

Luke Chapter 1 v 5 - 38

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Preacher: Peter Robinson

[0 : 00] Famous verses about the Incarnation. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

And then skipping a verse. Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. For the law was given through Moses. Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God but the one and only Son, who is himself God, and is the closest relationship with the Father. He has made him known. Well, we're here to worship God today, aren't we?

That's why we're gathering. But God, in a sense, he's unknowable, isn't he? But Jesus, he's the most clear revelation of God to us.

That's the amazing thing about the Incarnation. In Christ, we see God. In him the fullness of Godhead dwells. So we're going to think about these things as we sing number 209.

[1 : 05] O come all ye faithful. Let us pray.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we come before you to worship you this morning.

And we thank you for that privilege that we are a people called out for your possession to worship you. And we think of who you are, the creator of the universe, the one who is all-powerful, the one who dwells in unapproachable light, the one who is holy, holy, holy, the one who is completely set apart, completely other.

And in one sense, as we've already said, unknowable. But yet you've revealed yourself to us in Christ. And we thank you for the gift of Christ coming down to earth so that we can know you and that we can receive the gift of salvation.

We confess that so often we are called towards the things of you. We forget who you are and we don't worship you for who you are. But we pray today that you'd show us again a glimpse of who you are.

[2 : 26] We thank you that not only do we know you through your word, but we know you by your spirit that you are dwelling among us. We pray that we'd sense some of your realness now as we worship you.

We pray that you'd give us hearts that are open, eyes to see. We pray that you'd teach us this morning. We pray all these things for your glory, for your namesake. In Jesus' name, amen.

Well, I'm going to share something with the children now. Well, the reading today is from the book of Luke, chapter 1.

And that will be page 1025 in your Bibles. So Luke, chapter 1, starting in verse 5. We're continuing the theme of birth stories in the Bible which point to Jesus.

So today we'll be looking at the birth of John the Baptist. Again, Luke, chapter 1, starting in verse 5.

[3 : 41] And we'll read till verse 38. So Luke 1, 5. Once when Zachariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense.

And when the time of the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshippers were praying outside. Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right-hand side of the altar of incense.

When Zachariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. But the angel said to him, Do not be afraid, Zachariah. Your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John.

He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the

Holy Spirit even before he is born.

He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go on before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

[5 : 27] Zachariah asked the angel, How can I be sure of this? I am an old man, and my wife is well on in years. The angel said to him, I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news.

And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because he did not believe my words, which will come true to their appointed time. Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zachariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple.

When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them, but remained unable to speak.

When his time of service was completed, he returned home. After this, his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. The Lord has done this for me, she said.

In these days he has shown me his favor and taken away my disgrace among people. In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David.

[6 : 40] The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, Greetings, you who are highly favored. The Lord is with you. Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.

But the angel said to her, Do not be afraid, Mary. You have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son and you are to call him Jesus.

He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever. His kingdom will never end. How will this be, Mary asked the angel, since I am a virgin? The angel answered, The Holy Spirit will come on you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God.

Even Elizabeth, your relative, is going to have a child in her old age and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month for no word from God will ever fail.

[7 : 44] I am the Lord's servant, Mary answered. May your word to me be fulfilled. Then the angel left her. Good.

Thank you, Joel, for leading us so helpfully. And yeah, ten years since those Chilean miners. It seems time flies. Well, thank you for those of you who came yesterday morning to sing in Baxtergate.

It was an exciting morning. If those of you who weren't there don't know about it, you can ask folk about it. It wasn't quite the usual, but again, the opportunity to share the gospel was great.

And do pray for tonight. I know that many of you invited friends and family and neighbors and invitations as well. Do pray for those who come along that the Lord would make himself known to them and speak to them and that they would indeed come along.

Do you know why you have the name that you've been given? Boys and girls, just for a moment. Do you know why you're called the name you've been given? Somebody told you? Have you asked your mom and dads why you've been given that name?

[8 : 57] If you don't know, ask your mom or ask your dad when you get home. Choosing children's names. It's a quandary, isn't it? And perhaps when you were choosing your children's names, you had all sorts of influences, all sorts of things that were in the back of your mind.

Perhaps you wanted to name them after their grandparents or favorite auntie or somebody else in the family. Maybe you wanted them to have a name that would stand out.

Perhaps you've got a very popular surname like Robinson and you wanted them to stand out a bit so you thought, well, I'll give them a different name. Perhaps not quite an unusual name.

A name a little bit out of the ordinary. Perhaps it was just a name that you heard and you thought, I like the sound of that name. I'm going to call my son or my daughter. That, when did you decide to give them that name?

Was it after they were born? Our eldest son was just baby Robinson for three days in hospital before we decided what name we were going to call him. Perhaps you decided upon a name when you knew that you were expecting.

[10:08] Or perhaps as a couple, even before you got married, you talked about these things and they're the sort of names that you had in mind. Perhaps even before you met your husband, you've already got in mind the name that you're going to call your children.

I'm pretty sure that Zachariah and Elizabeth had a baby name list, particularly when they were first married. I'm sure that as they looked forward to, along with their friends and the relations, they looked forward to the time when they would have many children.

They looked forward with the names that they were going to decide upon. However, they never got to use those names. They never got to use those favorite names, those family names, those names that they hoped that they could have used.

In fact, by the time that their son is born, John, they are given up, I imagine, all thought of ever being able to have any children at all. We're told there they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive.

And in fact, as well, they were both very old. Old's a fluid sort of word, isn't it, nowadays? If you're a child or a young person, anybody over 20 is pretty ancient.

[11:23] 20, that's so old when you're young. But then I know a few people here in their 80s who would say, I'm not looking forward to getting old. It's all a matter of perspective.

However, we are told that Zachariah and Elizabeth were very old, which I think in their day probably meant they were in their late 60s. So that may not be how you'd like to describe yourself at the moment.

But even by today's standards, in their late 60s, they were never going to be able to have children normally, naturally. If they hadn't had children before, there was no way they were going to have children now.

But they hadn't counted on what God had planned for them. He was going to give them a child when they had given up any hope of ever having a child many years before.

And we're told how it happened here in verses 8 and following. Zachariah, one of the priestly line, sons of and descendants of Aaron, was sent to Jerusalem to do his time, as it were.

[12:30] Each one of the priests had their opportunity and time. And Zachariah was chosen to go in and burn in, sent something that he would only get the chance to do once a lifetime.

And when he's in there, an angel appears to him. God sends him a message through his messenger, the angel. Tells him his long-forgotten dream and prayer of a child is about to be realized, about to be fulfilled.

And he's also told what name he is to give this child. There in verse 13, Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son and you are to call him John.

He's struck dumb because he doesn't believe God's word. And he leaves the temple and returns home. In fact, he remains dumb.

And I think from what we read, probably deaf as well. Right up until, throughout the pregnancy, right up through the birth as well, until the day of John's circumcision, when he would be given his name.

[13:34] A bit like we would at a baptism of a child. On the eighth day, we're told they were going to circumcise him and they were going to name him after his father, Zachariah.

But his mother spoke up and said, No, he's to be called John. And so they said, There's nobody in your family called John. And so they made signs, we're told, to Zachariah.

And he asked for a writing tablet and to everyone's astonishment, he wrote, His name is John.

Immediately, his mouth was opened, his tongue set free. He began to speak, praising God.

And we're given this wonderful song of praise that Zachariah has, no doubt bottled up, for nine or more months. And he begins to praise and worship God.

John was the last in our line of miracle babies that God gave to carry out his gracious work, his plan for the salvation of the world.

[14:35] And as Joel said earlier, over these past several Sunday mornings, we've been looking at some of those miraculous births. Isaac, born to Abraham and Sarah, they were very old in the real sense.

It's 90 and 100. Samson, the last judge who was flawed. And we saw something of his life. Samuel, the appointer of kings last week.

And today, John, the forerunner of the Messiah. Each one of these miracle births is part of God's preparation for the one truly miraculous child.

They point us each one to the arrival of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, born to a virgin, Mary.

He was God and man. God taking on human nature, living in the world.

[15:35] Earlier on, the very start of our service, Joel mentioned and read from John chapter 1, these very words. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

Jesus is the living revelation of God, the Word, the description of God. He makes known God in all of his truth. And John goes on to say, we have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Like John, Jesus was given his name before his conception. There we read of John being given his name by the angel to Zechariah, but that same angel, Gabriel, when he goes to Mary and to Joseph, in fact, tells them that they are to name their son, Jesus.

The name John means God is a gracious giver. And indeed, of course, for Zechariah and Elizabeth, the birth of John was a wonderfully gracious gift.

A son in their old age. And as Elizabeth puts it, he has taken away my disgrace among the people. She felt second rate because she hadn't been able to have a son.

[17:00] But she wasn't, not in God's sight. A gracious gift. But he was a gracious gift as well, not only to that family, but a gracious gift to God's people there in those days.

Because he was the one who came to bring to them the good news of God's salvation and Savior, Jesus. Jesus. We're told that later on, when he had fully grown, John went into the wilderness preaching, repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.

He was sent to prepare the way for Jesus. He was the warm-up act, we might say. His job was to get everybody excited, thinking, looking forward to the coming Messiah.

Later on, people began to think that he might be the Messiah, and he had to put them right. In Luke 3, the people were waiting expectantly, all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah.

But John answered them all, I baptize you with water, but one is more powerful than I will come. The straps of his sandals I'm not unworthy to untie. I'm not worthy to untie, rather.

[18:15] He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. John's name was given to him by God to highlight his work, that God is a gracious giver, but all the more so with our Lord Jesus Christ.

For when that angel not only told Mary, but told Joseph concerning the son who would be born to Mary, he tells him that his name is to be Jesus.

And he explains why his name should be Jesus. For he says this, you are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins.

Because he will save his people from their sins. Many of us have surnames which relate to the jobs and positions that our forefathers, our ancestors, had.

So if you have the surname Cooper, it means at some point in the past you had a relative who made barrels. If you have the name Fletcher, then that means that some day in the past you had a forefather who made arrows.

[19:29] Or if you had the name Cartwright, made wheels for carts and so on. Many of us are named because of the jobs that our forefathers or ancestors did.

And Jesus was given this name because of who he was and because of what he was going to do in the world. Jesus means the Lord saves.

The Lord saves. And above all, what we're meant to understand by what the angel said to Jesus by giving him this name and by what he says about him, we're to understand firstly and foremostly that this child who was born, this miraculous child to the Virgin Mary, this incredible child, this one and only child, that he is the Lord.

Remember, the Lord saves. He will save his people from their sins. The name the Lord was the highest title given to God in the Old Testament.

It was a title that God gave to himself. He spoke to Moses in Exodus chapter 6 and says him, I am the Lord. And often, if you read in your Old Testament, you'll see that the name Lord is written in capitals.

[20:49] Capital L, capital O, capital R, capital D. It's a name by which the Israelites related to God. It's a name that they worshipped. It was a name that they praised.

It was David who says in Psalm 23, the Lord is my shepherd. And this child who's born to Mary had to be called Jesus, the Lord saves because he was the Lord.

He is God. God. So when Gabriel speaks to Mary, tells her of this child who is to be born to her, he will be great, will be called the Son of the Most High, Son of God.

There were many other children in Jesus' day who had the name Jesus. It was the Greek translation of the word Joshua.

Joshua, that great hero of the Old Testament. They were called by that name as a reflection upon him, upon how people looked at him and thought of him as a great hero of God's people.

[22 : 05] But Jesus was given that name not simply because he was a great hero or a great leader of God's people as Joshua had been and brought them into the promised land. He was given that name to show that he was indeed the Lord.

You see, the birth or the conception of our Lord Jesus Christ in the womb of Mary was not the beginning of the Son of God. It was not the beginning of his life.

When you and I were conceived in our mother's womb at that moment we became living beings. We became people. We became human. We began our existence in this world.

But not so with Jesus Christ. He was already alive. He was God.

And just like God he has no beginning and no end. At his birth though something did start and begin. Something unique.

[23 : 07] something that had never happened before and will never happen again. For there the divine nature of the Son of God became one with a human nature. Two natures.

One person. In Jesus Christ. So Paul puts it wonderfully in that amazing hymn of praise in Philippians in chapter 2.

Jesus Christ who being in very nature, true nature, that's what it means, God. God did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage.

Rather he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant being made in human likeness. In Jesus Christ God has fully felt human life.

In Jesus Christ God has experienced all that we have experienced in our lives and more besides. He is truly man and God.

[24 : 11] There is only one thing that he has not experienced in his human nature and that is sin. Jesus never committed a single sin in thought or word or action.

But he knew what it was to be tempted. He knew what it was to feel that pull upon his mind and upon his heart and upon his life. That pull to sin.

But he resisted it. He didn't give into it. He remained free from sin's corruption and guilt. Hebrews in chapter 4 we're told he was tempted in every way just as we are yet he did not sin.

And it's only because he is both God and man and only because he did not sin that he could do what he was born to do.

Whether you realize it or not dear friends you and I were born with a purpose. You and I have a reason for living. A *raison d'etre*.

[25 : 19] A reason to be. And you may feel perhaps at times that you are lost. You may feel at times you don't seem to have much of a purpose. Life seems to drift along or you're just about surviving or holding on by the skin of your teeth.

And you think what on earth is the purpose of this life? Why am I here? I don't seem to be getting anywhere or doing anything or accomplishing anything. Let me assure you dear friends that you have a purpose.

The very first thing that God purposed for you is that you might be his child. And if you are his child then your life opens up for the most amazing and great purpose that any human being can have.

To live for the glory of God. To show forth the wonder of who he is. To tell others and by your life to show that he is a God who is mighty to keep, to strengthen, to help.

You may feel that being a worker in a factory or being a mum at home or being somebody who is at that point where life has or age rather has taken from you the ability to do all the things you once were able to do.

[26 : 36] Let me assure you that whatever you are doing and wherever you are God's purpose for you still remains to live for his glory. To show the wonder of who he is.

And that can never change. And it doesn't matter whether you are sending men into space, whether you are brushing the streets, whether you are changing that stinky nappy.

You are living for the glory of God. And our Lord Jesus Christ in coming into this world came both as God and man to be who he was meant to be, to fulfill the purpose that the Father had for him

and the purpose that the Father had for him was that he should save.

He will be called Jesus for he will save his people from their sins. There's many people who do what we think are quite amazing jobs of rescue, saving lives, firefighters and doctors and nurses and surgeons, a whippy lifeboat crew, all sorts of people whose very work involves the saving of life. These people are highly trained, they're qualified, they carry out this saving work only because they've had years of experience or training or equipping or whatever it may be. Not just anybody can do what they do.

[28 : 07] And Jesus is the only person who possesses the qualities and the abilities to save his people from their sins. God. As the sinless God man, there's no one like him.

No one comes close to him. He is utterly unique. There never was, never will be, never can be any other person like Jesus. And the whole of his life story shouts that out.

And the whole of history shouts that out. Why do we have faith in this Jesus Christ who we read about in the scriptures? Why do we entrust to him the whole of our lives and every moment, every day, and our death and eternity?

Why? Because we know that he is the Lord. We know that there is no one like him. We know that he is uniquely equipped to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves, to save us.

Because he is who he is, he alone can save people, save his people from their sins. Maybe we're asking this morning, why does he need to save his people from their sins?

[29 : 20] I mean, if you spoke to most people in the street, they would say, well, sin isn't dangerous. Sin isn't really dangerous, is it? I mean, fire is dangerous, and cancer is dangerous, and the sea is dangerous, isn't it?

Isn't sin just making a mistake, getting it wrong? wrong. No, sin is much, much worse than any of those things that we count as dangerous.

It is the most dangerous, most deadly threat to every living person on the face of the earth. Sin is doing what I want.

Sin is living life on my terms. Sin is pleasing myself, following my own path. It's that self-confident attitude that says, I know what's best for me.

I know what choices and decisions are the very best ones in my life. Not God, not anybody else. I'm the Lord of my life.

[30 : 31] I'm the God of my world. Apart from the sheer arrogance, thinking of ourselves as having the very greatest wisdom and understanding, we see throughout the world, throughout history, and throughout the world and our society today, that men and women living their own way has created absolute chaos, sorrow, sadness, death.

In every home, in every town, in every city, in every nation of the world, men and women living for themselves and putting themselves in the place of God has meant utter sorrow.

But there's something worse than that. The fact is that our sin has sentenced us to an everlasting and eternal death. Now, none of us would ever say, and in fact, if you spoke to people even about sin in the street today, nobody would say, I've never sinned.

We would all acknowledge that we have sinned. We all acknowledge that we have been selfish and proud and arrogant and greedy and thoughtful, thoughtless at times. We realize that, we accept that, but what we don't realize is just how dangerous that is, what a predicament that has brought us to.

Because sin is not simply just getting it wrong or making a mistake. Sin, whether we believe it or not, our sin, your sin and my sin, has brought down upon our heads God's anger, God's wrath.

[32 : 10] Paul, as he describes this, and he describes the way that people live in the world, puts it like this, all of us, including himself, all of us lived among the people of this world, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature, following its desires and thoughts.

like the rest of people, we were by nature deserving of God's wrath. That's where the danger is. We are sinners in the hands of an angry God.

We are sinners who have rejected and turned away from him and brought upon ourselves his just judgment and sentence. That's why we all need saving whoever we are.

God's wrath. God's wrath. Because if we're not saved from God's wrath, then we shall experience God's wrath. We shall experience the full force of God's justice and judgment when we die.

But this is the wonder, this is the great thing, this is why this name Jesus is so special to us. He will save his people from their sins. This is the very reason of his birth, the very purpose, that he, the

God, from eternity should take on human nature.

[33 : 30] This is why he, the God-man, should live amongst us. Because in the mercy and love of God, his desire is that we should be saved from our sin, saved from the punishment that we deserve.

And instead of us feeling, experiencing, enduring God's just righteousness, Jesus did it for us. See, he was born to live, but he was born ultimately to die. He was born to give his life upon the cross, not as some empty gesture, not as some sort of innocent in the world of wickedness, but that he might take and pay the full price, the full cost of your sin against God.

That he might turn God's anger away from you and have it placed upon himself. That is why he had to be God and he had to be man. He had to be God because only God could represent God.

And only God could endure the full weight of the wrath and the punishment of God upon himself.

And he had to be man to represent human beings. He had to be man because he had to be like us in every way apart from sin.

[34 : 57] And there on the cross he suffered and he died and he was treated as the worst sinner in the whole of the world. And he did it to save his people from their sins.

And he will save his people from their sins. It's not that the angel Gabriel said to Joseph he might, he hopes to. It's his plan, it's his dream, it's his lifelong quest to save people.

No, he will save his people from his sins. It's a certainty. If you are one of his people then you can be certain and sure he will save you and has saved you. But the big question surely must be this, are you one of his people?

Who are his people that he saves from this sin that we all deserve? Are they only the descendants of Abraham, the Jewish nation? Are they just the English?

Are they just the good? Are they just the religious? Who are these people? His people who he was saved from their sins. Well they, we are told again and again throughout the Bible exactly who these people are.

[36 : 11] They are those people who ultimately see their need of Jesus Christ and believe on him. Paul puts it wonderfully in this way in his letter to the Christians in Rome.

He says if you declare with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified.

It's with your mouth you profess your faith and are saved. For the scripture says anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame. For there is no difference between the Jew and Gentile, English and Scottish, Welsh and Irish.

The same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Whoever you are, whatever you've done, wherever you've been, Jesus will save you as you put your faith in him as Lord and believe on him as the one who died and rose again for your salvation.

[37 : 25] Are you one of Jesus' people? Are you one of the Lord's people? Are you one of the Lord's people not only because in your heart you have said I believe but because your life speaks Jesus is the Lord of my life.

Do you see how Paul makes that very clear? Declare with your mouth. In other words, live in such a way that your words and your actions declare Jesus is the Lord, not me.

My life is his and I want to live for him. And in your heart you believe that Jesus is raised from the dead because he first died for you. life and heart, faith.

He is Jesus, the Lord who will save his people from their sins. Trust in him, you never fear.

Rely on him, he'll never let you down. Follow him and you'll never fall. Amen. Now to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his presence in glory without fault and with great joy to the only God our Savior be glory and majesty, power and authority through Jesus Christ our Lord before all ages now and forevermore.

[38 : 55] Amen.