

Who is This King of Glory

Part 1: The King Has Come

OT Prophecies of Christ's Birth and Ministry
December 2008

I was asked earlier this year about the prophecies of Christ in the Old Testament and how He has fulfilled them throughout His life, death, and resurrection. This is a huge topic to consider because as Origen, a Church Father in the early centuries of the Church has said, the Old is found in the New and the New explains the Old. In a great sense through types, analogies, images, poetry, and other forms of literature, the entire Old Testament focuses on the Person of Jesus Christ, the fulfillment of all of Scripture.

Because this topic is so large, I will catalogue it in three or four articles throughout this next year. This first installment discusses the Old Testament prophecies concerning the birth of the Messiah to prepare you for the Christmas season. The second concerns His ministry. The third article will be written concerning the death and resurrection of Jesus in the month of April during Easter to remind us all of His sacrifice for us. Finally, at some point in the fall, I will once again return to this series with an article on the nature of Old Testament prophecies concerning the second coming of our Lord. But let us get started with the first of three glimpses into the beginning of the greatest story of God's revelation and salvation.

In every genre of the Old Testament, Christ has been depicted and held out as the

salvation of humanity. The Pentateuch, which is the Law of Moses shows how humanity cannot become righteous without the help of a Savior who can not only atone for sin, but cleanse the conscience and rid the human nature of the sin nature. The books of histories search for a King who will rule God's people righteously and bring peace to all of Creation. The wisdom literature and poetry seek the true Essence of all wisdom and the Lord who will restore humanity to its original destiny. And the prophets also proclaim God's hidden plan to bring salvation and freedom to the whole earth. It is on these prophets that we focus, specifically on Isaiah's images of the coming Messiah.

Every Christmas, my family has a tradition. We gather together before any gift opening and we read the Christmas story together, found in Matthew 1:18-2:23 and Luke 2:1-40. In a day where many have forgotten the reason for Christmas, a celebration of the Incarnation, the birth of the Messiah, we try to keep His first coming in mind. Before we begin, let me explain what the Messiah came to mean.

The Hebrew word Messiah, which is the equivalent to Christ in New Testament Greek, can be translated "the anointed one." In the Old Testament, prophets, priests, and especially kings, were anointed. In a sense, every king of Israel has been a messiah,

because they were all anointed and set aside for service to God. But the Messiah to which the prophets begin to refer is a larger-than-life Person who has the ability and authority to completely save and redeem not only Israel but the world. This Messiah, as we know Jesus, fulfilled all anointed roles simultaneously: prophet, priest, and king.

As we go through especially Matthew's account, which makes mention of several of the prophecies Jesus' birth fulfilled, we will notice that most of them are from Isaiah. So let's begin with a point made from Luke's chapter specifically, that John the Baptist was the forerunner for Jesus. Luke goes to great lengths to show the supernatural involvement of God in John's birth. This is to fulfill Isaiah's message concerning the one in the desert making straight the paths (Isaiah 40:3), which was an image of the valleys and hardships of travel becoming easy to walk on, fulfilling the requirement of repentance and righteousness for the Messiah to come. The way being made straight signified the people becoming righteous so that the Lord would be welcome in coming. Remember that the people understood God's holiness as a separateness that could not be broached by sinful humans or objects, as the Law demonstrated. And John's message in the desert as he baptized shows this very idea, because his message was one of repentance.

Luke goes on to give us more clues about Jesus being the Messiah. When his parents take him to the temple, they meet Simeon, who proclaims when holding the boy whose name means "The Lord saves" that he can die in peace because he has seen the Lord's salvation, calling Jesus "a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to Your people Israel." This is a reference to all of the Servant Songs of Isaiah (42:1-4;

49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12), which pointed to this child being the wonder child who would be God's salvation for all the people, but more on this in the Easter part of the article. Notice that his parents were amazed at this pronouncement. I assure you that they knew Isaiah's material very well and understood the implications of Simeon's words.

Now we turn to Matthew, who by far goes out of his way to interweave the prophecies with all of Jesus' birth, ministry, death, and resurrection. In Matthew 1:23, the angel tells Joseph to not leave his pledged wife and to name the baby Jesus (meaning "The LORD saves") and then quotes Isaiah 7:14. The virgin in that passage is not necessarily a virgin as we would understand today. Isaiah spoke to King Ahaz concerning a sign that the king would have known, and *alma*, the Hebrew word for virgin might also mean maiden betrothed as well. We do not know who this woman was, but Isaiah and Ahaz did, because Isaiah pointed to her specifically, probably a woman in the royal court, as the sign that the Syro-Ephraimite Coalition would be destroyed. However, it reaches its most poignant and full meaning as a sign of Jesus' divinity here in Matthew.

Just as important is the name given to Jesus by Isaiah under the power of the Holy Spirit, calling Him Immanuel. Immanuel is a Hebrew word that combines words to mean, "God with us." How literally this can be taken as God's Son came to this earth and could fully be called God With Us because that is literally what His incarnation and birth not just signified, but fulfilled!

As we move on in Matthew, we find these kings from the east who ask where Israel's king is to be born. This word king

shows up in descriptions of Jesus' rule in Jeremiah 23:5 and 30:9, as well as Zechariah 9:9. The most common depiction of Jesus in these three places is a king of righteousness and salvation. Then, when Herod gathers together all the priests and scribes to find out where Jesus will be born, they all answer with another prophecy from Micah 5:2. In that passage, Micah is calling the people to rise up and proclaiming a ruler to lead the rebellion. This would of course scare Herod to death, because he loved the throne so much. And this ruler will come out of Bethlehem, the city of David.

Next, Jesus and His parents fled to Egypt to avoid Herod's edict to kill all the boys two years and under. Aside from a major theological point by Matthew that Jesus is essentially reliving the entire Exodus of Israel, going to Egypt and then returning, this is a quote from Hosea 11:1. In that passage, God is recounting how much He loved Israel, but how much their sins had thrown them away from His presence and had pushed them out of the land promised to them. But here, the emphasis is on Jesus doing what the nation of Israel failed to do. He is the true Israel that listened to the Lord and obeyed!

When Herod killed all of these boys, another prophecy was fulfilled, this time from Jeremiah 31:15. This quote symbolizes Rachel as the mother over all Israel, weeping that her children have been killed. Originally, it spoke of the exile and the Israelites leaving the land and those who died in battle. The verses right after this one in Jeremiah speak of hope, reward, and restoration. We know that Jesus came to do these things.

One final notation to be made concerning the birth of Jesus and Old Testament prophecies might be the most cryptic of all of these prophecies. Matthew mentions that they return to Galilee, in Nazareth and then cites a prophet saying, "He shall be called a Nazarene." This is not a direct quote, so it is hard to know what Matthew is citing. But consider Isaiah 11. Here, Isaiah speaks of a Branch, a Root out of Jesse, who is the father of David's lineage. The word for branch is netzer. Sounds much like Nazarene. Kings and kingdoms in the Old Testament are often referred to with the images of trees. So Matthew might have been talking about Jesus being called a Branch. Now in that passage, the striking characteristics of this Branch are that He will have the Spirit of the Lord to discern wisdom, to counsel, to be a righteous judge. That is the closest scholars have come to pinning down this reference by Matthew.

All of these prophecies point to a Messiah who fulfilled the requirements and dreams of a nation seeking someone anointed to set them free. They of course sought this in a king, an anointed one, who could politically and militarily set them free from the bondage of Rome. But that is not what Jesus came to do. As Messiah, His mission was to set them free from a deeper and more crafty enemy, the enemy of the human soul that has imposed itself upon each human being from the time of Adam onward. This Christmas, let us all remember the Messiah's birth and first coming, the Incarnation of the God-Man that had the power and authority to truly set us free! Merry Christmas indeed!