**The Son Has Come**
**Luke 1:26-35**

Now, you've got to admit, there is a certain irony in us starting Advent in a smart hotel, when Mary and Joseph couldn't find a room in an Inn. I mean it's not just that they couldn't book the honeymoon suite at Novotel Bethlehem, or even that they couldn't afford a simple double and had to head out to some road-side motel. There were no rooms and Mary was reduced to giving birth most likely in the same place the innkeeper kept his animals. And the grime and the dirt of that is just about a million miles from these sterile surroundings.

And that begs a question: what's the relevance of this story for us? Because it's like we inhabit two different worlds, isn't it? Just about everything about the nativity story: the culture, the poverty, the social standing of the main players – it's all so far removed from our own experience – and that's before one even gets to the issue of angels appearing. So how are we supposed to span this divide? How are we supposed to bring this story to bear on our lives, if, that is, we even want to?

Well, one-way people try and do that is by romanticizing the story and the stable is transformed into a rustic idyll, filled with light, with cute farm animals, and sturdy honest shepherds and we prettify the whole thing so we can connect with it on an entirely superficial level. Or those on the liberal end of the theological spectrum try to cleanse the story by deleting all the supernatural bits because, hey, we're far too sophisticated for that sort of thing.

But if we don't want to engage in that kind of chronological snobbery, as CS Lewis called it, or if we're honest enough to admit that the picture the gospel writers paint is far from romantic, what does this story of the birth of a baby boy 2000 years ago in squalor, in Roman-occupied Judea, really have to say to us? Why, when there are so many other things you could be doing with your time this Christmas season, should you give this birth any consideration at all?

Well, that's the question we want to give ourselves to over the next 3 Sundays. Next Sunday at our Carol service we're going to look at 'The Saviour has come', and then on the 23rd at our candle-lit communion service, 'The Light of the World has come.' But today we're going to look at 'The Son Has Come'. Because when the angel appears to Mary he tells her in v31, 'behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son.' Then he says in v32, 'He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High.' Then the angel tells Mary that this son will inherit 'the throne of his father David' (v32) – so He's the Son of David. And then finally he says the boy 'will be called holy – the Son of God' (v35). So those are some big claims for a little boy.

**Son of Mary, Son of God.**
In my last job I was a neonatologist, and over the course of my time, I attended loads of births. And when you're in a room with a baby being born – you get to see the full range of emotions, joy, tears, pain, fear, anxiety, shock, relief – you see the works. But I think in all the deliveries I ever attended I never saw boredom. I don't think I ever saw a mother or a father, or even a member of staff, looking bored. It would be almost impossible, wouldn't it?

And yet, when we come to this story and read that Mary gave birth to a son, we can think, 'and?' I mean this happens all the time – admittedly not to virgins – but sons and daughters are being born all the time, so what's the big deal?

And the big deal, of course, is who the Bible tells us this son of Mary was. Because there is something much more going on here than another Jewish peasant girl conceiving out of wedlock or giving birth in appalling conditions. The incredible, we might even say, unbelievable, story line of the Bible is that the eternal God who made everything, the God who threw the stars into space and spoke light and life into being, who upholds everything by His power, who knows the days of our lives and every word we speak before we speak it and every thought we think before we think it, didn't just create this baby in Mary's womb, he didn't just knit it together in the hidden place, as the Psalmist says, He was this baby.

The story line of the Bible is that in some incredible way we struggle to get our brains around, what theologians call the Second Person of the Trinity – God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the second person of the God-head, God the Son, who inhabits eternity, who holds the universe in the palm of His hand, for whom and through whom all things were made, was, in the words of the creed, 'conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary.' That this was not simply another birth to another young woman, another son come into the world, but that He was God's Son, born to a Jewish girl, as her son, in some stinking barn somewhere in Bethlehem, in the backwaters of the Roman empire. As Matthew in his gospel puts it, the story line is that this baby boy, this son, is Immanuel – God with us.

And that is incredible. You see, when John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin was born a few months before, his father Zechariah said of his boy John, "And you, child will be called the prophet of the Most High" (Luke 1:76). But Mary's son, Jesus is in a different league. The angel tells her, 'he will be called the Son of the Most High' (1:32). Now, interestingly, Isaiah the prophet saw all this coming some 700 years before, of course, when he wrote, 'For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, *Mighty God*, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace' (Is 9:6).

But why does any of this matter to us? Why does it matter to us, in 21st Century Switzerland, that a baby born in 1st Century Judea was claimed to have both a human and a divine nature, that in Jesus there was some coming together of the human and the divine, that he was both son of Mary and Son of God?

Well, there are many reasons, but I just want to highlight two. Firstly it tells us that whatever preconceptions you might have about God, the God of the Bible is not a God who stands aloof, or apart, untouched and uninterested in the world He has created, in your world. He's not like an engineer who sets the machine going but then walks away as it spins out of control. Rather He is a God who has entered our world and knows its joys and sorrows – your joys and sorrows. He knows what it is to be born and to die. What it is to laugh with friends and mourn with them. He knows what it is to celebrate and party and to withdraw and be quiet. He knows the heights of success and the lows of seeming failure. He knows

what it is to be tempted and to resist temptation far better than we will ever know. In short, the God of all eternity, knows what it is to be human, to be you.

And that means that not only is God not out of touch, neither is He out of reach. You see, every other religion tells you that you have to build your ladder to God to save yourself. Through your own efforts, by improving yourself, by whatever means, you have to escape the gravitational pull of this world and ascend and become more god-like. And, of course, what comes with that is deep, nagging uncertainty: can I ever be sure? Can I ever be sure I've done enough? But Christianity is unique – because rather than us building our ladder to God, God has come down to us. Rather than us trying to rescue ourselves and escape the world, the Bible tells us that God has entered our world to do the rescuing for us.

So, the fact that Mary's son was her son, but was also God's son, is of profoundly greater importance than just being a line in a creed. It tells you – God knows you, He knows what it is to be you, and He's entered your world that you might know Him.

But before we look at that in more detail – let's look at the third description the angel gives of Jesus. Yes, he'll be the son of Mary and the Son of God, but he also tells us He will be the Son of David.

**Son of David**
Luke 1:32-3 again, 'And the Lord God will give to him 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.'

When we were back in the UK some months back, someone came up to me in church one day and said, in all seriousness, 'Martin, I know that you've always longed for a son and…' and he began to tell me why I didn't need to feel so bad about having daughters and how he was sure the Lord would still bless me through them anyway, as if my girls weren't quite up to the same mark as a son would be. And I stood there with my blood pressure getting higher and higher until I'd finally had enough and said, 'actually can I just stop you there. I can honestly say I have never longed for a son, in fact I love my daughters very much and I'm perfectly content with them, thank you very much.' Because I've never felt some kind of disappointed longing for a son. Now, sons-in-law, that's a different matter all together, I pray for four of those every day, but not a son – I don't think that kind of thinking ever crossed my mind.

But what if you're a king? What if you're a royal family, and you need a son to fill the throne and continue the royal line? That would put a whole different perspective on it, wouldn't it? And the announcement of Prince William and Kate's expecting a baby brought some of that home this week – as the British press spoke of 'sighs of relief' that the Royal line can continue for another generation.

And David was Israel's most famous king. His was the golden age and God had promised him that He would provide a son for David whose throne would

endure, whose reign would never end. But to anyone looking on, things hadn't worked out that way. The nation of Israel had gone into decline, and whilst there were some good kings who followed David, and who tried to turn things around, there were plenty of bad ones. And the nation endured military defeat after military defeat, and finally conquest and exile in Babylon. Until now, when having returned to the land of Israel, they were under Roman occupation and the only king they had was Herod, and he wasn't even a Jew.

So people longed for David's ultimate, greater Son, the Messiah, to come – to rule and to reign and to liberate them from their oppressors. And the angel is telling Mary, 'Mary, your son is that Son.' Once again of course, Isaiah had seen this coming. The passage we read earlier from Isaiah 9 continues, 'For to us a child is born, to us a son is given… Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore' (Is 9:6,7).

But in our highly individualistic western cultures, where we so prize our personal autonomy and our right to call the shots over our lives, talk of a king being born, who has come to rule and reign and exercise everlasting dominion over us, may not exactly sound like music to our ears. In fact, it might be the very thing you rebel against.

Yet, I want to suggest two reasons why that would be the wrong reaction. First, is the whole issue of superior fire-power. If this Son born in poverty in Bethlehem, which just happens to be David's home town, is in fact the promised Son of David, the King who will have everlasting dominion over all people; if He is the Son of God come as a human, who rules now, not on some earthly throne but in glory; if He is the one who holds the universe in the palm of His hand and yet also knows you better than you know yourself; then wouldn't He be the very king you should welcome and bend the knee to? Wouldn't it be folly not to?

But the second reason you should welcome such a king, is not simply because He is more powerful than you, but because He won't let you down. He is unlike any other ruler. Most other people who want to have sway over you, whether kings, or politicians, or someone in your personal life, does so for their gain, for their good. Now I'm not saying that every politician is as cynical as that, but there is something about power that corrupts, that needs to be fed. But Jesus is unlike any other king. All other kingdoms and empires come to an end. They rise and fall. I mean, just ask us Brits. There was a day when our empire covered the globe, but now we're struggling to persuade the Scottish to stay with us! But every empire comes and goes, God raises them up and brings them down. And only Christ's will remain. As the angel says to Mary, 'Of his kingdom there will be no end' (Luke 1:33).

And that means He won't let you down. He's not like a politician who needs to buy your vote by making promises that He can't keep. He doesn't need you in that sense at all. In fact, far from Him needing you for His gain, His rule and His

reign is for your supreme and ultimate gain. Because this king is for you – not to use you.

And in closing I want you to see just one way He does that.

**That we might become sons**

Listen to what Paul writes in Galatians 4: 'When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God' (4:4-7).

You see, the message of the Bible, simply put, is that we are more lost – our condition is more hopeless - than we could imagine. But at the same time it tells us we are more loved by God than we could ever hope.

And to describe our situation it uses the picture of us being slaves. Now you may sit there and think, 'hey, who are you calling a slave?!' But just think what we might be enslaved to. We try and break bad habits or bad attitudes, but find that we can't – we keep sinking back into them; or we find ourselves controlled by fears that come to dominate us; or we're desperate for the affirmation of another, even when that leads us into harmful relationships. Or, if we think we're too sophisticated for that kind of thing, in our desire to possess something or someone, we discover that it ends up possessing us, and controlling us, so that even a good thing can become our slave driver. And ultimately of course, we are all enslaved to death – because there's just no escaping it. And over us all, Paul says, stands God's law – and its righteous requirements. And either we realize through our repeated failures that we just can't live the kind of life God calls us to live, and so it condemns us; or by concentrating on the big outer sins and ignoring the telling inner sins of the heart we deceive ourselves that we can keep God's law, and we end up proud, looking down on others from our lofty moralistic mountain. And so, if we're honest, we discover that maybe the Bible's not so wrong after all.

So, putting it theologically, we're in a mess, we're in a hole and the ladder's broken and we need someone to deliver us from this slavery. And the message of Advent is that that's what Jesus has come to do. You see, whilst He was fully human – born of a woman, He was fully human with one important difference. He perfectly kept the law. He lived the life you and I fail to live, and he died the death you and I deserve to die.

And out of His love for us, the Son of God paid the penalty for our sins and our failures. The curse, the condemnation of the law fell on him, instead of us. And in so doing we get to walk free. But the remarkable thing is that God does not then leave us in some kind of no-mans land. It is not that He redeems us from slavery, and pays the price that sets us free and then says, 'now off you go and live as a freeman.' No – God sets us free and promptly adopts us as sons.

And ladies this includes you, because you have to understand the picture Paul is using here. In the Roman world, a Roman citizen would frequently adopt a grown adult male – often a freed slave - as his son; and then proceed to make that adopted son the heir of all his wealth. And in that passage in Galatians 4, Paul is saying that is exactly what God the Father has done for you – and it doesn't matter whether you're male or female. Jesus, *The* Son came that you might become a son, rather than a slave. Through his life, death and resurrection, Jesus came to release you from slavery to sin, to death, to fear, and make you a joint heir with Him. He became poor that you might become rich.

And the first down payment of that inheritance is His Holy Spirit who gives you the faith to believe, who gives you new life, as a son. Who enables you to approach the eternal God, and call Him the name a young Jewish boy would call his dad, 'Abba' – Daddy. The Spirit always confirming to you, you are a child of God, you are loved; Christ came for you; He died for you; your sin has been atoned for; He has set His affection upon you; you have a Father.

So why does it matter this Advent that two thousand years ago a young woman gave birth to a son in poverty? Because His poverty was your riches. That as you put your trust in Jesus, and not in yourself, you might hear the Spirit saying to you, you too are a son, and God is your Father.