

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

What unfolds in the pages of Scripture was actually conceived in the vastness of eternity, before the foundation of the world. St. Paul reports, *“the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ... has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him [that is, in Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him”* (Eph. 1:3-4). Yes, even before He made us, our God and Father knew that fleshly pride and weakness of resolve would be our downfall. We would fall away from Him in whose holy image we were created. It wasn't enough for Adam to be righteous; it wasn't enough that man knew God and walked with Him in the cool of the garden. No, we wanted to *“be like God”* and to know *“good and evil”* (Gen. 3:5).

And so, the man and the woman disobeyed the one command given them: *“of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die”* (Gen. 2:17). They ate, and they fell. They ate, and their ways were no longer righteous. They ate, and their thoughts were no longer God's thoughts. They were ashamed; they had brought sin and death into the world. How mysterious it is that God knew all this would happen, and yet He made us anyway.

Not content, though, to leave us mired in shame and despair, he began to reveal the remedy He had conceived before the creation. He would send His own Son to be our savior. He revealed to Adam and Eve in the serpent's curse that He Himself would destroy the power of the devil by the offspring of a woman.

It wasn't so clear then that God's promise meant the offspring would be of woman alone, without the aid of a man, but those details would be supplied through the years. And so, we hear the prophet Isaiah proclaim: *“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel”* (Isa. 7:14). And then the angel Gabriel appears to a virgin maid in Nazareth to tell her, who had never known a man, that she would conceive and bear a son who would also be *“the Son of the Most High”* (Luke 1:32). The Holy Spirit would do this impossible task, overshadowing Mary with the power of the Most High and conceiving holy flesh and blood in her less-than-immaculate womb. Shortly thereafter, an angel soothes Joseph's bruised ego by informing him about his pregnant wife: *“that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit”* (Matt. 1:20). And Joseph does as he was commanded. He didn't know Mary *“until she had given birth to a son”* (Matt. 1:25), thus assuring us of the virgin birth.

God revealed more as history unfolded. Abraham was told his offspring shall come as a blessing not just for his physical sons, but for all nations, Jew and Greek.

This promise was fulfilled as the angel proclaimed to lowly shepherds: *“I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.”*

“[T]o us a child is born, to us a son is given,” and you can be forgiven if you think those continue the words of the angel. But they're the words of the prophet Isaiah foretelling the coming of the *“Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace,”* the king who would sit *“on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness.”* Seven hundred years later the angel Gabriel said to Mary: *“the Lord God will give to [your son] 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.”* And nine months later, the angel announced to the shepherds: *“unto you is born ... a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”*

The prophet Micah revealed yet more: look to Bethlehem, where David had been born, as the place from which would *“come forth ... one who is to be ruler in Israel.”* And so Caesar Augustus orders a census to be taken, forcing Joseph, *“of the house and lineage of David,”* with his wife to travel to his ancestral home to register. And while Joseph and Mary were there *“in the city of David,”* Mary has her son in less-than-regal surroundings, wrapping her baby *“in swaddling cloths”* and laying Him *“in a manger.”* Yet He still is the Christ, the anointed king.

Jesus fulfills all these prophecies and more. Of course, all of this could just be coincidence, but the probability of this happening by chance is very small. A mathematics professor calculated the probability *“of one person in the first century fulfilling just eight of the most clear and straightforward Messianic prophecies,”* and that probability was 1 in 10^{17} , a miniscule number (*“The Statistical Probability of Jesus Fulfilling the Messianic Prophecies,”* nickcady.org/2020/02/18/the-statistical-probability-of-jesus-fulfilling-the-messianic-prophecies/, February 18, 2020).

Much more likely is the comforting thought that a loving and gracious God planned it all from before the beginning and executed His plan to perfection, giving a world groping in darkness a light, giving a world mired in sin a savior — Jesus our Savior.

That's what this night is about — proclaiming this Jesus to you: *“unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord,”* and calling you to believe it. God grant it to us.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.