

The Savior Foretold (Part one)

Predictions. Predictions. They are so common this time of year. The Packers are going to win the Super Bowl. No! It's going to be the Vikings! It's going to be a warm winter. Look at how little snow we've had. Predictions. Does anyone really know? Can anyone really be sure?

We are going to hear God make some predictions. Some outlandish! A virgin will be with child! And will give birth to a son? Uh, God, maybe you don't know how these things work. Let me explain it to you. But is anything too hard for the Lord? Is anything impossible for God? Christmas, the very fact of God coming to earth is no less outlandish. God becoming a real human is just as far out there. Here's the wildest part. God didn't just make a prediction. God made it happen. God sent his Son. God became a real human. God's own Son was born. Of a virgin!

After making that prediction, and making it come true, maybe the other details we are going to hear seem kind of tame. Born in Bethlehem. Born Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God. The government will be on his shoulders. But maybe these were just lucky guesses by people who claimed to be prophets. Maybe they were just vague horoscope ideas that could come true any number of ways. Listen as these predictions are made. Not just Bethlehem, but the one and only Bethlehem in Ephratha. That's pretty specific.

Just a lucky guess? Consider this. Scholars at MIT, like the smartest university in the country, calculated the odds that one person could just randomly fulfill the prophecies God made about Jesus. They only chose eight prophecies to do their calculations, because after eight the numbers just got crazy. Do you know how they described the odds with just eight prophecies? Imagine the entire state of Texas, covered with silver dollars, two feet deep. Texas. Silver dollars. Two feet deep. One of those coins has a special, invisible mark on it. Your job is to find that one, on the first try. You can walk as far as you want. Fly over and land anywhere. But you only get one try. What are the odds? The same as one person randomly fulfilling just eight of God's prophecies. This is no lucky guess. Jesus is our Savior. Just as God predicted.

The Savior announced (Part two)

When Mark Zuckerberg, the founder of Facebook, announced that he was going to be a father, he said, "I am not going to be on Facebook for two months!" That made him the first parent to avoid Facebook after the birth of a child. Isn't it far more common to not just get the birth announcement on Facebook and the first baby pictures, but almost annoying pictures of day 2, one week, first bath. All right, you had a baby, we get it.

God did something completely different. He announced the birth of his own Son, Jesus, to just one person, Mary, the mother of Jesus. God chose just one person to be the first to hear the news. Mary was not a high and mighty CEO. She was an ordinary girl, probably on the young side of the teen years, living in a village so insignificant, that decades later someone asked, "Can anything good come from there?"

But God gave Mary something special, at the very beginning of this birth announcement: favor! The Bible scholars among us might be more familiar with another word: grace. God began his birth announcement to Mary with this assurance: Mary, you stand in a state of grace. Mary, God has given you his grace. Grace is undeserved love. Even the Catechism students among us might know that definition. But none of us will ever fully get to the bottom of appreciating this undeserved love.

Think about what this means: undeserved love. We deserved hell, but God gave us heaven. We deserved God's anger, but God gave us his love. We did not deserve to be part of God's family, but God sent his own Son to be our brother, to take our place and take away our sin. That's grace. That's favor. That's quite an announcement, not just to Mary, but to you!

What a Savior this is!

Gorillas in the Mist. It was a movie about a Midwestern woman, Dian Fossey, who traveled to Africa to count the declining gorilla population. After many long days of not seeing a gorilla and being just about ready to go home, she finally spotted one. But she could sense the fear, both in the gorilla's eyes and her own. Here's how she calmed the fears. She started to mimic the gorilla. She sat down cross legged. She chewed on some leaves. She even pounded her chest. Then slowly, but surely, the gorilla wasn't afraid anymore. Maybe the gorilla thought this being was one of them. Looked a little different, but was one of them. By the end of the movie, this lady was carrying around baby gorillas and almost considered them her best friends.

In a way, that's kind of like Christmas. Our world was trapped in a worse situation than a declining population. We were all, each one of us, in big trouble, because of our sin. But it was only a white lie. I didn't want to hurt her feelings. But it's just a pretty picture. She still has on most of a swimsuit. Come on, everyone does that at work. It's no big deal. Lying. Lust. Laziness. They just name three sorry symptoms of our sinful status.

Did God just stay distant? Did Jesus just stay home in heaven? No! He came to our earth. But he couldn't come as the almighty God in all his power and glory. Even one angel terrified the shepherds so much it hurt. Instead, God mimicked us. God became a gorilla in our midst if you will. He became one of us. He sat down on our earth in a manger, a cattle feed box. He ate our food. He pounded his chest with pain over our sins and prayed with resolve at the only solution: a cross. A bloody, horrible, awful piece of torture. A beautiful, heavenly, awesome, piece of forgiveness. It is finished. Sin is paid in full. No more guilt. No more agony. No more hell. All because Jesus became one of us. All because Jesus died on the cross. What a Savior this is! He became one of us! What a Savior this is! He died for you! What a Savior this is! Amen.