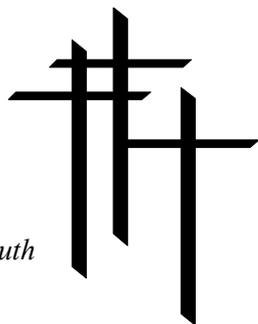


Timely Messenger



*Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth
Speaking the Truth in Love*

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BORN TO DIE

By Gregg Bing

When the angel Gabriel was sent to Mary to announce the birth of Jesus, he told her: “Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:31-33).

You might think, from these words, that this is what Jesus came for—to reign as King over Israel. Jesus certainly was the rightful King of Israel; Ezekiel described Him as “He ... whose right it is” (Ezek. 21:27), so when John the Baptist came to prepare His way, he proclaimed, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” (Matt. 3:2). When Jesus began His public ministry, He preached the same message (Matt.

4:17). The kingdom was “at hand” or near because the King was in the midst of His people, Israel.

However, the eternal Son of God did not enter this world and become a Man to reign—He came to die. In this study, we will explore how this truth was unfolded throughout Jesus’ earthly life and why this purpose was so important.

The Virgin Birth

When Gabriel announced to Mary that she would conceive and bear a Son, she asked, “How can this be, since I do not know a man?” (Luke 1:34). She was betrothed to Joseph, but she was a virgin, just as Isaiah prophesied: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel” (Isa. 7:14). While the Hebrew word translated “virgin” can rightly be translated “maid” or “young woman,” the Greek word used in Matthew 1:23, which quotes Isaiah 7:14, means exactly what it says, “a virgin,” a woman who has never “known a

man” sexually.

Gabriel answered Mary’s question of “How?” by telling her: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit and then carried in the virgin Mary’s womb until His birth. He is called “the Son of God” because He had no earthly father, but was conceived by the Holy Spirit. He is called “that Holy One” because He was “separate from sin” (Heb. 4:15); the virgin birth ensured this was the case. But why was this so important?

After Adam and Eve’s disobedience brought sin into the world, God gave the first promise of a Redeemer to come and deal with the issue of sin. The penalty that God requires for sin is death (both physical and spiritual), just as He told Adam: “In the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen. 2:17). The only way sinners can be saved from paying this penalty themselves is through a substitute. Since the only acceptable substitute is a sinless one, and all men are sinners (Rom. 3:23), then God Himself had to provide this substitute.

This is illustrated in Genesis 22 where we read of God’s command to Abraham to offer his only son, Isaac, as a sacrifice on Mount Moriah. As the two of them jour-

neyed to the place of worship, Isaac, knowing they had the wood and the fire, questioned Abraham, “Where is the lamb?” Abraham answered, “My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering” (Gen. 22:8).

This is what God did for us: He provided “for Himself” the Lamb to offer as a sacrifice for our sins. God sent His only Son into the world to become “the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10), satisfying God’s righteous requirement for sins. As Paul described it: “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). If Jesus’ had been born of an earthly father, such as Joseph, He would have been just as sinful as we are, having inherited the sinful condition and sinful nature of Adam (Rom. 5:12; Eph. 2:3), and thus unable to bear the sins of others.

The virgin birth is a critical part of God’s purpose to redeem sinful men, yet, most people consider the virgin birth of Christ to be absurd. Increasing numbers of theologians, churches and denominational groups deny this blessed truth, demonstrating that men fail to grasp the true nature and power of God, “For with God nothing will be impossible!” (Luke 1:37).

Angels Herald Jesus’ Birth

On the night of Jesus’ birth, an angel appeared to a group of

shepherds as they tended their flocks. As they were suddenly surrounded by the glory of the Lord, they were “greatly afraid,” so the angel said to them: “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:10-11).

What were these good tidings? A Savior was born that night! The word “savior” can mean “deliverer” or “preserver,” and most in Israel were looking for a Messiah to come into the world and deliver them from their enemies, the Romans. Jesus is certainly that Deliverer (Rom. 11:26), but that is not why He was born into this world. Think back to the words the angel Gabriel had spoken earlier to Mary’s betrothed, Joseph: “You shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). Jesus came, not to deliver Israel from their enemies, but to save them from their sins, and the only way this could be accomplished was through His death. Though it would not be understood until years later, the death of Christ for the sins of the whole world would bring “great joy” to all who come to trust in Him as Savior.

Simeon’s Prophecy

When Joseph and Mary took
(Continued on page 4)

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(Continued from page 3)

the baby Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord, they met a “just and devout” man named Simeon who was “waiting for the Consolation of Israel” (Luke 2:25). The Holy Spirit had revealed to him “that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ” (Luke 2:26). Simeon took the baby Jesus up in his arms and blessed God, saying, “Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation ...” (Luke 2:29-30).

Simeon rejoiced in the salvation God would provide in this special child—that sounds like good news, and it is! But how this salvation would be provided was to cause great sorrow and pain to Jesus and to those closest to Him. Simeon told Mary, “Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.” (Luke 2:34-35). God would provide salvation for sinful men through this Child, Jesus, but in doing so, it would cause a sword to pierce through Mary’s soul, a pain she would experience as she stood at the foot of Jesus’ cross.

The Baptism of Jesus

Jesus began His public minis-

try when He was thirty years old by coming to John at the Jordan River to be baptized. Even Jesus’ baptism, in a way, points us to the fact that He was born to die. John preached “a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” (Luke 3:3), so when Jesus came to be baptized, “John tried to prevent Him, saying, I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?” (Matt. 3:14). Why would Jesus, the sinless Son of God, need to be baptized?

Two reasons are specified in Scripture for Jesus’ baptism. The first is found in Jesus’ answer to John: “Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness” (Matt. 3:15). Jesus lived under the dispensation of law (Gal. 4:4-5), and so He submitted Himself to the requirements of the Mosaic Law, which, in this case, included the various “washings” (baptisms) of the law (Heb. 9:9-10). At that time, it was God’s will that the Jews submit to the baptism of John (Luke 7:29-30). This cleansing was necessary to prepare them to become a “kingdom of priests” (Exo. 19:6; Rev. 1:6; 5:10).

The second reason Jesus was baptized is voiced by John when he says: “I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water” (John 1:31). John was told by God: “Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who bap-

tizes with the Holy Spirit” (John 1:33). The sign John was given to identify the Christ was the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Him. This happened just after Jesus was baptized by John. Once John saw this, he knew and testified of Jesus: “This is the Son of God” (John 1:34). Jesus’ baptism was the means by which the Lord Jesus was made manifest to Israel.

Another possible reason for Jesus’ baptism points specifically to the cross. The word “baptism” carries the idea of being so immersed or enveloped in something that you become identified with it. For example, the nation of Israel was “baptized into Moses” while in the wilderness (1 Cor. 10:1-4). There was no water involved in this baptism, but the people were identified with Moses as their spiritual leader under the dispensation of law. Jesus was baptized by John in the company of men and women who came confessing their sins. His baptism might be viewed as His identification with sinners (and with their sins) in preparation for His later baptism into death (Luke 12:50), when He would bear our sins “in His own body on the tree” (1 Pet. 2:24).

The Temptation of Jesus

Immediately after Jesus’ baptism, He was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness “to be tempted by the devil” (Matt. 4:1). This encounter was not orchestrated by

Satan; it was the will of God. But, what was God’s purpose? Jesus was not tempted to see if He would sin, but to demonstrate that He was sinless! The word “tempt” means to put to the test for the purpose of proving or approving. We read in Hebrews 4:15 that Jesus was “in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.” John the Baptist declared Jesus to be “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). The sacrificial lambs offered in behalf of the people of Israel under the law had to be “without blemish and without spot.” The temptation proved Jesus to be just such a Lamb, who could then provide redemption by shedding His “precious blood” for our sins (1 Pet. 1:19).

Despised and Rejected

The first chapter of John’s gospel declares that Jesus “came to His own, and His own did not receive Him” (John 1:11). We might wonder how the people of Jesus’ day could reject such a wonderful person, but His rejection by men was not unexpected. Isaiah prophesied that He would be “despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. ... He was despised, and we did not esteem Him” (Isa. 53:3). The “little flock” who believed in Him, “beheld His glory, as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14), but the multitudes, and especially the Jew-

ish rulers, found no value in Him at all. The Psalmist prophesied they would hate Him “without a cause” (Psa. 35:19).

Why would the Jews hate their Messiah, the Son of God? As the New Testament opens, we find the nation of Israel to be a people whose hearts were “far from God” (Matt. 15:8). This became evident very early, beginning with the baptism of John. The Jewish rulers sent priests and Levites to question John about why he was baptizing (John 1:19-25). John recognized their hypocrisy and rightly denounced them as “a brood of vipers” who were in danger of “the wrath to come” (Matt. 3:7-12). These religious rulers, who were supposed to provide spiritual leadership for the nation, refused to be baptized by John, thus rejecting the will of God (Luke 7:29-30). Having rejected John’s ministry, they proceeded to reject the One of whom John was the forerunner, the Lord Jesus Christ.

“Destroy this Temple”

After Jesus’ first miracle at Cana in Galilee, where He turned water into wine, Jesus went to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. As Jesus entered the temple, He found that many of the Jews had turned His Father’s house into a house of merchandise, so He drove them all out (John 2:13-17). The Jews asked for a sign from Him to prove He had the authority to do

this. Jesus’ response indicated what He had come into this world to do; He answered: “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19). They assumed He was speaking of the physical temple, which had taken forty-six years to build, but Jesus was speaking of “the temple of His body” (John 2:21) which would be broken on the cross of Calvary.

After Jesus’ resurrection, His disciples would remember these words of Jesus and would believe in Him, not just because they had seen a great sign, but because they read the Scriptures and heard the word which Jesus spoke. While Jesus was in Jerusalem at that Passover, “many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did” (John 2:23), but Jesus realized this belief was merely superficial and so He “did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man” (John 2:24-25).

“They Did Not Believe”

Jesus’ powerful miracles amazed many people, particularly His ability to heal. From the onset of Jesus’ ministry He healed people of “all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease” (Matt. 4:23). His fame spread because of this, and, as He continued to heal, “great multitudes followed Him—from Galilee, and from Decapolis, Jeru-

salem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan” (Matt. 4:24-25). Yet, later in His ministry, Jesus rebuked “the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not repent” (Matt. 11:20). There was no real change of mind or heart in these Jews. “Although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him” (John 12:37).

The multitudes followed Jesus for the physical benefits He provided. After feeding over 5000 people with a young boy’s lunch, “Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king,” so He departed from them. The next day, people found Jesus on the other side of the sea and questioned how He got there. Jesus answered them: “Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled” (John 6:26).

The Plot to Kill Jesus

As for the Jewish rulers, the scribes and Pharisees, as well as the priests and Sadducees, they rejected Jesus at the very beginning of His ministry. It was not long before “they plotted against Him how they might destroy Him” (Matt. 12:14). In fact, there were numerous times throughout Jesus’ ministry when they sought to lay hold of Him and kill Him, but, each time, Jesus escaped from

their hands (cf. Luke 4:30, Matt. 12:15, John 8:59). We read that: “No one laid a hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come” (John 7:30; John 8:20).

What “hour” does this refer to? The time when Jesus would be delivered into their hands to be crucified, and God’s determined purpose (Acts 2:23) of redemption would be fulfilled.

The event which took the plot of the Jewish rulers to the next level was, surprisingly, Jesus’ raising of Lazarus after he had been dead four days—the most powerful and the most amazing miracle Jesus would perform! (John 11).

Many who were present when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead believed in Him, but some “went away to the Pharisees and told them the things Jesus did” (John 11:45-46). This situation reminds us of what happened after the man born blind was healed by Jesus in John 9. The healing of a man who had been blind from birth was an amazing miracle; it was unheard of. The people took him to the Pharisees, whom they looked to as experts in religious matters. It was almost as though they needed to be told by these “learned men” what they should think, what they should believe. The resurrection of Lazarus, a man who had been dead four days, was even more amazing, so that, once again, many Jews did not know what to think, what to believe about this man Jesus of Nazareth.

The Jewish rulers were worried about the situation, saying: “What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation” (John 11:47-48). They weren’t concerned with the truth about Jesus, only with their own “place” of authority and reputation among the people. They were motivated by the sin of pride.

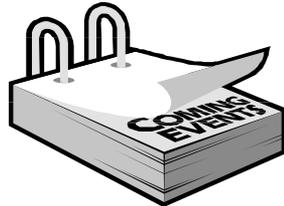
The high priest, Caiaphas, unwittingly, prophesied concerning what Jesus had come to do, saying to the council: “You know nothing at all, nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish” (John 11:49-50). Thus, he “prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad” (John 11:49-52). From that day on, the plot to put Jesus to death intensified, so that Jesus could no longer walk “openly among the Jews” (John 11:53-54).

As the Passover drew near, the Jews in the temple asked one another: “What do you think—that He will not come to the feast?” (John 11:56), for the Jewish rulers had commanded “that if anyone knew where Jesus was, he should report it, that they might seize Him” (John 11:57).

The stage was now set for the

final week before Jesus’ death, for what is commonly referred to as “the Passion Week,” the time of Jesus’ greatest sufferings, the week that would culminate with Jesus’ death on the cross. We will continue this study in our next issue, looking at the events of “the Passion Week.”

Next Issue:
“The Hour Has Come”



WINTER YOUTH RETREAT

December 29-31, 2011

Theme: “Defending the Faith”

Our annual Winter Youth Retreat will be December 29-31 this year at Three Mountain Retreat in Clifton, Texas. This is a wonderful opportunity for our young people (ages 13 to college age) to enjoy a weekend of fellowship centered around the study of God’s Word.

Registration forms and additional information should be available around the 1st of November on our website:

www.gbcbfw.com/ministries/retreat

A BIG PICTURE FROM A LITTLE MAN

By Lori Gardner

What's the one thing that pops into your mind when you hear the name "Zacchaeus"? It is probably that he was a "wee little man." Most of us remember his stature because of the children's Sunday school song, but there is much more that we can learn from his life.

It is in Luke chapter 19 where we meet Zacchaeus. His name means "pure" and it is probably safe to say that at that particular time there was not much about his life that was pure. Luke 19:2 says that he was the chief publican or tax collector. That means he held a position of authority in Jericho's tax administration. Then, just as now, tax collectors were not very popular. Under the rule of the Romans, they were especially hated. The Jews were taxed simply because they were Jews. That was in addition to all the other exorbitant taxes that had to be paid. The Romans hired local men to collect and in turn they were given a percentage. The more the publicans could wring out of the people, the more they could

keep for themselves. The Bible describes Zacchaeus as being "rich". This word means that he wasn't just well-off financially, he was abounding in wealth. More than likely it was all acquired at the expense of his own people.

Zacchaeus met Jesus as the Lord was passing through Jericho. Like always, there was a crowd pressing to get a glimpse of Him that day. Verse 2 says that Zacchaeus "sought to see Jesus, who he was..." but was hindered because of his size. He was simply too short to see over the crowd (Luke 19:3). So, he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree in order to get a good view of the Lord as He passed by.

Verse 5 says, "...when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for today I must abide at thy house." Jesus called him by name because He already knew His purpose for the man. He then told him to hurry down because He "must" abide at Zacchaeus' house. That means it was necessary.

It was necessary for a couple of reasons. First, He knew that the short, little man needed salvation. That was the first priority and there is no doubt

that Zacchaeus became a changed man after his encounter with the Savior. Verse 6 says that the tax collector came down from the tree and “received Him joyfully” (Luke 19:6). He not only received Christ into his house, but into his heart as well.

It would be logical to assume that the crowd would rejoice over this event. After all, a converted tax collector must have seemed like a miracle! Unfortunately, the reaction of the Jews was just the opposite. Verse 7 says, “And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying that he [Jesus] was gone to be a guest with a man that was a sinner.”

The crowd’s opinion didn’t seem to matter too much to Zacchaeus, though. He probably had much more important things on his mind. The change in him was obvious right away. Verse 8 says he stood and said, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.” Notice, he promised to make restitution after his salvation. He was not trying to purchase it or buy favor with the Lord. This was simply the outward sign of the change that had occurred on the

inside of Zacchaeus.

Under the Law of Moses if a Jew had taken something that did not belong to him, he was to confess his sin, and pay back what he had taken and more (Exo. 22:1; Num. 5:7). Zacchaeus now had the desire to follow the Law and make right some of the wrongs he had committed.

The complete change in Zacchaeus is a wonderful picture of the change that Christ can make in all people. The moment we place our trust in Him we truly are a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). We are justified freely by His grace (Rom. 3:21; 5:1). He declares us righteous no matter what we have done in this life. However, there is also a bigger picture to be seen from the events of that day.

There was a second reason that Jesus singled out Zacchaeus at that particular moment of time. In verse 9, the Savior makes a special point to call Zacchaeus a “son of Abraham.” Technically, he was a physical son of Abraham, being born a Jew, but because of his profession as a tax collector, he had lost his rights to worship as one. Tax collectors were considered to be so vile and wicked that Zacchaeus was not allowed to enter the Temple. After Zac-

chaeus' conversion Jesus declared him to be a complete son of Abraham; he was now righteous, allowing him to freely come into the worship of God.

This was all done in full view of the crowd in order for them to see that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God (Matt. 16:16). He wanted them to realize that He was their promised Messiah and King and what He did for Zacchaeus, He could do for the entire nation. It was God's will that they would be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex. 19:6; 1 Pet. 2:9). They were to bring the rest of the world to God, but it was necessary that they be brought back to God first (Acts 3:19-21).

In verse 10, the Lord clearly states that He came to "seek and to save that which was lost." He was not only speaking about lost sinners; He was also referring to His chosen people, "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 15:24). However, they didn't see the big picture.

This was a source of terrible sadness for the Lord. He knew where the results of their disbelief would lead. Later on, in verse 41 of Luke 19, as He neared the city of Jerusalem, Jesus wept over it. The word

"wept" means He was crying audibly for His beloved people.

This was the time of His visitation, but they were blind to it. As a result, they would eventually be overtaken by their enemies, their city and their temple would lay even with the ground. There would not be one stone left upon the other (Luke 19:42-44).

Thankfully, we have the completed Word of God today and we can see the big picture. Romans 11:26 says, "And so all Israel shall be saved." One day, they will look upon the One they rejected and they will be brought into their kingdom just as God promised.

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