

Introducing Jesus – Part 1 (Luke 3:19-38 March 1, 2009)



Last Monday – I got home from the office very late. Dena had flicked on the Academy Awards and we watched a few minutes worth.

In the best actor and actress categories – they had five previous winners come onstage who then had one minute to introduce each of the nominees.

It got me thinking. If I had one minute to introduce someone to Jesus – what would I say?

If I met a Hindu who had never heard of Jesus – how would I try and convey who Jesus is?

How do you express that He is divine yet human. Sinless yet bore our sins. Died but now He lives?

How do you sum up the fact that the One who created the vast reaches of this universe became a man to die for us?

How do you sum up the essence of Jesus of Nazareth?

Our passage this morning begins a fascinating section where Jesus is introduced to the world – and this incredible introduction displays the glory and beauty of who Jesus is.

Remember where we are in Luke. It has been three decades since the miraculous births of John and Jesus. Since that time John has lived in obscurity in the Judean hills and Jesus has lived in obscurity in Nazareth. No one in the halls of power of Jerusalem or Caesarea or Rome would ever have heard their names uttered.

Then suddenly – the name of John the Baptist is on everyone's lips. Word sweeps throughout Palestine and beyond that after 400 years a prophet has arisen in Israel – and not just any prophet – the forerunner of Messiah!

The multitudes were intrigued. Huge numbers of men and women left their homes and made the trek into the wilderness of Judea. There they were stunned when John called them a brood of vipers fleeing the wrath to come. John told them that the way to prepare for Messiah was through repentance.

Then he said this:

I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

John had come to tell them they were unclean and needed to be washed by the Spirit of God. But when Jesus appeared and John declared – Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world – from that moment – John had completed the task for which he had been born.

He had preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins to prepare the hearts of the people for the Messiah and he had identified the One who was the Messiah.

From that moment on – the spotlight fell on Jesus. Some of John’s disciples were unsure about this shift. In John 3:26-30:

They came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him.” John answered, “A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.’ The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. **He must increase, but I must decrease.**”

John had faithfully fulfilled his God given task and now was the time for Jesus to increase and for John to decrease

And so it is that in the providence of God – John is moved off the stage. Luke 3:19-20:

But Herod the tetrarch, who had been reproved by him for Herodias, his brother’s wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done, added this to them all, that he locked up John in prison.

Herod was a ruler who organised his life around his own pleasures and cared little for his people. He was an object of hatred.

Like many men – faithfulness to his marriage was not one of his strong points. He felt free to marry and divorce for lust.

At the time John ministered – Herod was married to Herodias. Their marriage was an abomination to the Jews – but no one else dared speak out.

Herodias was a woman who lusted after power and used sex to get it. She began her rise to power by marrying her own uncle, Herod Phillip I. While he was a Herod he was a minor Herod. He had no country to rule over because he had been disinherited by his father – Herod the Great. He was sent to live in Rome as a private citizen.

Herod Antipas was married to the daughter of Aretas, the king of the Nabatean Arabs. But, while on a visit to Rome he spent time with his half-brother, Philip. There he laid eyes on Herodias and fell madly in love with her.

He professed his love for her and wanted to sleep with her. He asked her to divorce his brother and become his second wife – after all his father had ten wives.

She saw the opportunity. This Herod actually ruled a kingdom. But Herodias was not going to be anyone's second wife. She agreed to marry Herod but only on the condition that he divorce his first wife. Herod wanted her – so he reluctantly agreed.

The fact Herodias was married – and to his brother at that. The fact he was married. The fact that divorcing his wife would lead to a war with the Nabateans. None of that mattered. He was a man in lust – nothing would stop him.

They both divorced their spouses and married. Herod's first wife was enraged and returned to her father the king of Nabatea. He was so angry by this insult to his daughter, that later in AD 36 he saw the opportunity to invade Herod's territory and he inflicted a heavy defeat on him. Many of Herod's people died and they hated him all the more.

Finally, to complete this incestuous little family, there is Salome – Herodias' daughter by her first marriage. She was every bit as ambitious and sensual as her mother. She left Rome to live in the palace with Herod.

She was the one who danced so seductively that Herod Antipas gave her the head of John the Baptist as reward.

Salome must have learned something from her mother because she ended up marrying Herod Phillip II her great uncle. He was an older man – but after all he was Tetrarch over Iturea and Trachonitis.

So that is the family who ruled over Galilee and Perea. The Jews despised Herod and Herodias. They had divorced when God was very clear – He hates divorce. Then to marry your brother's wife while he still lives is incestuous and against the Law.

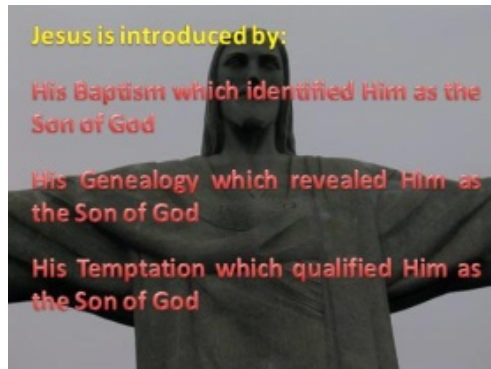
But Herod killed those who spoke out against him – so the people were silent. Not John. He publicly attacked Herod and Herodias for their sin. They hated him.

Herod had John imprisoned. But because he feared the people would rebel if he killed a man they held to be a prophet – so he was content to let John rot in prison.

Herodias was not as content. She wanted John dead. It was she who knew her husband would find her daughter seductive and offer her anything. It was she who said – ask for the head of John the Baptist.

While this may look like evil men prosper and good men suffer – it was all under the plan of God. John had fulfilled his task. He had to decrease so that the main act – the Messiah – Jesus of Nazareth – might increase.

With John off the scene we now come to the Introduction of Jesus.



Here we find that Jesus is introduced by:

His *Baptism* which **identified** Jesus as the Son of God

His *Genealogy* which **revealed** Jesus as the Son of God

His *Temptation* which **qualified** Jesus as the Son of God

Notice the theme in here. In His baptism – God cries – You are My beloved **Son**.

In His genealogy – Jesus is introduced as – the son of Adam, the **son of God**.

In His temptation – twice Satan says – If You are the **Son of God**.

These events are designed to introduce Jesus as the **Son of God**.

First, we look at His *Baptism* which **identified** Jesus as the Son of God.

Verses 21-22:

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

Notice that the Trinity – the Son, the Spirit and the Father – are all involved in identifying Jesus as the Son of God.

First, Jesus identifies Himself through being baptised.

There is a question that screams out when we read this verse.

We have just read that John's baptism is a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

So why would the sinless Son of God need to be baptised?

In fact, even John himself wondered about this:

Listen to Matthew 3:13-15:

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented.

John sees Jesus coming. John knows He is a sinner. John knows Jesus is not. He knows Jesus is the One who will baptise him with the Holy Spirit so he says – no – *You* don't need my baptism – *I* am a sinner who needs *Your* baptism.

Jesus says, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness."

What does He mean?

Jesus came to fulfil the prophecies regarding the Messiah – the One who will make the sinful righteous – wash them clean, give them new hearts.

He does that by becoming a man who will die on a cross for our sins. And because we are united with Him – when He suffers and dies – our sins are paid for. We are declared righteous. He fulfils all righteousness.

Jesus was baptised – **not** to wash away His sins – but to identify Himself to the world as the One who will fulfil all righteousness by dying and bearing our sins.

So John agrees and baptises Jesus. Jesus is then praying – and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove.

What does this mean?

In most of the movies made about Jesus – as He is baptised – a glowing white dove comes out of the heavens and settles on Him.

And so – the symbol for the Holy Spirit became a dove.

The only problem is that this is **not** what the text says. It says that the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, **like** a dove.

It is not that the Holy Spirit took the form of a dove – but like a dove fluttering down from the heavens – the Spirit in some kind of visible bodily form came down upon Jesus.

Why?

The prime reason is *identification*.

The Old Testament made it very clear that the Messiah would be identified by having the Spirit come upon Him.

Isaiah 42:1-3:

Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him.

Isaiah 61:1:

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.

And even John the Baptist was told this was how He would recognise the Messiah. John 1:32-34:

And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'"

So the Spirit identified Jesus as the Son of God – the Messiah – the Saviour.

But the fact that the Spirit remained on Jesus shows that as well as identifying Him – the Spirit also empowered Jesus. Look at these verses that follow.

Luke 4:1:

And Jesus, *full of the Holy Spirit*, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness.

The power to resist the temptation of Satan – to survive in the wilderness – to become the second Adam – to prove He is qualified as the Son of God – it comes from the Spirit of God.

Luke 4:14:

And Jesus returned in *the power of the Spirit* to Galilee.

Here Jesus begins His ministry – and He does so in the power of the Spirit.

Luke 4:18 he stand up and the first words of His ministry are:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

It is by the power of the Spirit that Jesus ministers.

Think about this verse. Here we find Jesus praying – and being filled by the Spirit – empowered to carry out His ministry.

If Jesus – the sinless Son of God – if He needed to commune with God and receive the power to carry out His ministry – how much more do we?

If Jesus needed to live out His life in the power of the Spirit – how much more do we?

Men and women come and tell me – they are dry, they are sinning, their marriage is in trouble, they are not living for Jesus – and I ask – are you reading the Word and praying. No – too busy.

They live in the power of the flesh and wonder why they struggle.

If Jesus needed to pray and call on the resources of the Spirit how much more do we? Take time to be holy. Ask God to empower you. Draw on the resources that are your birthright.

But there is more going on here.

Jesus identified Himself as the Son of God through His baptism.

The Spirit identified Him as the Son of God by descending upon Him.

Now the Father identifies Him as the Son of God by divine proclamation:

And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”

Jesus is the Son of God. As the Scriptures elaborate on this we come to understand the full impact of this.

Jesus is the second person of the Trinity. God the Son. The Scriptures say Jesus created the universe. He has always existed. He is all powerful. He is the object of our worship.

He is the uncreated Creator. He is the One who speaks and the galaxies spring forth. He is the one who spoke and man came into being.

He needs nothing. And yet, love caused Him to temporarily lay aside some of the privileges of deity and humble Himself by becoming a man – in order to die on a cross for us.

The Jews have no category for a God-man. Even Christians struggle to grasp the enormity of this truth. But that is who Jesus is. The Son of God – the God-man.

But, there is more in this introduction than merely identifying Jesus. Notice what God says. “You are my beloved Son; with You I am well pleased.”

Every Jew would pick up the allusions to two great Old Testament passages.

First is the great **Son as King** passage of Psalm 2. Listen to verses 6-12:

“As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.” I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.” Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

This passage presents the Son of God as the all powerful King – ruler of the nations – the One all men should bow down to.

But there is also the allusion to the **Son as Servant** passage of Isaiah 42. Listen to verses 1-3:

Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice.

This passage is part of the section that describes the Messiah as the One who will suffer and die for the sins of His people.

The Jews did not think of this passage as referring to Messiah – and they certainly never put the two – conquering King and suffering Servant together in one person.

But that is who Jesus is – the King of Kings, ruler of all nations, the One before whom all men bow the knee **and** the man of sorrows. Despised and rejected. Who would bear our griefs and be wounded for our transgressions.

That is who stood before those Jews. The Son of God. God made man. Humbled to raise us up.

I have tried to imagine what it would have been like to be there. A time when the Trinity together declare that the One all history was awaiting has arrived.

The Son is baptised – to show He is the One who will fulfil all righteousness.

The Spirit descends to identify and empower Him for His ministry.

And the heavens are split asunder and the Father Himself identifies Jesus as the Messiah – King and Servant – the God-man.

Surely no one could doubt who Jesus was – the Son of God.

Finally, the One history awaits has arrived.

If you have not bowed the knee to Jesus – You deny the testimony of God Himself as to who it was who walked this earth and died and rose again and lives to empower men today.

But, the introduction of Jesus is not finished yet. In verses 23-38 we have the genealogy of Jesus.

His *Genealogy* **reveals** Jesus as the Son of God

Notice verse 23:

Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age.

Thirty was a significant age. It is the age a man could become a priest, it was the age Joseph was when he entered Pharaoh's service and when Ezekiel was called to his ministry and most importantly – the age when David began his rule.

It is an age that marks a man as ready for the great task of his life. Now after years of obscurity, the time is right for Jesus to begin His ministry.

But first – Luke gives us a genealogy. Why is this here?

The key comes from understanding the different genealogies in Luke and Matthew. Both are genealogies of Jesus – but they are quite different.

The point of Matthew's genealogy is to show Jesus as a son of David and a son of Abraham – One who is qualified to assume the royal throne. Jesus is constantly referred to as the Christ – the Messiah – the anointed One.

Matthew leaves out some names to shape his genealogy into three fourteen block groups – but his point is to show Jesus is the royal son of David – the Messiah – the Christ.

However, if you compare Matthew's genealogy with Luke's what stands out is that the line leading from David to Jesus is very different in the two accounts.

Matthew records Jesus' line from David through his son Solomon.

Luke records Jesus' line from David through the insignificant third son of Bathsheba – Nathan.

Matthew says the father of Joseph was Jacob.

Luke seems to say the father of Joseph was Heli.

In fact the only names the same between David and Joseph are Shealtiel and Zerubbabel.

Almost certainly these Shealtiel's and Zerubbabel's are different. The ones in Luke's genealogy are probably named after the more famous ones in Matthew's record.

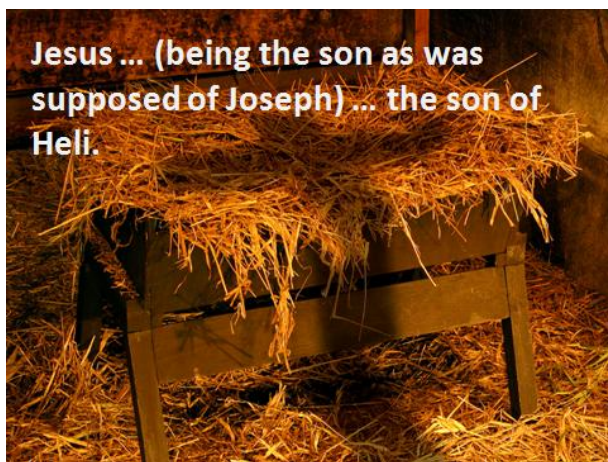
So what is going on? Why two different genealogies.

The most likely answer is that Matthew gives Jesus' legal genealogy through Joseph and Luke gives Jesus' human genealogy through Mary.

It is unfortunate that our English translations don't show this – but in Luke's genealogy – every name has the article – *the* – before it – except one – Joseph.

Combine this with the comment – 'as was supposed.'

There are a number of ways of punctuating this. I want to suggest this way.



Jesus ... (being the son as was supposed of Joseph) ... the son of Heli.

The lack of the article, the comment – as was supposed – these have the effect of showing that Joseph is **not** meant to be read as directly a part of this genealogy. The link from Jesus goes direct to His grandfather – Heli – Jesus ... the son of Heli.

What is going on here is this.

Matthew gives Jesus' **legal** genealogy through Joseph. Jesus is the legal son of Joseph – and so he becomes the legal heir to the throne of David through Joseph.

Luke has a different focus – the **humanity** of Jesus – which is passed down through his natural parent – Mary.

So Matthew gives us Jesus' legal line through Joseph.

Luke gives us Jesus' human line through Mary.

So why doesn't Luke make that clear by mentioning Mary? Luke gives a typically Jewish genealogy without women. You do not give the genealogy of a woman.

So how do you give a genealogy in a virgin birth when only your mother's line is human.

You show it is Jesus' genealogy – but you record His father Joseph in such a way that we know it is not his line we are looking at.

Tradition tells us that Mary's father was named Heli. The early church knew this was the line of Mary.

I know this might sound confusing – but here is the point. Luke's is showing that although Jesus is the Son of God – He is *also* a son of Adam – He is revealed to be fully human.

There are many reasons Jesus came to this world.

To tell us about God. To teach us how to live. To give us an example of how we are to live.

Jesus could have done all of these things without becoming man. But then – He would not have saved us. We would still be dead in our trespasses and sins.

Jesus came to save us. 2 Corinthians 5:21:

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Scripture teaches us that God created Adam – His son. He was the head of all mankind and was placed in Eden – a paradise – with every need met.

And yet despite all of this Adam chose to sin.

He chose to rebel against His Creator – the infinitely Holy Lord.

At that moment the very nature of the created universe changed. Sin and death – sickness and decay entered.

This was an action so utterly depraved – so heinous – that it had cosmic ramifications. When the king of creation sinned against God – the created order – the whole universe suffered.

In reality the fact that God did not destroy this tainted universe then and there is an act of incredible mercy.

And because Adam fell – all mankind fell. We have reaffirmed that our nature is like Adam's so many times – we are corrupt and sinful.

God also made it very clear that the wages of sin is death. Our sin is such an affront to a holy God – our eternal lives are forfeit because of our sin.

But – God promised to send a Messiah who would fulfil all righteousness. Who would wash the unclean and make them holy.

The question that arises is this. How can our sins be washed away?

There are hints that develop throughout Scripture. Genesis 22 – the sacrifice of Isaac – where God provides a ram in place of Isaac as a sacrifice.

There is further development in the accounts like the Passover in Exodus.

But when we reach Leviticus we find that God declares that the blood of an animal – its death – taking its life – shedding its blood – atones for our sin.

Now, any thinking Jew has to ask the question – how can this be so?

I steal, I lust, I lie – then I buy a lamb and sacrifice it and my sins are washed away.

We know from the writings of the rabbis – they wondered – how does this work?

I sinned – how can an animal's life pay my penalty?

But, the men and women of faith simply trusted the word of God.

Then, finally John the Baptist arrived and he pointed to Jesus and said – Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Now the picture becomes clearer. The sacrifice of animals was a picture – leading to the Lamb of God – Jesus.

Only one blood can truly deal with sin. Hebrews 9:28:

Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many.

And yet even here the thinking person asks – how?

How can Jesus' death deal with my sin? We know His blood is pure and precious and divine – yet how can **His** death pay for **my** sin?

Where is the justice – where is the holiness of God in that? How can someone else pay the penalty for me?

Let me share my imperfect understanding. I think that here we come to the glory of Christ.

No other religion or philosophy has a way of dealing with sin against a holy God. *Only* Christianity answers the great question of how sin is dealt with.

The key to the atonement is our **union** with Jesus. Scripture teaches that when we come to Christ – we become united with Jesus forever. We are *in* Him – He is *in* us.

What happens to Him happens to us.

In my mind – I picture myself being placed inside Jesus – covered by Jesus. This means that when the wrath of God falls on Jesus – **my** sin is punished. When Jesus hung on the cross – I hung there in Him. As His blood was poured out – as His life was given up – my sin was paid for.

Galatians 2:20:

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.

1 Peter 2:24:

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree.

God's justice is satisfied – blood is shed – life for life – and since we are in Christ – His blood pays for our sins.

This is the promise of a Redeemer renewed.

But as sons of Adam we can only unite with a son of Adam. Only – a man – a son of Adam – could bear the penalty for the sins of men.

So Jesus – the Son of God – had to be a man – a flesh and blood son of Adam – or else He could not die on our behalf.

Prick Him and He bleeds. Smite Him and He suffers.

The Jews had no category for a God who becomes man. To them God was so holy His name could not even be uttered. To see Him was to die.

But without the virgin birth, without Jesus becoming man – there is no salvation.

And so this genealogy leads from Jesus to Adam, the son of God.

In this – Jesus is revealed as the Son of God – divine but also a man – who will die for His people.

In the great moment of His baptism, all heaven declared that in the person of Jesus was the One – divine and human – who would take away the sin of the world.

The hope of the world is not in science or bail-out packages or human leaders. The hope of the world is in one man – the Son of God – Jesus Christ.

Perhaps some here this morning are not Christians.

You need to know that every one of us has sinned against a holy God and the wages of sin is death. On your own – it will be **your** blood – **your** life who will pay the penalty for your sins.

But:

God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

He came as a man – **His** blood – **His** life – **His** death on the cross – can wash away your sin.

Jesus cries. Trust Him. Join Him. This day – follow Jesus and let His blood avail for you.

This is the God we worship. This is the God who died for us. This is the God we proclaim.