

THE STORYFORMED WAY

Part 6: The Person and Works of Jesus

Questions for Personal Study

- Review the Story. What are the major points so far?
- Read the first 5 chapters of Luke. How does Luke connect Jesus to the OT?
- Read the first 5 chapters of Matthew. How does he do the same?
- Read the Lewis quote below. Is the incarnation the central miracle? Why?
- What are the implications for us that God became a man?
- When you look at the ministry of Jesus, what stands out? Why?
- What do you think really drew people to Jesus?

Questions for Study in Community

- As a community, what does “incarnation” mean to you?
- How does your community “incarnate” (=put on the flesh) the gospel?
- What does it look like on a daily basis to have Jesus with us?
- Why does Jesus grab disciples and spend so much time with just 12 guys?
- What is Jesus teaching the disciples, and why is that important?

Questions for Staying on Mission

- Jesus is the greatest missionary. Why?
- How does Jesus pursue sinners in his life? How do you?
- Do you see yourself more as a tax collector or a Pharisee? Why?
- What message does Jesus preach to both tax collectors and Pharisees?

For Further Reading and Learning

The central miracle asserted by Christians is the Incarnation. They say that God became Man. Every other miracle prepares for this, or exhibits this, or results from this. . . . In the Christian story God descends to re-ascend. He comes down; down from the heights of absolute being into time and space, down into humanity . . . down to the very roots and sea-bed of the Nature He has created. But He goes down to come up again and bring the ruined world up with Him. One has the picture of a strong man stooping lower and lower to get himself underneath some great complicated burden. He must stoop in order to lift, he must almost disappear under the load before he incredibly straightens his back and marches off with the whole mass swaying on his shoulders. (CS Lewis)

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Understanding The Story

As we have traced the Story of God from Genesis, we’ve tried to see the narrative thread of the Bible. Each story within its pages is connected to The Story, the surprising narrative of a holy God’s pursuit of a rebellious creation. That is the main theme of the Bible that jumps off of every page and weaves its way through every story: God saves sinners. Certainly God could have communicated that truth in other ways, but by working through what he has made to bring about the promised rescue, we learn more and more about God, his heart for his creation, our own participation in the rebellion, and our deep and abiding need for God to come and rescue us.

Again and again in the Scripture we have pictures of humanity trying to make our way back to God, as if by our ingenuity (tower of Babel?), obedience (the Law?), or worship practices (the Temple?) we could fix the brokenness that pervades creation and our own hearts. But the brokenness of creation is deep in the human heart, and despite all of God’s gracious activity with Israel, the heart problem is never resolved. In fact, the Old Testament ends with the minor key of the prophets - Israel has utterly failed, and all that is left is a promise that God will somehow do what he has been aiming to do from the beginning. Somehow, the prophets contend, God will come to his creation, rescue it from the rebellion and decay that exists deep within our hearts, and restore the whole world to a better-than-Eden existence. But how will God do it?

Consider the words of the prophet Jeremiah: “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for

they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

Jeremiah predicts that God will come to his people, his creation, and he will finally and fully deal with the heart issue - he will fully remove sin, and he will give them new hearts that love Him and want to obey him. And he will recreate the world like Eden, where everyone knows him and enjoys him forever.

Incarnation: God Steps Into the Story

The New Testament opens with a birth, and the question is always, “Who is this?” Every page asks this question. But both Matthew and Luke recount the lineage of this illegitimate baby named Jesus as a way of answering that question. The genealogies of Jesus remind us that what is about to happen fits into The Story, and is in many ways the culmination of all that God has been doing. Matthew tells us that it is the genealogy of “Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.” For those of us who’ve become familiar with the Story, this should cause our ears to perk up! Jesus is the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham, that through Abraham’s offspring God will bring his blessing back to his creation! And Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s promise to David, that one day God would send a Forever King, who would right all the wrongs and lead God’s people into everlasting enjoyment of God!

Mark, in his gospel, begins with a prophecy from Malachi and Isaiah, the promise that God will come to visit his people, and that a messenger would come to prepare the way for God’s King. The writers of the Gospels go to great lengths to help us see that what is about to happen in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is a direct fulfillment of what God has been promising to do all along: “But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.”

John is perhaps the most clear on what exactly is happening in the birth of Jesus. He goes all the way back to creation and says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” (John 1.1, 14) The God who created everything has stepped into the creation he made. God put on flesh in the person of Jesus, and has come to rescue his people. What humanity has been utterly incapable of doing, God is about to do himself. God is about to put himself on the hook for humanity’s rebellion, and bring resolution to the Story.

The Ministry of Jesus

If the stories of Jesus’ birth tell us about his Identity as the Son of God and prophesied Messiah, his life tells us about what he came to do. Jesus’ ministry begins with his baptism, where the Holy Spirit descends on him and God declares, “This is my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” Jesus is anointed for ministry, and immediately goes into the desert to battle with Satan. Luke makes it clear that the temptation Jesus faces in the desert is a replay of Adam in the garden, on this new Adam passes the test. Jesus puts the devil to flight, and steps into town on a mission: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me... to proclaim good news to the poor... liberty to the captives... and recovering of sight to the blind...” (Luke 4). Teaching, performing miracles, and gathering followers is the work Jesus has come to do.

First, Jesus preaches and teaches. He proclaims that the Kingdom God is coming in and through Him. He declares himself the King, the long-awaited Son of David, come to bring God’s gracious reign back into the world. And he begins to teach what the Kingdom of God is like and how it reverses the values of the world, restoring wholeness to every inch of God’s creation. Jesus invites sinners to repent and believe the good news of God’s rescue!

Second, Jesus performs miracles. Jesus has come to make the world the way God intended it to be from the beginning. Jesus’ miracles do more than draw a crowd. Each miracle points to a re-created world, a world where sin no longer reigns, illness and suffering are wiped away, and death is defeated. In his miracles, Jesus declares himself Lord of creation and Lord of re-creation!

Third, Jesus gathers disciples. He is making a new humanity, a people who come together around King Jesus. This new humanity will be a people set free, a people who love one another as God intended from the beginning, and a people who are charged with extending the Kingdom of God in their own preaching, ministering, and making of disciples.

The New Covenant

One of Jesus’ final works, just before his murder, was a meal with his closest disciples. As he took a cup of wine and a loaf of bread, he told them that God was making the new covenant that Jeremiah predicted. It was a covenant sealed by blood - His blood - that would bring the promised forgiveness of sin and reconciliation to God, that would create a new humanity who would forever be God’s people. And the best news of all was that Jesus was about to do it!