He sent Christ to die for us. And He sought us. And He brought us to the fold of salvation. All we have done is to resist Him, but we have learned that we are not greater than He is, and so when He called us to Himself, we came. He saved us. He keeps us. And He is going to present everyone one of us faultless before His presence with exceeding joy. Hallelujah, what a God we have!

But you say, we are supposed to be talking about Jesus Christ. And the angel said that He would be "the Son of the Highest," but that is not like being "the Highest." Oh, isn't it? What did it mean to the Jews when the Lord claimed that God was His Father? The Apostle John tells us in John 5:18. Listen to what he said there:

Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.

You see, if God is the Highest, or the most high God, and Jesus Christ is His Son, then Jesus Christ is the highest One also. The sovereignty of the Lord may have been veiled during much of His life here on earth, but didn't He raise the dead, and still the storms, and heal all kinds of sinners. And isn't His sovereignty seen in your salvation and mine when in spite of all of our resistance and objections, He works in our hearts so that we willingly and joyfully come to Him, and by the gift of faith we believe in Him for our salvation.

The Lord Jesus Christ was showing Himself to be "the Son of the Highest" when He said, "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18).

But let us move on to the fourth expression in our text:

III. KING (Luke 1:32).

This word *King* is not used here, but instead we read, "And the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David." You see, according to the flesh, our Lord was born "of the seed of David according to the flesh" (Rom. 1:3). This means that He is the Heir to the Throne of David, but it also means that He is the Messiah. The angel Gabriel spoke of our Lord's reign in a limited way here, saying that it would be "over the house of Jacob for ever." Caesar was reigning over the house of Jacob in our Lord's day, but Caesar is gone; the Lord Jesus remains. And He is not only going to reign over the house of Jacob, but Rev. 11:15 tells us that the day is coming when

The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.

And we add to that one of the charges which the Apostle Paul gave to Timothy:

13 I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession;

14 That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ:

15 Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords;

16 Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen (1 Tim. 6:13-16).

The Lord came the first time to save; when He comes to the earth again it will be to reign forever and ever. But in His first coming, although He was the Son of Mary, He was also "the Son of the Highest."

At this point Mary was clearly overwhelmed. And so she asked a very reasonable question in verse 34, and yet it revealed that she did not really understand the full meaning of what the angel had been saying. Her union with a human husband could never have brought about the birth of the Person the angel Gabriel had been speaking about. And so he added what is verse 35 in our Bibles. And here Mary was told that her Child will be called,

IV. "THE SON OF GOD" (Luke 1:35).

Here is the statement of the virgin birth of Christ. Jesus Christ would be the only one to be born without a human father. The Child that the angel was talking about would be conceived by the Holy Spirit. He would come upon her and "overshadow" her like the presence of God came down upon the Tabernacle in the desert – that awesome presence of God!

The result of this would be that the human baby she would give birth to would nevertheless be "called the Son of God." That is, He would be "the Son of God." He would become Man without ceasing in any way to be God! He would be both God and Man, perfect God and perfect Man, the only One Who could possibly provide salvation for sinners.

What Mary may have experienced as a result of this, we do not know. The shades are drawn to keep out all intruders. Mary never spoke about it, and it is not for us to know. But we know that it did happen. The virgin Mary had a Child. He was named "Jesus," but He continued to be what He had been before He was born as a baby. He was and always will be, "the Son of God.

Concl: If God has given you the grace and the faith to believe all of this, as He has to me, then our hearts, and probably our knees, should bow before Him in adoration and praise, that such grace should be granted to us. We believe this with all of our hearts. We can't understand how it could all be, but, thank God, it is not for us to understand. What we are to do is to believe this record which God has given us concerning His Son, and to realize that all that our Lord experienced in becoming a Man was absolutely necessary for our salvation. How great is our need for such a Savior to be provided for us!

If you don't know the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, I trust that you have been given an ear to hear what the Lord has said to us in His Word, and that today you will turn to Christ to save you from your sins.

JOSEPH AND HIS DREAM

Matthew 1:18-25

Intro: In the past God has had many ways in which He has spoken to man. Sometimes it has been through a vision. Sometimes it has been through a dream. Often God spoke to the prophets, and then they proclaimed the message of God to the people to whom they were sent. Sometimes He actually spoke in an audible voice. We know that whenever God appeared visibly, such as in those appearances of the angel of the Lord, it was Christ Who appeared because the Apostle John has told us that

No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son Who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him (John 1:18).

But the writer of the book of Hebrews has put the period, so to speak, on what God has said in the words we find at the very beginning of that epistle. These are the words to which I am referring:

1 God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets,

2 Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds (Heb. 1:1-2).

And so this passage tells us that after Christ came, God no longer spoke in those "divers manners," or *different ways*. Those different ways came to an end after Christ came. Now God speaks to us through His Word. That is the reason we have the Bible. It is there that God speaks to us. We firmly believe that the Bible is the completed Word of God and that in the Bible we have the full message of God to man.

Today God does not speak through dreams, but he was still speaking through dreams when Joseph, the man our text speaks of, was living on the earth. And so we read in Matthew 1:20 that "the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream." I have often wished that our guidance was as clear today as it was in Bible times when the Lord spoke audibly from heaven, or when a vision was given, or when a direct revelation was given in some way to a prophet, who then would give the message to the people. We know that God still leads, and that He providentially works in our lives, but mainly we are dependent upon the Word of God and the ministry of the Holy Spirit in seeking and finding the will of God. Be careful of any guidance you seem to get from any other source than the Word of God, and especially any guidance that is in conflict with the teaching that God has given us in His Word. When we say that we walk by faith, we do not mean that it is like a person groping his way in the darkness. It is that

we walk in the light of the Word of God that God leads us.

It is obvious that this incident related to the birth of our Lord followed the two events which we have already considered in this series:

- 1) The angel's message to Zacharias concerning the birth of his son, John, who is known as John the Baptist.
- 2) The angel's message to the virgin Mary that she would be the mother of a Son Whose Name would be Jesus.

The account begins by telling us of:

I. JOSEPH'S PROBLEM (Matt. 1:18-19).

This verse does not give us what Joseph understood at this time, but it is Matthew's understanding of what had happened. And this, of course, was written after the birth of our Lord. What Joseph understood at this time was simply that Mary was "with child."

Mary was espoused to Joseph, similar to what we call engagement, but much stronger than our engagement. A legal representative (or simply a friend) of the man would meet with the parents of the prospective bride, and an agreement was entered into indicating a definite intention to marry. Breaking this agreement was more like what we would call a divorce even though the man and the woman were not yet married.

We are told here that "Joseph was a just man," meaning that he was saved, that he was a believer in the OT promises of a Redeemer and of salvation. In Luke 1 we learned that Mary was "highly favored" by the Lord. And when she accepted the message of the angel Gabriel, we are told in Luke 1:38 that Mary said, "Behold the handmaid of the LORD; be it unto me according to thy word." So it is very clear that we have here a betrothal that would be pleasing to the Lord. A person, man or woman, who knows the Lord, is only free to marry a spouse who also knows the Lord. So everything was in order here regarding the will of God.

But we can understand why Joseph was both astounded and grieved to discover what he thought was Mary's unfaithfulness to him. It is certain that some communication passed between them. It may not have been that he had actually talked to Mary, but somehow he learned from a reliable source that she was expecting a baby. Just what the situation was between Joseph and Mary at this time we do not know. But what we do know is that Joseph felt that he could not go ahead with the marriage. However,

because of his great love for her, he was "not willing to make her a public example," but "was minded to put her away privily."

In the Mosaic Law, Deut. 22 beginning with verse 23 we are told that if a man and a woman who is betrothed to marry another man, are guilty of adultery, both were to be stoned. But in the case where the guilt was on the man's part, only the man was to be stoned. Joseph evidently felt that the second case would apply to Mary, but still he felt that he could not go on with the marriage. And so, not willing to disgrace her anymore than he felt she already was disgrace, he was going to break the betrothal in private. We can imagine what an agonizing time this was for Joseph.

As we come to verse 20 we have:

II. THE APPEARANCE AND MESSAGE OF THE ANGEL (Matt. 1:20-21).

We are not told who this angel was, but I think that we are safe in assuming that it was the same angel who appeared to Mary, the angel Gabriel. He was the one who appeared to Zacharias, and he also appeared to Mary, and it would appear that it would be his responsibility from the Lord to appear to Joseph although with him it was in a dream.

Twice in chapter 2 of Matthew we are told that "the angel of the Lord" appeared to Joseph, and both times it was in a dream. Cf. Matt. 2:12-13 and 19-20.

But our text here in Matthew 1 continues with the statement, "While he," that is, Joseph, "thought on these things, behold the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream."

Brown, in his commentary on Matthew's Gospel, said,

Who would not feel for him after receiving such intelligence, and before receiving any light from above? As he brooded over the matter alone, in the stillness of the night, his domestic prospects darkened and his happiness blasted for life, his mind slowly making itself up to the painful step, yet planning how to do it in the way least offensive -- at the last extremity the Lord Himself interposes.

And then he was given the most amazing message. He did not need to be afraid to take Mary to be his wife because the child that she was going to

have had been conceived in her by the Holy Spirit. This was exactly the same message that the angel Gabriel had given to Mary earlier when she asked how she could have a child when she was not married. It was to be the cause of humiliation to Mary, and presumably to Joseph, since both of them would have been under suspicion of not waiting until they were married.

In addressing Joseph as "thou son of David," the angel was reminding Joseph that he was in the Messianic line, the family from which the Messiah would come. And we know that Mary was in that same family line. *But never before in the history of the human race had such a thing taken place, that a virgin would have a child who had been conceived by the Holy Spirit.*

It may have been that the angel's words in verse 21 convinced Joseph of what had actually happened.

Note the certainty expressed in verse 21:

- 1) "She shall bring forth a son."
- 2) "Thou shall call His Name JESUS."
- 3) "He shall save His people from their sins."

As was the case with John the Baptist, those were days when it was impossible to determine whether a woman would give birth to a son or a daughter. But the angel Gabriel told Zacharias that Elisabeth would have a son, that his name was to be John, and that he would "make ready a people prepared for the Lord." How much of all of this Joseph had been informed of, we do not know. But since in this series we are considering the Names and Titles of our Lord, let us turn our attention now to the Name, JESUS.

Joseph had only one option in naming the child that would be born. It was his prerogative to name the Son, even though our Lord was not actually his child. So to have named the Lord any other name would have been utter disobedience on Joseph's part.

One writer (Barnes) said that "JESUS" is actually synonymous with salvation. This was the purpose behind the birth of this Child. He was coming to "save His people from their sins."

The "He" in "He shall save," is emphatic. It indicates that the work of salvation would be His, and His alone. And the verb "save" must be taken

in its most comprehensive sense. He would save His people, those whom the Father had given to Him, His elect, "from their sins." He delivers His people from the judgment of God they are under because of their sins. And this statement should make us realize how hopeless we are without the divine Savior, and what a terrible death He died when He took upon Himself the full penalty for our sins.

But He delivers us from sins power. This means from temptation, not that we cannot be tempted, but the power of temptation has been removed for those who know the Lord. He keeps us in times of trial and testing. He protects us from all that the enemy of our souls would do to defeat us. Sins power over us is broken by our Savior.

But salvation would not be complete if it did not mean that some day we will be delivered from even the possibility of sinning. The child of God hates sin. A person cannot be saved and still continue on in the same way of living afterwards. And he looks forward to heaven when sin and the shame that goes with it will be a thing of the past. What a marvelous statement verse 21 is, and the more we think about it, the more truth we see in it.

But we must move to verses 22 and 23 where we have:

III. THE QUOTATION FROM ISAIAH'S PROPHECY (Matt. 1:22-23).

What this quotation meant to Joseph, we cannot say for sure. It does not seem that it was a part of the angel's message, but that it was added by Matthew to show the relation of the angel's message to the Word of God through Isaiah. I don't think that it is beyond the realm of possibility that Joseph knew this prophecy, and it may have come into his mind as he listened to the message of the angel of the Lord. But whatever may be the relationship of this prophecy to Joseph, Matthew wanted his readers to know that this very thing had been predicted by Isaiah some 700 years before.

And even in the first prophecy in the OT concerning a Redeemer we are told that the Redeemer would be *the seed of a woman* in a book where genealogies are traced through the men, not the women. We can see now that even that prophecy in Gen. 3:15 was a prediction of the virgin birth of the Messiah, but that feature was not made clear until the days of Isaiah.

But in this prophecy we learn that the Lord would be called, "Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us."

We have no record that our Lord was ever called "Emmanuel" while He was here on earth. Perhaps someday that Name will be used for Him. But the point here is that the birth of the virgin's Son would only be explained by *the meaning of that Name!* "God with us."

In the first place, this signifies that Jesus Christ was God in human flesh. He was made in our likeness, but He continued to be God. His humanity did not take away from His Deity in any way. He was the God-Man, the divine and the human in one Person.

But also contained in this Name is the idea that God is on our side. God has come in human flesh to take our part, to meet our need. It is really explained for us in Isa. 41:10:

Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.

We have the same idea in Isa. 43:1-2:

1 But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.

2 When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.

The birth of the Lord Jesus Christ was the ultimate testimony that God is with us, on our side, has come to meet our need, and to accompany us all through life.

In Barnes commentary he gives this poem which I am going to read to you. I don't know if he wrote it, or someone else did, but it conveys the idea, at least in part, of the Name, Emmanuel:

"Till God in human flesh I see,
My thoughts no comfort find,
The holy, just, and sacred Three
Are terror to my mind.

"But if IMMANUEL'S face appears,

My hope, my joy, begins.
His grace removes my slavish fears.
His blood removes my sins."
(from Barnes' Notes)

The last words of our Savior recorded in the Gospel of Matthew, are, "And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world," or *until the consummation of the age*.

Be sure to drink of the sweetness of these two names, "Jesus" and "Emmanuel." They not only spell complete salvation for us, but they assure us that throughout life we can always count on the Lord being on our side, meeting our needs, granting us victory, and keeping us in peace throughout all of the trials of our journey here below.

The Puritans used to say, "If God is our Friend, it makes no difference who our enemies are." The Apostle Paul put it this way, "If God be for us, who can be against us" (Rom. 8:31b).

Our final two verses tell us of:

IV. THE OBEDIENCE OF JOSEPH (Matt. 1:24-25).

He married Mary, but did not live with her as a husband until after the Lord Jesus was born. And when our Lord was born, Joseph "called His Name JESUS."

God ministered to Joseph through the angel, giving him faith to believe the unbelievable. And it seems from the quotation of Isaiah's prophecy that we have an illustration of what the Apostle Paul said about faith in Rom. 10:17, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God."

Concl: What a remarkable story this is! How amazing are the works of the Lord. And what assurance there is in the birth of JESUS, as the Apostle Paul said in Rom. 4:20-21 about the time when Abraham and Sarah faced an impossible situation of their own:

20 He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief;
but was strong in faith, giving glory to God;

21 And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he
was able also to perform.

What encouragement should the birth of Christ be to us that God is always

faithful to His Word. You and I could never have devised a way of salvation that would be like our salvation is. And if we could have, we would not have the power to do what was necessary, to bring Christ down from heaven. But our God has done it all, providing full and free and eternal salvation for His people.

But let me remind you that those who are the chosen of God can be identified because they express true faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, not a faith that comes and goes, but a faith, although it may be stronger at some times than at others, yet never fails completely, but grows strong and stronger until that perfect day when all shadows will forever flee away, and we shall stand before God, perfected in the righteousness of our Savior Who bears the sacred Names, JESUS and IMMANUEL.

THE PROPHECY OF ZACHARIAS

Luke 1:57-80

Intro: Every birth of a child is to the parents an exciting event. And yet there is always some apprehension connected with a child's birth lest something might go wrong. But I doubt if any of us can appreciate the joy which Zacharias and Elisabeth had when their child was born because they were past the age when they could normally have children. And that is what got Zacharias in trouble with the Lord because His response to the angel, Gabriel, when he told Zacharias that he would have a son by Elisabeth his wife, was:

Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years (Luke 1:18).

For that reason he was unable to speak during the whole time of Elisabeth's pregnancy as a judgment from the Lord.

Nevertheless, Elisabeth did give birth to a son. She did well, and the baby was born safely and healthy. So Zacharias had more than one reason to be thankful to the Lord.

On the eighth day of their baby's life, in obedience to Lev. 12:2, some came, probably priests, to circumcise the baby, and to name him. It is never said in Scripture that the first child should be given his father's name, but evidently that custom had been practiced for some time when Zacharias and Elisabeth's baby was born. And so it was assumed by all that their son would be named, Zacharias. But Elisabeth objected, and said that his name would be John. And this bothered those who had come to do the circumcising, and so they said to Elisabeth, "There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name" (Luke 1:61). Elisabeth might have been overruled by the people who were there, and so she made signs to him to ask him what he wanted their baby to be named. Well, Zacharias still could not speak, and so he indicated to them that he wanted a writing tablet. On this tablet he wrote, "His name is John"! The order of the words in the Greek text is, *John is his name*, thus making it very emphatic that their baby had already been named, and that he and Elisabeth would not consider any other name. And then several amazing things happened.

In the first place we are told that all of the people who were there at the time, "marveled." This means that they were amazed, but, at the same time, they did not object. They seemed to sense that there was something very unusual about this child – and, of course, there was!

The second unusual thing that happened was that for the first time in nine months Zacharias was able to speak. His unbelief brought on his dumbness, and his obedience caused it to be restored. Both were caused by the Lord. And it is significant that Zacharias' first words after all of that time were words of praise for God. And I am sure that his words of praise were not primarily that he could speak again, but that God in His faithfulness, wisdom, and power, had fulfilled His promise in giving the baby John. And not just in the birth of their son as such, but because of what the angel had revealed to him about the ministry that this son would have.

But then look at verse 65. Word of this quickly spread throughout all of the surrounding area, probably because Zacharias as a priest was well known, and most people were aware that he had been unable to speak. So when they heard what had happened in naming the baby, the people took this news into their hearts. And everywhere people were saying, "What manner of child shall this be!"

At this point Luke tells us that Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and he began to prophesy. The verb, *to prophesy*, has a twofold meaning. Its primary meaning is *to preach*; but it also means *to predict the future*. In verses 68 through 75 Zacharias was preaching; in verse 76 through 79 Zacharias was predicting the ministry that his son would have after he grew up.

When Zacharias was preaching, he was praising God that He was fulfilling promises that had been given to the people of Israel by "His holy prophets" (see v. 70). He was doing what preachers today are supposed to do. He was bringing out the meaning of God's promises in His Word. And he was doing this under the blessing of the Holy Spirit. And notice that in this first part Zacharias was speaking to the people

But when he spoke to baby John, telling him what His ministry would be, He was speaking as only a few of the men of God in the past have done, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. That type of prophesying came to an end with the completion of the NT. There are men today who claim to have the gift of being about to foretell the future, but they can only predict what has been recorded in the Word of God. When they go beyond the Bible, they only *think* that they know what is going to happen, but they are deceived, and anyone who believes them is deceived as well. To put it plainly, such men are *false prophets*.

But let look at our text. And first we have:

I. ZACHARIAS PREACHING TO THE PEOPLE (Luke 1:68-75).

Notice that he addressed God as "the Lord God of Israel." And in the same verse, 68, he called them, "His people," that is, *the people of the Lord God*.

Notice "for us" in verse 69. And "we" and "us" in verse 71. In verse 72 we have "our fathers." And "our father Abraham" in verse 73. And in verse 74 we have "us" and "we" and "our" – all addressed to the Jews who were before him. And in verse 75 we have "all the days of our life."

I point all of these pronouns to you so that you will see that Zacharias really believed that the long-delayed promise of God for the salvation of His people, the spiritual descendants of Abraham, had come. His words seem to indicate that he believed in salvation as we know it today, but there was also the hope expressed in his message that God was sending One Who would deliver the nation from their enemies. This, too, was promised by the prophets of the OT, but that part of the promises of God (we know now) awaits the time when the Lord Jesus will return to the earth. We haven't seen that yet, but that was one of the great expectations of the Jewish people when they realized that the Lord Jesus Christ was their Messiah. You may remember that even just before the ascension of our Lord, His disciples asked Him, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). That was still their hope as it had been throughout the Lord's ministry. And some day Israel will be delivered from her enemies, but that awaits the second coming of the Lord Jesus to the earth.

It seems that Zacharias combined the idea of salvation from sin as well as deliverance from their enemies, but his emphasis was definitely upon the latter.

But now let us look at the second part of his message, and we can call this:

II. ZACHARIAS' PREDICTIONS CONCERNING HIS SON ((Luke 1:76-79).

Now there is no question but that Zacharias' emphasis in what he said to his baby boy meant that baby John, when he became a man, would be involved in proclaiming the message of salvation from sin to the people of Israel. His ministry was to be a ministry preparing the way for the Lord, the Messiah. It was to be a ministry of giving the "knowledge of salva-

tion" to the Lord's people as to how their sins could be forgiven, and that salvation would be, not because they were Jews, nor because they had earned salvation as a reward, but it would be "through the tender mercy of our God, to bring them out of darkness and death "into the way of peace." Here is the doctrine of reconciliation. The Jewish people needed to be delivered from their enemies, but of far greater importance was their need to be delivered from divine judgment. And the One Who was coming would eventually bring both to them, the latter being first.

And we all know now how wonderfully John the Baptist fulfilled the ministry to which he had been appointed by God. Who can forget those simple yet powerful message, "Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). John's message in those words show that his understanding of the Gospel was that it was not just for Jewish people, but it would include Gentiles all over the world. In this he was far ahead of his generation in understanding the ministry of Christ.

It is very apparent to those who read the Gospels, that there were very few in Scripture who surpassed John the Baptist in his devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world. He had his surprises like we all have in the work of the Lord, and the greatest was his imprisonment. But he left behind him an outstanding example of one who was completely the Lord's. Who can forget those great words, "He (speaking of Christ) must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). And it seems that no one had the ministry that John the Baptist had, probably not even our Lord. The foundation of his ministry is laid in the words spoke by Gabriel to Zacharias, and then in these prophetic words of Zacharias as he preached to the Jews, and as he spoke prophetically to his baby son, John.

But I want to get now to my emphasis in this brief series surrounding the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. What names and/or titles of our Lord do we have in this prophecy of Zacharias? I want to call your attention to four that we have in our text for today. Let us call this:

III. THE NAMES AND TITLES ZACHARIAS USED FOR OUR LORD.

The first is in verse 69:

A. "An Horn of salvation" (Luke 1:69).

Thayer, in his Greek dictionary, says that since animals, and particularly

bulls, defended themselves with their horns, and this is what gave them courage and strength against their enemies, this was used by God to describe the Messiah as a mighty and valiant and triumphant Savior.

This is brought out by David in Psalm 18 where we read in verses 1 and 2:

1 I will love thee, O LORD, my strength.

2 The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.

Our Lord Jesus has shown His strength and courage not only in doing what was necessary for our salvation, but even in overcoming all of the resistance that we put up before we were saved.

The word "horn" is used only here in all of the NT. But this once is very important because it points out that our Lord is sufficient for all that is necessary for our salvation. And remember what we have learned about the three tenses of salvation – past, present, future – justification, sanctification, glorification.

We come to a second name in verse 76.

B. "The Highest" (Luke 1:76).

When the angel Gabriel spoke to Mary, he told her that she would conceive and bring forth a Son Whose Name would be Jesus, and that He would be called "the Son of the Highest." Here in our text we are told now that Zacharias' son John would become "the prophet of the Highest"! So we see that this term, "the Highest," belongs not only to the God the Father, but also to God the Son.

This is the equivalent of "the most High God" to whom we were introduced in the story of Melchizedek in Genesis 14. In verses 18 and 19 of that chapter we read these words:

18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God.

19 And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth (Gen. 14:18-19).

And then farther down in the chapter when the King of Sodom was trying to work out a compromise with Abram, this is what we read in verses 21-23:

21 And the king of Sodom said unto Abram, Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself.

22 And Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lift up mine hand unto the LORD, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth.

23 That I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich.

In the book of Hebrews we read that our Lord Jesus is a Priest forever after the order of Melchisedec. So the Name, the Most High God, or as we have it here in Luke 1:76, "the Highest," means that there is no god who is greater. He is the Supreme God, and to the earth He is its Creator and Possessor and Sustainer. This world belongs to the Godhead. They created it, They sustain it. It, and everything in it, belongs to Them. And so They, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are in supreme and sovereign authority over all creatures, and every nation. When I hear our politicians talking like they are the ones who hold the destiny of the world in their hands, I would like to tell them that this world belongs to the Lord , and His will, not theirs, is going to prevail.

Long ago, a Psalmist, probably King David, wrote:

The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations (Psa. 33:11).

And many years afterward, his son, King Solomon, expressed the same truth in these words:

There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand (Prov. 19:21).

Puny man is nothing in comparison with God. And the mightiest nation on the face of the earth is just a drop in a bucket to the Lord. *And if we persist in ignoring the Lord, and doing what is expedient to us, we may find out, as other nations have, how quickly the Lord can bring us to nothing. Our politicians are concerned about what is pleasing to their constituents so they can preserve their careers. What they need to be concerned about is what is pleasing to the Lord or they won't have any careers.*

Our Savior is the sovereign God. No one is greater than He. And this is what the Apostle Paul had in mind when he described our Lord in Rom. 9:5 as the One "Who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen."

But as much as I would like to stay on this point, I must go on to the third Name, and it is much akin to "the Highest." It is found in the same verse as "the Highest." Our Savior is:

C. "The Lord" (Luke 1:76).

He is Deity. He is the Master. And He is working all things out according to the counsel of His own will. He is in charge of every creature on the face of the earth. But let us who know the Lord Jesus as our Savior, recognize that we are His, not only by birth, but by the new birth. He is our Lord. And I trust that you and I who belong to the Lord are realizing in these days how important it is that we live to do the will of God, and that we are careful to search His Word to know what His will is. Americans have been deceived into thinking that what we approve is right, and what we disapprove of is wrong. Let me remind all of us today that right and wrong are determined by God, and we in our country have legalized a number of things that are abominable in the sight of God. And we won't get away with defying His will because God is LORD, and Jesus Christ is LORD, too. How wonderful it is to know the Lord, and to do His will, but there is nothing more treacherous than continually defying the will of God. God is very patient, but there will come a day when His patience is exhausted. Read Revelation and see the judgments that are ahead for this world.

But I have one more Name, or Title, which Zacharias used for our Lord. And it is:

D. "The Dayspring from on high" (Luke 1:78).

The meaning of this expression is given to us in verse 79. The dayspring is the dawning of the day. It is when the light of the sun begins to dispel the darkness of the night. It speaks of the life which follows death.

This is the equivalent of saying that the Lord Jesus is "the Light of the world." Or, as we shall see in our Sunday School lesson for next Sunday, we have these ominous combined with wonderful words concerning our Lord Jesus Christ:

1 For, behold, the day cometh, that shall bum as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.

2 But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall (Mal. 4:1-2).

How very apparent it is today that our world, our nation, is enveloped in

darkness, the darkness of ignorance concerning God, and the darkness of God's hatred of sin. But the Lord Jesus as "the Dayspring" can bring us light if and when we realize our depraved and sinful condition, and turn to Him Who is the Light of the world. He alone possesses this Title. And He is the One Who said:

I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life (John 8:12).

There is no way for any person to come out of the darkness and despair of sin unless he turns to Christ for salvation. And we have overwhelming evidence nationally and internationally that we as a nation are groping our way through a darkness that deepens all of the time. When we come to Christ, He guides "our feet into the way of peace" (Luke 1:79).

Concl: I don't know what God's will is for us as a nation. Often a nation gets so corrupt that total judgment falls on it. We feel that it can't happen to us, but let me tell you that it can. Our only hope is that God will be gracious to us, and send us a mighty awakening so that people will confess their sins, and turn in repentance and faith to Christ for salvation. We have had warnings in hurricanes and floods and diseases and wars and crime which is out-of-hand. The whole world is in a turmoil, and people's lives are in turmoil to. And it is all because we have left God and His Word out of our lives. The Bible points the way to hope for us, and that hope is focused and centered in Christ. May those of us who know Him, be careful that we are walking in fellowship with Him every day. And should it be that even one is here today who does not know the Lord, seek Him now while He may be found. Call upon Him while He is near. He is the "horn of our salvation," the Supreme God, our "Lord," and "the Light of the world." As we approach the Christmas season, how important it is that we make sure that we know why He came. John the Baptist was raised up to tell his generation, and we who know the Lord are to be witnesses to our generation.

THE SHEPHERDS AND THE ANGEL'S MESSAGE

Luke 2:8-20

Intro: This morning I am concluding the short series of messages on the birth of Christ that I have been giving to you each Sunday morning since Thanksgiving. And my emphasis has been on the names and titles given to our Lord in five specific events. Four out of the five have involved angels.

The first was the time when the angel Gabriel appeared to Zacharias to tell him that his wife Elisabeth would conceive and bear a son whose name was to be John. Fourteen times their son is called, "John the Baptist" in Matthew (6 times), Mark (4 times), and Luke (4 times), but not at all in John. He got this title because baptism was a major part of his ministry. He even baptized the Lord Jesus Christ as the Lord entered into His public ministry. Anyway, we considered the angel Gabriel's message to Zacharias in the first message.

In the second message we considered Gabriel's message to Mary, telling her that before she was married should would conceive and bear a son, whose Name would be Jesus. Her child would be conceived by the Holy Spirit, and would be called "the Son of God."

Next, on the third Sunday, we took up the passage in Matthew 1 where Mary's pregnancy was explained to Joseph. He had thought that he would break his engagement with her because he could only assume that she had been unfaithful to him. But after the angel explained what was happening (we assume that this was also the angel Gabriel), Joseph believed the angel, married Mary, but did not treat her as his wife until after the baby Jesus was born.

On the fourth Sunday, which was last Sunday, we took up the prophecy of Zacharias after his son, John, was born. Those of you who were here will agree with me when I say that his prophecy contained some marvelous titles which he gave by the Holy Spirit to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Today we come to the familiar story of the angel who appeared to the shepherds who were taking care of their sheep, and the angel's purpose was to tell them about the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. This particular angel is not named, but I think that we are safe in assuming that it was again the angel Gabriel who earlier had spoken to Zacharias and to Mary, and, we assume, to Joseph.

My purpose this morning is to focus attention on verses 8 through 20 of Luke 1, but as we begin I want to point out one very interesting fact about the circumstances under which our Lord was born into this world. And in this we must recognize:

I. THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD (Luke 2:1-7).

Most of you will remember that God the Holy Spirit had revealed to the OT prophet Micah that Christ, the Messiah, would be born in Bethlehem. We find that prediction in Micah 5:2. Let me read it for you.

But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting (Micah 5:2).

But the problem was that Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth which was some 75 or 80 miles north of Bethlehem. Bethlehem was and is located about five miles south of Jerusalem. And so what did God do to stand behind His promise that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem?

He did this: *He moved upon the heart of Caesar Augustus, the ruler of the Roman Empire, at the time of its greatest expansion, to decide at that very time to have the people throughout the Empire to return to the place of their birth to register for the purpose of being taxed.*

It was almost 1,000 years before our Lord was born that the Holy Spirit directed Solomon to write these words:

The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will (Prov. 21:1).

Our Lord was born when the Roman Empire was at its zenith. And to fulfill a 700 year old prophecy, the Lord moved upon the heart of Caesar Augustus to give a decree that would bring Joseph and Mary to the city of David, and all of the time Caesar thought he was doing this "on his own."

Now this ought to be for our encouragement. If the Lord moved upon the heart of the greatest monarch on earth in those days, and He is unchanging, then He is able to do the same today. We are only conscious of how that decree affected Joseph and Mary, and ultimately the birth of our Lord, but it undoubtedly true that what God did then was the working out of His plans in countless other people. So God is working out His plans in Washington, D. C. in these days. It is not in the hands of the Republicans, nor of the Democrats, nor of the President, nor of the President's friends. God is working all things out according to His own will. So it will do a

lot more good to be praying to our God in the matchless Name of our Lord Jesus Christ than it will to be writing our senators, or anyone else. Let us place our hope in the Lord. He is working all things out according to His own will. He is not concerned about poles, nor about the will of the people. He is concerned about His own will, His own glory, and the fulfillment of His own purposes.

And so the Lord was born in Bethlehem in the lowliest of circumstances. Both she and Joseph were of the royal family of Israel, but no place of honor was given to them. They had to make their bed among the animals. And notice that Mary had no help in the birth of her Baby because "she... wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger." She was the mother of the Baby Jesus, and she immediately had to care for all of His needs. Talk about sanitation! There was none there where the Lord Jesus was born *except that which the Father in heaven sovereignly provided for His Son.*

Now let us go on with the Scripture passage which is before us.

II. THE SHEPHERDS (Luke 2:8).

— Suddenly the scene changes, and we are transported outside of the city into what is called, "the field." And we find a group of shepherds "keeping watch over their flock by night." They were guarding their flock just as the Father in heaven was guarding His flock. How fitting it was that shepherds, lowly shepherds, all unnoticed by the world, would be the first to view the infant Jesus Who would declare Himself to be "the good Shepherd. We will learn more about these shepherds as we come to the message of the angels who appeared to them.

III. THE ANGEL AND HIS MESSAGE (Luke 2:9-12).

Accustomed to the total quiet of the night, it must have been even that much more startling to the shepherds for the angel of the Lord to appear before them, and to begin speaking. It is very apparent that this angel was sent specifically and directly to these particular shepherds.

— The words "came upon them" shows how suddenly all of this began to take place. And the suddenness of the angel's appearance was intensified by the fact that "the glory of the Lord shone round about them." This speaks of the very presence of the Father. No one has ever been able to see the Father, but many have looked upon His glory, for example, as it

appeared to the children of Israel in the wilderness. The light around the shepherds on that night was greater than a million halogen lights lighting up the sky. It must have been almost blinding to the shepherds. This was the most important moment that those shepherds had ever experienced! It was their appointment with God Himself. We can understand why it caused the shepherds to be afraid.

Gabriel's first words to Zacharias had been, "Fear not." His first words to the virgin Mary had been, "Fear not." His first words to Joseph had been, "Joseph, thou son of David, fear not." And now he speaks the same words to the shepherds: "Fear not." But in each case, instead of producing fear, the angel of the Lord carried the news that the believers in Israel had been waiting for for hundreds of years. The prophetic clock which seemed to have stopped, was ticking again and bringing to the people of God the news which they had waited for, and which they were expecting to see fulfilled.

The message of the angel was described as "good tidings of great joy." The words "I bring...good tidings" is the translation of the verb which means *to preach the Gospel*. It is the verb which is associated in the NT to *the good news of salvation*. And that good news would produce in the hearts of those shepherd, "great joy." Wherever the good news about Jesus Christ has gone, it has produced "great joy" in the hearts of those who have received it. In fact, there is no joy comparable to the joy of salvation!

But the angel did not say that everybody would be happy about it. We know that the scribes and Pharisees and the Sadducees hated it—at least most of them did. The angel said, "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy." And then he added, not "which shall be to all people," but which shall be added to all the people."

We have been learning in our study of Ephesians in the Tuesday Bible Class that the doctrine of election was to the Apostle Paul, not a subject for controversy, and certainly not a subject for debate, *but a subject for praise!* And once you see it in the Word of God, as many of you have said, *you begin to see it everywhere in Scripture! And here it is in the message of the angel.* The Gospel has not been a message of "great joy to all people," unless you translate that the word "all" so often means, *all kinds of*. But the definite article "the" means *a particular group of people, those who have been appointed by God for salvation*. Herod certainly did not rejoice in it. When the wise men did not return to tell him where they

had found the baby Jesus, we read this in Matt. 2:16-18,

16 Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men.

17 Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying,

18 In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.

Concerning the wise men, on the other hand, we are told that "when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy"(Matt. 2:10)..

You see, when we speak of *the elect* we are talking about people like Zacharias and Elisabeth, Joseph and Mary, the shepherds and the wise men. And that is confirmed in the case of the shepherds because the angel went on to say in Luke 2:11, "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."

In spite of the fact that the religion of the Jews had deteriorated terribly by the time the Lord Jesus Christ was born, God had His elect people who were waiting for "the consolation of Israel," as we are told Simeon was in Luke 2:25.

So, if you were to ask, "Why did the angel of the Lord appear to the shepherds we are reading about in this passage?", the answer is, "Because they were shepherds chosen of God to inherit by faith the salvation that was to come through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, as most of you know, my purpose in going through the passages I have chosen for the five Sundays we have been considering events which led up to and followed the birth of Jesus Christ - my purpose has been to pay particular attention to the Names and Titles that were given to our Lord. In this passage we have three, and they are all here in verse 11:

- 1) A Savior.
- 2) Christ.
- 3) The Lord.

In some ways this will be a review of what we have already learned, but perhaps we will see some added light on the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

A. "A Savior" (Luke 2:11).

This is the great work for which the Lord Jesus Christ came. The fathers of Israel were given the promise of a Savior. The prophets of the OT gave many details concerning the Savior. But none could save except God, the Son. He alone was without sin, and therefore He alone had not sins for which He must die. But He died to "save His people from their sins," as the angel told Joseph.

Adam Clarke, in his commentary, describes this word as meaning " to make safe, to deliver, preserve, to make alive." And he quoted another writer who added, "The word properly denotes such a Saviour as perfectly frees us from all evil and danger, and is the author of perpetual salvation."

This word sets before us the primary reason for the coming of the Son of God into the world. Man, because of his sin, is under divine judgment, and unable to do anything about it. There is nothing worse than to fall under the judgment of God, and yet man is so defiled and ruined and trapped by his sin, that he will never, apart from the grace of God, turn to God for help. And so it is in the hands of God as to who will be saved. We all know that. None of us who knows the Lord would dare to take credit for our own salvation. We say that the Lord showed us our need. He showed us our utter helplessness. But He also showed us the Savior, and He gave us the faith to put our trust in the Savior. He is the One Who has delivered us from divine judgment. And He is the One Who keeps us after He saves us, preserving us and protecting us from every form of evil. And, coming to the earth as a Man, and by His death, He "became the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him" (Heb. 5:9).

As our Savior, He did not do part of the work of salvation, and then leave the rest for us to do. He is the Savior. I trust that you can say today, "He is my Savior." He saves us from the terrible judgment awaiting all who do not look to Christ, and to Him alone, for their salvation. As people used to say so often, "Jesus saves, and He keeps, and He satisfies." He saves us and He keeps us saves, and He brings into our lives a satisfaction, a joy, a peace which no one else can possibly give us.

But He is also:

B. "Christ" (Luke 2:11).

This means the same is *Messiah*. Christ is from the Greek, and Messiah is

from the Hebrew. Unger called this "the official title of our Lord. He is *the Anointed One*. Who anointed Him? God did. God anointed Him to do what He has done. He came to do the will of the Father. He is the One spoken of prophetically all through the OT as the coming Redeemer. He alone could satisfactorily carry on the work of salvation.

We hear various ideas from different people as to how people can get right with God. But the important thing is to find out what God thinks about all of those other ways. And it can truthfully be said that there is only one way to be sure that our sins are forgiven, and that is through the One Whom the Father appointed to do that work. It is only of Jesus Christ that the Father has ever said, "This is my beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased." Therefore, don't look for salvation in any other place. It is not in a church. It is not in good works. It is only in the One Whom God has anointed to do the work of a Savior. Cf. John 14:6 and Acts 4:12. Jesus Christ is the complete Savior, and the only Savior.

But we also have here in our text that Jesus Christ is:

C. "The Lord" (Luke 2:11).

As I have pointed out before, this means that the Lord continued to be the Lord in every sense of the word after He became Man just as He had been Lord before He became a Man. And with this title comes the idea that He is a *Sovereign Lord*. He is a Lord Who is all-powerful. He is omnipotent! He is greater than any of His creatures; He is greater than all of His creatures combined. He is the One with supreme authority. In Psalm 2:2-5 we read these words:

- 2 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying,
- 3 Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.
- 4 He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.
- 5 Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure.

And it is because Jesus is the Lord that He will save all whom He intends to save. When He calls, we come. His work at Calvary's Cross was not in vain. He purchased us at the Cross, and resist though we may, ultimately the Lord wins our hearts, and we joyfully come to Him.

The affairs of the world are not in the hands of the Clintons, nor the House of Representatives, nor the Senate, nor the Supreme Court, nor the Blairs, nor the Husseins, nor the leaders of any of the other nations of the earth. Only Jesus Christ is Lord. He is Lord right now. And some day He will make that very clear to every person who has ever lived.

In Isa. 40, verses 15 and 17 we read these words:

15 Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing.

17 All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity.

King David of Israel prayed long ago this prayer found at the end of Psalm 19:

19 Arise, O LORD; let not man prevail: let the heathen be judged in thy sight.

20 Put them in fear, O LORD: that the nations may know themselves to be but men. Selah (Psa. 9:19-20).

How that is needed today! Instead, we deify man, and ignore the Lord. How thankful to God you and I should be if we understand that Jesus is the Savior, and the Christ, and the Lord!

Concl: What is the conclusion to this wonderful and true story?

Suddenly there were many angels who appeared praising God, and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

We are not told at this point that the shepherds were afraid and fearful. But when the angels had departed, they determined that they would go to Bethlehem to see what had come to pass, which the Lord had made known to them. They went, and they found Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus Who was lying in a manger.

After that they could not keep quiet about what they had seen and heard. People marveled at what they said, and even dear Mary, who was also still learning, "kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart." Then the shepherds went back to their sheep, "glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them."

This was not fantasy, but true history. Make sure that you know that Jesus is the Savior, Christ, and the Lord. If you do, worship Him.

THE WORD MADE FLESH

John 1:1-3,14

Intro: We are at that time of the year when the world gives attention to the birth of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. However, year by year there is such a commercialization of Christmas, that very, very few pay any attention at all to the birth of the One Whose advent we unconsciously recognize every time we write down the date. Time for us is marked by so many years B.C., *before Christ*, or A.D., *anno Domini*, meaning, *in the year of our Lord*. In just a few days we will be *in the year of our Lord 2000*. And yet I doubt very much if any of us have heard the new millennium described that way. A few year ago when an attempt was made by some to “put Christ back in Christmas,” I remember that the criticism was voiced by several that “some people want to put religion into everything.”

And so, just as many people try to define a Christian without saying anything about Christ, so people can talk about Christmas all of the time without giving a thought to Jesus Christ. And yet you can't write the word “Christmas” without writing “Christ.” However, more attention is paid today to that fictitious character Santa Claus than to the greatest Person Who ever walked upon this earth, our Lord Jesus Christ. Countless millions of people will spend eternity wishing that they had given more attention to the message of Christ.

The Bible makes it very clear that our Lord Jesus Christ and His birth, His life and works, His death, His resurrection and ascension are the focal point of all history. No one who ever lived can ever begin to approach Him in importance. All of the OT anticipated His coming, and, after you get through the Gospels, the rest of the NT explains the meaning of His coming, and anticipates His return. But in the Gospels, all four of them, we have the divine record of the coming of Christ to the earth, and much of what He did while He was here. I say “much” because in the last verse of John's Gospel he had this to say,

And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen (John 21:25).

It is interesting to observe the different ways in which the writers of the Gospels approached the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Matthew began with a genealogy, and then proceeded to tell what happened to Joseph when he discovered that Mary, to whom he was engaged to be married, was expecting a child. He felt that he must break the engagement, but he loved her so much that he did not want to disgrace her, and so he planned to do it as quietly as possible. But it was then that the angel of the Lord appeared to him, and this is what Matthew recorded about the angel's message:

20 But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

21 And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins (Matt. 1:20-21).

And then Matthew added this important explanation from Isaiah 7:14:

22 Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying,

23 Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us (Matt. 1:22-23).

In the last two verses of the chapter we are told what Joseph's response was:

24 Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife:

25 And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS (Matt. 1:24-25).

Mark did not include any account of the birth of our Lord. Instead he simply stated at the beginning, in chapter 1, verse 1, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." And then he went right on to speak of the ministry of John the Baptist, who, in turn, introduced the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Luke gave us the fullest account of the birth of our Lord, telling first of how the birth of John the Baptist was made known to John's father, Zacharias, and then he went on to tell how the angel of the Lord appeared to the virgin Mary to tell her that she would give birth to a Son, Whose Name was to be JESUS.

But I have announced my text from the Gospel of **John**. And he gives what is the briefest account of the birth of our Lord. He simply said,

“**And the Word was made flesh**” (John 1:14a). There you have only six words. In the Greek there are only five words. And we could translate those words, *And the Word became flesh*. That is how John announced the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. But the Spirit of God, under whose direction the Apostle John was writing, had a wonderful way of packing a lot of truth into just a few words.

Let me read to you what David Brown in the JFB commentary said about John’s Gospel. Here is his comment:

As the Fourth Gospel was not written until the other three had become the household words and daily bread of the Church of Christ, thus preparing it, as babes are by milk, for the strong meat of this final Gospel, so, even in this Gospel, the great keynote of it, that "The Word was made Flesh," is not sounded until, by 13 introductory verses, the reader has been raised to the altitude and attuned to the air of so stupendous a truth.

We are going to leave those words for the time being although I will come back to them before I complete my message today. First, I want to pay attention to the Name which the Apostle John gave to our Lord. He called Him:

I. “THE WORD.”

I think that most of you have learned that the Apostle John is the only one in Scripture who used this Name, or Title, for our Lord Jesus Christ.

You have it three times in the first verse of John’s Gospel.

The next time we come to it is in the first verse of 1 John. I will read that verse and verse 2 with it:

- 1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life;
- 2 (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) (1 John 1:1-2).

This title for our Lord is also found in 1 John 5:7, but it is not found in many of the better MSS. Nevertheless, I will read it to you:

For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit: and these three are one (1 John 5:7).

— The last time John used it is in Rev. 19:13 where John was describing our Lord when He will come in His glory. I will read verses 11 and 12 so you can see the connection:

This is truly a strange Name, or Title, for our Lord to assume with His many other Names, but as His other Names have special significance, so it would be a mistake for us to think that this Name does not have special significance along with the others. *Let me suggest two important points which have to do with our Lord having this Name, "the Word of God."*

- A. This first is that this Name immediately links our Lord with the Book which God has given us, which is called "the Word of God."

We had one of those verses which speaks of the Bible as the Word of God when we were going through 1 Peter; where Peter described the new birth with these words:

— 23 Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever (1 Peter 1:23).

But over and over again we read in our Bibles about "the word of God," or "the word of the Lord." And we are all familiar with the way the prophets announced their messages with, "Thus saith the Lord," or, "Thus saith the Lord God.." It would be a blessing to read all of these, but I doubt if it could be done in the time I have with you today. But let me give you just a few which I am sure most of you will recognize.

First, Eph 6:17: "And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." And then 1 Thess. 2:13:

For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

— And we surely should include Heb. 4:12:

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and

spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

God has given us His Word, and we know that this is a book which tells us about Christ from start to finish. When the Lord was with those two disciples on the road to Emmaus after His resurrection, perhaps you will remember that Luke made this statement about what the Lord did with them. We find it in Luke 24:27:

And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

Christ is the Key Who unlocks the Scriptures. He is the living Word of God; the Scriptures are the written Word of God. And the living Word and the written Word are forever joined together.

But there is a second meaning to this expression that we all need to understand. And it has to do with the meaning of the Greek word that is used in most of the passages that I have given you.

B. The word λόγος has to do with a message.

We communicate with each other with words, don't we? You and I have probably spoken more words than we realize just in talking to each other during the time we have been together today.

Jesus Christ is the Word of God, the living Word, because He is in Himself God's message to us. As Hebrews 1:1 and 2 tell us,

1 God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spoke in time past unto the fathers by the prophets,

2 Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;

3 Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high (Heb. 1:1-3).

Our Lord not only spoke the Word, but He was the Word, and He still is the Word. All that God has to say to us is embodied in His Son. And

there is more in that statement which I have just made than I understand, and more than it is possible for anyone to understand.

Now the question is, and this is my next point:

II. WHAT IS GOD'S MESSAGE TO US THROUGH CHRIST?

The answer to this question has a past message which takes us into that period before creation. Second, we move on to His incarnation, His birth. And third, we look ahead to His coming in glory.

A. Christ before creation (John 1:1).

And this idea is conveyed to us with the verb “was.” And it is further established by the statement in verse 3 regarding creation. So this is a “beginning” which precedes the “beginning” of Genesis 1:1.

As we look back before creation we find that this One Who is called “the Word” “was” always there. There was no time when Christ began to be. He is eternal. There was a beginning to this universe in which we live, and a beginning to all life upon the earth – plant, animal, and human. But the Lord Jesus Christ existed eternally before anything was created.

B. “The Word was with God” (John 1:1).

And here the key is in the preposition “with.” The preposition is the Greek word *πρός*. and it is full of meaning as we think of the relationship between Christ and God.

First it means that They are two distinct Persons. But it means more than that. That word *πρός* means, according to A. T. Robertson, “perfect fellowship with God,” and it “presents a plane of equality and intimacy, face to face with each other” (Vol. V, p. 4). So, while God and Christ are distinct Persons, they are equal, on the same plane with each other, in a perfect fellowship which has never been broken. It speaks of Christ's total and eternal acceptance with God. God has always delighted in Christ, and only in Christ.

So we should not be surprised at the third statement which the Apostle John made.

C. “And the Word was God.”

Here the Apostle John, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared the full Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is where we must begin in learning about Christ. This is the truth teaching, the true doctrine, concerning our Lord Jesus Christ. He is eternal. He was equal with God, always in perfect fellowship with God, face to face with God, and He always has been Deity.

And verse 2 emphasizes the middle of these three statements, and we have *πρός* again.

And verse 3 tells us that our Lord was working with the Father in everything that was created. Our Lord is both God and Creator.

Now let us move on quickly to verse 14. And here we have the Apostle John’s account of:

II. THE INCARNATION OF CHRIST (John 1:14).

Notice that the Apostle John used the same Name for our Lord that he had used in verse 1. So this means that all that was declared of our Lord in verse 1 *remained unchanged as we come to the birth of Christ.*

Men who have been interested in Christ have wondered what changes took place in our Lord when He “became flesh.” And the Apostle John has given us our answer by saying that it was “the Word” who “was made flesh.” The verb “was” indicates that He became something that He had not been before. He became a real human being. He was born of the virgin Mary. He came into this world as a little baby, and then He grew and developed like any other child. But through His conception and His birth, and throughout His life on earth, ***He continued to be “the Word”!*** While we will never in this life be able to understand fully how God and man could be joined in one Person, yet that is exactly what happened. And this accounts for the sinless character and life of our blessed Lord.

So as a baby nursing at the breast of the virgin Mary, our Lord was still “the Word of God.” He was a real human baby, but He remained perfect Deity.

His life did not change this. His death did not change this. His resurrection was proof of this, and since His ascension He has been seated at the right hand of the Father, enjoying the same perfect fellowship that He and the Father enjoyed before the world was!

But now let us complete the story by looking ahead to:

III. OUR LORD'S COMING IN GLORY (Rev. 19:11-13).

I read this passage to you earlier in my message, but let me read it to you again.

11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.

12 His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.

13 And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God (Rev. 19:11-13).

This is an event that is still future, but it means that when the Lord comes to the earth again, He will still carry that marvelous Name, "the Word.." He, even after becoming sin for you and for me, He will still have that same Name, "the Word." – still eternal, still equal with God and precious to God, still the only One Who was qualified to carry out the work of salvation completely.

Concl: Now from all that we have learned, do you see how important it is that we listen to what the Lord had to say as "the Word of God"? Nothing He ever said was unimportant. In fact, all that He said, and all that the Scriptures tell us about Him, continues to be extremely important. He is God's message to us.

There are many things I could say as I close, but let me emphasize just one of the many things our Lord said as His message to us from the Father. It is found in John 14:6. Make sure that you understand it, and make sure that you are trusting in Christ, the living Word, as the only way to God. Our Lord said this:

I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man [or woman, or young person, or boy, or girl] cometh unto the Father, but by Me.

“ON EARTH PEACE”

Luke 2:8-14

— **Intro:** Of all the accounts in Scripture of incidents that were related to the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, none is more well-known than this account in the first twenty verses of Luke 2. And in this section of Scripture, the best-known from memory is in verses 8 through 14. Perhaps this is because so many of us as children were given verses 8 through 14 to commit to memory. I imagine that most of you who attended Sunday School as a child were asked to memorize these verses. No one would dispute the fact that they are truly wonderful verses. This is not to minimize the importance of anything that is found in any of the other three Gospels, nor of the importance of any other part of Luke 1 and 2. But it is to recognize the familiarity of this passage.

Chapter 2 of Luke is the only passage which actually records the birth of the Lord Jesus. (Read verses 6 and 7.) That alone makes it very significant.

— It is also an unusual passage because it tells us about shepherds and about angels. We would have thought that the birth of Jesus Christ would have been declared to the leaders of the Empire, or surely to the leaders of Israel, but instead angels announced it to shepherds who are not even named. But we should not be surprised about this because it is entirely in keeping with the humiliation of our Lord Who came to die to save sinners from their sins. And there is also the added emphasis that those shepherds were among the elect of God because the angel who appeared to them said,

10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring **you** good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

11 For **unto you** is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

12 And this shall be a sign **unto you;** Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger (Luke 2:10-12).

So these shepherds had a vital personal interest in the birth of Jesus, the Son of God, the long-awaited Messiah.

— And the fact that the elect are very prominent in this passage is to be seen in many versions of the Greek text where the definite article “the” comes before the word “people.” It was to those chosen of God for salvation that

this news would be “good tidings of great joy.”

But our text tells us that after the angel of the Lord had finished delivering his message to the shepherds, that suddenly, and completely unexpected, “a multitude of the heavenly host” appeared “praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men (Luke 2:14).

In these days when there seems to be a fascination with angels among many people, it is to be regretted that people are not paying attention to what the Bible has to say about angels, because in the Bible you have the truth regarding angels.

I doubt if most people even know the meaning of the word, *angel*. *An angel is a messenger. There are good angels, and there are bad angels.* Or we can say that there are *the elect angels*, and there are *fallen angels*, or demons. The Devil is the chief of the fallen angels. Gabriel and Michael are two of the elect angels. In the OT “the angel of the Lord” is usually a preincarnate appearance of our Lord, but in Luke 9 it probably refers to the angel Gabriel who appeared to Mary to tell her that she would be the mother of Jesus according to the flesh, and it would seem that he was the angel who also appeared to set Joseph’s mind at rest when he discovered that Mary was expecting a child before they were married.

Today I want to direct your attention especially to verse 14, and so let me point out some details about this verse that are important for all of us to recognize.

You all can see that there are three parts to this fourteenth verse:

- 1) “Glory to God in the highest,
- 2) “And on earth peace,
- 3) “Good will toward men.”

You will also notice that there is an “and” before the second statement, but there is not an “and” before the third statement. *This has led expositors to say that there are two main statements in this verse:*

- 1) “Glory to God in the highest,
- 2) “And on earth peace.”

And that the third statement actually belongs to the second statement, and helps to explain the meaning of that second statement. That is, that peace on the earth is God’s good will toward men.

Some have suggested that the last statement should read, “toward men of good will,” but the strongest authority is for the verse as it stands in the KJV. Besides, how would you explain “men of good will.” It would make the “will” man’s will, when the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ as a baby was God’s will, not man’s. And, as God’s will, it would reasonably follow from the opening statement of the verse, “Glory to God in the highest,” that is, *in the highest heaven!*

Now let me point out another very important feature of this verse, especially in the first two statements, but supported by the third statement. You will notice that the first statement has to do with God in heaven: “Glory to God in the highest”; the second statement has to do with men on the earth: “And on earth peace, good will to men.”

Therefore, we must conclude from the message that God gave to the angels to declare to the shepherds, and for us to understand, that the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to earth to do what He was appointed by the Father to do, was pre-eminently for the glory of God. That detail about the birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, far surpasses every other consideration. And you see this repeatedly in what the Lord had to say about His coming. He came to do the Father’s will. He was sent by the Father to do what He did. He was amazed when Judas came with the soldiers to arrest Him, and Peter took out his sword and cut off the ear of the high priest’s servant in an effort to defend Him. But this is what He said to Peter:

Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it? (John 18:11).

The Lord’s main object throughout His earthly life and ministry, even when He was only twelve years old, was to do the will of His Father in heaven.

And so we can write “to God be the glory” over:

- 1) The birth of Christ.
- 2) The works, the miracles, of Christ.
- 3) The teachings of Christ.
- 4) The death of Christ.
- 5) The resurrection of Christ.
- 6) The ascension of Christ.
- 7) His present ministry in heaven,
- 8) And ultimately His coming again.

As that angelic choir sang in the presence of those shepherds it was all, “Glory to God in the highest.”

But there was a second point, and it was also important, but definitely secondary in comparison with the first: It was this: “And on earth peace, good will to men.”

Now let me ask you a question: “Does it amaze you that out of all of the blessings that you and I have received through Christ our Savior, “peace” should be the blessing that the angels mentioned as Blessing #1?”

Christ was born to be a Savior, Christ the Lord. He in a special way was born to die, to die for sinners. And by His death, atoning for the sins of all whom the Father had given to Him,

I. HE OBTAINED PEACE FOR US WITH GOD.

The Apostle Paul stated this very clearly in his letter to the church at Rome, and most of you will remember his words:

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 5:1).

“On earth peace” – “Peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” And we can have this peace right now, here “on earth.” That is what the angels were saying. “On earth peace.”

What does this mean? Well, Paul went on in that same fifth chapter of Romans to tell us what it means to have peace with God. Let me read to you what he wrote:

8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

9 Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.

10 For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.

11 And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement [the reconciliation] (Rom. 5:8-11).

To have peace with God means that we have been cleared of all the

charges which were against us because of our sins. It means that we are no longer enemies of God, but we have been reconciled to God by Christ's death on the Cross. Now we are saved by His life, and in place of the old enmity, not "we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by Whom we have NOW," here on earth, "received the reconciliation."

Now we love God. Now we, too, want to live to please Him and to glorify Him for this wonderful salvation He has given us. We are the objects, the recipients, of His good will. We love Him because He first loved us. We have chosen Him but only because He first chose us. We have sought Him, only because He first sought us. And now He delights in us because we are His in Christ. "We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

This is why Isaiah could speak of the Messiah, Christ, our Lord, as "the Prince of peace" in Isaiah 9:6:

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, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, **The Prince of Peace.**

"Prince" means that He is the Captain, the Ruler, the Lord, the Keeper of our "peace with God." And so for those who are trusting Christ, our "peace with God" is not something that we can have today, but lose tomorrow. Because the Lord Jesus Christ is our Peace, it will be ours forever!

Two verses I love, and I often use them when I sign my name, are Hebrews 13:20-21 where God is called "the God of peace." Listen as I read those verses to you because they emphasize, too, how and why we can have peace with God right now here "upon earth":

20 Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant,

21 Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen (Heb. 13:20-21).

I think I am right in saying that most of the people in the world don't have the slightest idea as to why Jesus Christ was born of the virgin Mary about two thousand years ago in a stable in Bethlehem. It was so that all who

would believe in Him would have peace with God because He died to put away their sins.

But before I close, I want to point out to you that there is another aspect of this peace that we need to know about when we read those words, “on earth peace.” It is what is Scripture is called,

II. “THE PEACE OF GOD.”

Paul spoke about this peace in Philippians 4:6-7. Listen to what the Holy Spirit directed him to write:

6 Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

7 And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:6-7).

What does it mean to have peace in this world, in the kind of a world in which we live? Does it mean that when you become a Christian, all of your troubles come to an end? We know that is not the case. Besides, Paul called it a peace “which passeth all understanding.” That means that we can have peace when there is no earthly reason why we should have peace. We have our troubles just like anyone else. We have our sorrows, and our disappointments. We have hopes that somehow are never realized. Then what does it mean to have peace?

The Greek word for peace is εἰρήνη. Thayer, in his Greek Lexicon, defines its use in this verse in this way: “The tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ, and so fearing nothing from God and content with its earthly lot, of whatsoever sort that is” (p.182).

We can say that having the peace of God in our hearts is believing Romans 8:28. Let me read it to you as it appears in the NASB:

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 (Rom. 8:28).

Since God is God, we know that He is sovereign over all things, and that, as Psalm 37:23, 24 tell us, our very steps are ordered by Him. No nation or group of nations, no individual, no circumstance, no trial, is greater than our God is. And He even uses what we call “bad things” for His glory and

for our good. Remember our text, “on earth peace.”

My mind often goes back to my days at Dallas Seminary, and especially to the ministry of Dr. Chafer. He not only taught us good theology, but he taught us to love the hymns of the church. He explained hymns to us so that we would sing with understanding. One of the hymns I learned from him is #590 in our Trinity Hymnal, and I would like for you to turn to that hymn with me now.

Dr. Chafer pointed out that the first part of every verse was a question, except for the last verse. Then he showed us that the second part of every verse was the answer. And so he would have us sing the first part of the verse softly and soberly, and then sing the last part with more volume, and triumphantly. Then he would have us pull out all of the stops like we were playing an organ, and sing the last verse with great joy!

This verse helps us to understand that whatever our circumstances, in the Lord we can have perfect peace. (Read the hymn.)

One thing that Thayer mentioned in defining “peace” in his Lexicon, was this: That this peace that we have been talking about is unique to the Christian faith. The world doesn’t have anything that even comes close to it, nor do the other religions of the world have anything like the peace of God, or peace with God. But we have it, we have it now with God, and we have His peace as we face every day that we live.

Isaiah said long ago, but it is still true:

3 Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.

4 Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength (Isa. 26:3-4).

Concl: Do you have “peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:?”

Are you trusting Him, and only Him, to make things right between you and God. Don’t believe those who try to make you think there is no such thing as sin. It was because of sin that Jesus Christ was born into this world. It was necessary for Him to come because no one else could settle the problem of our sins with God. But He did. And the only way we can have peace with God is through putting our faith in Christ and what He did when He died for sin and sinners on the Cross. Make sure

that He is your Savior before you leave this place today.

But for those of us who have peace with God, are we enjoying that inner peace with God? Are we worrying about anything instead of trusting the Lord to meet our needs? Take that problem, that burden, that need, perhaps that sin, and cast all of your care upon Him. Trust Him to give you a contented heart by flooding your soul with His peace. He alone is our sufficiency, and so we need to live each day trusting Him. His peace is truly a peace “which passeth all understanding.”

What a message we have for a world of people who have lost their way, and who are getting farther and farther away every day they live. The message of our Lord Jesus Christ means:

Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace, good will toward men.