

Jesus' birth

Who and what WAS the baby Jesus?

Understanding exactly who and what Jesus was as a human baby has been difficult right from the start, ever since an angel told Mary in **Matthew 1:21**, that she would “give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name **Jesus**, because he will save his people from their sins,” **Matthew 1:21**.

But where was that in the Bible? There was no mention anywhere in the Old Testament of a Saviour by the name of Jesus. In **verse 23**, Matthew quotes Isaiah 7:14, that a “virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son,” yes, BUT, “they will call him **Immanuel**,” not Jesus. Immanuel she could understand, but who was this Jesus fellow? And how could she have a child as a virgin?

It must have been even more confusing for Mary when she was also told in **Luke 1:32**, that her baby “will be great and will be called **the Son of the Most High**.” But how could a baby born to a human mother be a son of the mighty God? This was a lot for a young Jewess to digest, that she'd give birth to a child as a virgin, that her child had the power to save all Israel from their sins, he had a name she didn't recognize from Scripture, but he'd be great and become known as the Son of God.

She also started hearing strange things from her cousin Elizabeth, because Elizabeth's husband, Zechariah, said an angel had talked to him too, about their own son being somebody special. He would “be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth,” **verse 15**, “to make ready a people prepared for the Lord,” **verse 17**. It got even stranger in **verses 76-77**, when Zechariah looked at his newborn and said, “you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High, for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through **the forgiveness of their sins**.” So Elizabeth's son had also been specially chosen by God and miraculously conceived, but, take note, for the sole purpose of preparing Israel for **Mary's** son, who would forgive Israel's sins, something only YHWH, the God of Israel, could do.

Who and what on earth, then, WAS this child Mary was about to give birth to?

No more information was forthcoming, however, until after Jesus was born, when out of the blue a group of shepherds arrive at the manger, puffing heavily, to pass on the news that they too had been talked to by an angel, who'd told them in **Luke 2:11**, that “Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is **Christ the Lord**,” and this Saviour and Christ was Mary's baby (verse 12).

When Mary heard the word “Christ,” she heard it in her native Hebrew as “Messiah the Anointed One,” which to a Jew was the best news ever, because they’d been expecting the Messiah’s arrival at any minute. They’d been hanging onto the prophecy in **Daniel 9:25** that **“From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven sevens and sixty-two sevens.”** The first “seven sevens” described the 49 years it took to rebuild Jerusalem in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. So, count another “sixty-two sevens” (totaling 483 years) and that’s when the Anointed One, the Messiah, would come as **“the RULER.”** Imagine the Jews out with their calculators, then, figuring out the exact date of the Messiah’s arrival, and realizing that 483 years after the issuing of the decree to rebuild Jerusalem put the Messiah’s arrival right in the bull’s eye of their own lifetimes.

And wasn’t that exactly what the angel had told Mary in **Luke 1:32-33** too, that to this baby of hers **“The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”** It was true, then; the exact time had arrived that the entire nation had been longing for, when the Messiah would come and take over as King of Israel forever. But Mary’s head must have been reeling, because it was **her newborn baby** who was the Anointed One of Daniel’s prophecy, and the Ruler on David’s throne who’d establish God’s kingdom in Israel in the never-ending kingdom God had promised to Abraham.

For a brief couple of minutes, though, back when Mary was visiting Elizabeth in verse 40, it had all suddenly clicked, and she burst out in a most heartfelt and amazing song, which ends in **verses 54-55** with: **“He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers.”** Mary suddenly understood that the baby in her womb was the fulfillment of the greatest prophecy ever, of God’s eternal kingdom being established on earth through Abraham and his descendants.

But that was exactly what Elizabeth’s husband Zechariah came pouring out with in **verses 68-73** too. Zechariah suddenly got his voice back, after being struck dumb for questioning his ability to father a child at his age, and like a logjam being released he yells out, **“Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David (as he said through his prophets long ago), salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us - to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father Abraham.”**

What we’re getting so far, then, is a picture of who and what Jesus was **through the eyes of the people of his day**. They were Jews, whose minds had been filled from childhood with the covenant God had made to Abraham and his descendants and the nation of Israel, through whom God would bless the whole world forever. Everything in the lives of those Jews in the first century hinged on that; it was the reason they existed.

But hanging onto that and believing it must have been extremely difficult because there were no signs whatsoever that God was blessing the whole world through them. Things were looking even more dismal, not better. They'd returned from captivity in Babylon, full of hope when Jerusalem and the Temple had been rebuilt that this was the time God would establish his everlasting kingdom on earth through them. But it hadn't happened. Instead, they were under the brutal thumb of the Romans, slaves in their own country, and utterly powerless to do anything about it. They knew a Messiah from the house of David would come to deliver them, but several "messiahs" had come and gone already, and still no deliverance.

God would fulfill his covenant, yes, but when? When would God do what he'd promised to do in **Daniel 7** to all the boastful pagan empires that were ruling the earth instead? What about his promise in **verse 13**, that "one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence," where, **verse 14**, "He was given authority, glory and sovereign power," and "all peoples, nations and men of every language worshipped him," and "His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed"?

That was supposed to have happened after the rebuilding of the Temple, when God's power and presence would return to Israel and make them great again. Four hundred years had passed, however, and God still hadn't made his move. But then, in the Temple, in **Luke 2:29-31**, it happened. On seeing the eight day old Jesus **Simeon** cries out: "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."

The promise of God's deliverance was right there in their "sight," for all to see, in that baby. But how could a baby be God's answer to his covenant? Well, that soon became apparent when the Magi arrived in Jerusalem some time later in **Matthew 2:2**, asking, "Where is the one who was born king of the Jews?" and the reaction it caused in **King Herod**. He was deeply "disturbed," **verse 3**, and he wanted to know "where the Christ was to be born," **verse 4**, so he could get to the Messiah quickly and kill him. So even while Jesus was only a baby, here was a puppet king of the Romans already running scared. God was on the move all right, because Jesus was already asserting his rule as king, because that's exactly what he'd come to be.

Jesus' birth, therefore, had already marked the beginning of Jesus taking on the pagan powers head on, and reclaiming this earth for God. The king on David's throne, whose dominion would never end, had arrived, a point Jesus himself made abundantly clear to Pontius Pilate when Pilate asked him, "You are a king, then?" in **John 18:37**, and Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king, In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world."

No wonder King Herod shuddered. He was right in thinking the baby born in Bethlehem was a political threat. Jesus really was coming as a king, as Simeon had said, to bring “glory to your people Israel,” a glorious rule that Daniel said would begin in the lifetime of those first century Jews too. So in asking, “Who and what was Jesus?” we have Mary, Joseph, Zechariah, Simeon, Daniel and even Herod saying he’s everything the Messiah was predicted to be, the powerful Saviour and King in both prophecy and covenant promise who would bring deliverance, forgiveness and blessing to the whole earth, beginning with Israel in the first century.

But imagine how hard that must have been for the Jews in the first century to believe their king had arrived and was taking over the world, when for the next 30 years of his life Jesus grew up like any other Jewish boy, and instead of killing off the pagan power that ruled them, the pagan power killed him. Pagan powers continued to rule after Jesus’ death too, so where was the evidence that Jesus was truly king of the earth placing all his enemies under his feet?

And here we are, two thousand years later, facing the same question. Where is the evidence that God’s kingdom is here, and so is its ruler, and the takeover has begun? Where is the proof that God is reclaiming this earth as his through Jesus, and he’s been taking it back from the pagans ever since Jesus was born?

Well, we know it’s not by violence because Jesus told Pontius Pilate in **John 18:36**, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were my servants would fight.” The kingdom God is establishing on the earth through Jesus is not like the kingdoms of this world that impose their will by violence. And Jesus illustrated that by not unleashing legions of angels on his enemies, but he also illustrated it by something even more revolutionary than non-violence.

Right at the beginning of his ministry, in **John 2:13**, Jesus went to Jerusalem, found the temple being used as a market, and in fury he overturned the stalls and tables, yelling, “How dare you turn my Fathers’ house into a market,” in **verse 16**. When challenged as to what authority he had to do such a thing, and could he prove it by a miraculous sign (verse 18), “Jesus answered them,” in **verse 19**, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days,” referring to his own body (verse 21).

The sign of Jesus’ authority was his indestructibility. They could kill him, but he’d simply come back to life again. They could try all kinds of evil, nasty and very clever ways of stamping him out, but he’d bounce back. It was far more revolutionary than either violent revolution or non-violent revolution because Jesus was saying, “**You cannot destroy me.**” Here was the sign that he truly was the Messiah, the King whose dominion could never be destroyed, just as Daniel had predicted. And to put an extra stamp on his authority Jesus even gave the exact number of days after his death when he would bounce back to his indestructible life again.

And where did Jesus offer this proof of who and what he was? At the Temple, the same place where Simeon had said God was fulfilling his promise for all to see in Jesus. And here it was being fulfilled in a clear challenge by Jesus to all the powers that be, pagan empires and religious bullies, that nothing and no one could now stop him and what God was doing through him. He and the kingdom he'd begun were indestructible.

Imagine the world coming to that realization, therefore, that God's kingdom is truly on this earth with Jesus as its king, because who Jesus is and what he's doing cannot be stopped, and it hasn't stopped from the moment he was born.

But by what authority can we say that **today**, and by what miraculous sign can **we** prove it? What is there on this earth right now that proves the indestructibility of Jesus' dominion over this earth, and his power to reclaim it from paganism, exactly as Daniel 7 predicted? Is there an obvious miracle we can point to that clearly demonstrates the kingdom that began at Jesus' birth has never been, and cannot ever be, stopped?

Yes there is; it's the unstoppable indestructibility of Christmas, and the carol blasted out every year without fail over radio, TV, in Malls and stores all over the land, "Hark the herald angels sing, glory to the NEWBORN KING." And no one, not a religious pagan, not an atheist, nor any corporate or political leader in our Western world, has been able to stop that carol being played publicly to Christian and non-Christian alike for at least one whole month every year.

And what makes it even more miraculous is the date Christmas lands on, the birthday of Sol Invictus, the birth of the unconquered sun. How ironic that a pagan day celebrating the indestructibility of the most revered pagan god is now picturing the birth of the unconquered Son, and the indestructibility of Jesus and his kingdom. And who remembers Sol the sun god at this time of year? When is his name ever mentioned in carols?

A totally pagan day has been reclaimed from paganism and transformed into a day celebrating Jesus the Messiah, King of the earth. It's just one miraculous sign for people who are looking for proof that OUR GOD REIGNS (Isaiah 52:7). But we also have the evidence of history, as again and again - as **Psalm 2:2** says - "The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One," and they cry out in **verse 3**, "Let us break their chains, and throw off their fetters." Let's get rid of all that stuff about the Messiah being king and prove who's really in charge of this world, they say, but in answer to which "The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them," **verse 4**, because, **verse 5**, "I have installed MY King on Zion, my holy hill," and as year after relentless year passes and Christmas keeps on bouncing back as the highlight of the year, the truth of Jesus being born as the indestructible King of this earth is being announced and sealed over and over again.

And as Christians we're called to be witnesses to that - to Jesus being the Messiah, and through him God is establishing his kingdom on earth right now. But how do we do that with confidence and authority when pagan powers still rule the world with an iron grip, and the world isn't getting any better? It can be just as hard for us to believe the Messiah has come as king and ruler as it was for the Jews in Jesus' day.

It's not surprising, then, that the idea caught on in Christianity that this world will forever remain evil and unredeemable, so God takes us off to heaven after we die. But that's not what Christmas pictures - quite the opposite, in fact. It pictures Jesus being born as king of the earth to reclaim it for God and one day returning it to him, with all his enemies defeated (Psalm 110:1). And Christmas itself is proof of it, as it reclaims a day set aside for worshipping a false god and changes it to a day celebrating what God is doing through his Messiah, just as Daniel predicted, and even pagans can't resist it.

Some Christians believe we should get rid of everything in the church that originated with pagans, like Christmas, and they are mystified as to why Christians ever chose a pagan celebration in the first place for the birth date of Christ, because now we're stuck with Christ being replaced by Santa Claus, the gospel being replaced with Disney, and hope for all creation in Jesus Christ being replaced by hope for just our local economy in Black Friday and Christmas shopping.

But the carols keep on being played. The gospel is still being preached. Christmas is still a massive Christian triumph over paganism, because it simply won't die. So why should Christians give up territory they've held successfully for sixteen hundred years, especially when it so clearly demonstrates Jesus reigns supreme by the simple fact of history that paganism has never managed to stop it? Hard as pagans try they've never been able to get rid of Christmas, or get it back.

But hanging on to this and believing it is hard, because outside Christmas and Easter, what other proof or signs are there that Jesus is reclaiming this world for his Father? If Jesus really did begin a new creation on this earth what other miraculous sign can we turn to that proves it?

It is the miraculous sign in our own heads, that we know who and what Jesus was as a human baby, that we are now in the everlasting kingdom he began, being trained and prepared for the day when Jesus our king returns and resurrects our bodies into bodies like his so we can rule this earth alongside him. And that has given us new eyes at Christmas, where instead of seeing Christmas as pagan, we see it as proof that God is doing what he promised through his Messiah, as billions of atheists and members of pagan religions willingly partake in a day celebrating the birth of Jesus as king of the whole world, and they cannot resist it. As such they are being blessed, just as God promised Abraham they would be. It's our annual proof that "Our God reigns."