

ADVENT  DEVOTION



WAITING FOR LIGHT TO COME

BY ERIK REED



As we enter this Advent season, we step into a period of waiting. We are celebrating the Incarnation of the Son of God into the world, counting down the days of Jesus' birth. The word "*advent*" means the arrival of something or someone. From Scripture's first few chapters, and throughout its pages, we see this waiting for Israel's Messiah, Savior of the world. All of creation, including mankind, shatters under the curse and stain of sin. We live in a world of darkness. We need forgiveness, restoration, and hope. God makes a promise, and reveals it through His Word, that salvation will come.

For thousands of years, people awaited the coming of this Redeemer. This Christmas season is about remembering what God accomplished in the sending of His Son, our Lord, Jesus into the world. Over the next twenty-eight days, we are joining with saints of old in waiting for light to come. We look backward to see God's promises, signs, and works that point to the Savior. We look at our present and at the ways our lives find peace and hope through Jesus' constant nearness to us as Immanuel, God with us. And we long for His second coming.

This Advent season is about waiting on the Light of the World to come.

As John tells us in the opening lines of his Gospel (John 1:9)...

**THE TRUE LIGHT, WHICH GIVES LIGHT TO
EVERYONE, WAS COMING INTO THE WORLD.**

HER OFFSPRING



I WILL PUT ENMITY BETWEEN YOU AND THE WOMAN, AND BETWEEN YOUR OFFSPRING AND HER OFFSPRING; HE SHALL BRUISE YOUR HEAD, AND YOU SHALL BRUISE HIS HEEL.

GENESIS 3:15 (ESV)

The dust settled in the Garden of Eden as the reality of sin's calamity fell upon Adam and Eve. They hid themselves, suddenly aware of their nakedness and shame. The One they had known as their Creator, Companion, and Provider, was now their Judge. Sin wrecked everything.

God created Adam and Eve to walk with Him in joyous, unbroken fellowship. But Satan entered the Garden, armed with questions of God's goodness and wisdom in restricting their choices. They fell for Satan's scheme, and mankind plunged into enmity and opposition to God.

God set up a courtroom-style verdict for Adam and Eve. The gavel of God's justice slammed, and they received a guilty verdict for their sin, and with that a sentence of many hardships in life, including death. But Satan also stood trial. God decreed a future promise of Satan's defeat in addition to a curse. This became humanity's promise of hope.

God tells Satan, "*I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.*" The serpent and the woman will stay at war. Enmity will govern their relationship. Her offspring will bruise the serpent's head, and the serpent's head will bruise his heel. The imagery is one of an offspring of Eve crushing the head of the serpent under his foot. The picture is of the ultimate defeat of Lucifer, crushed under the victorious foot of Christ. Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection from the grave upends the curse and brings salvation to all who believe upon him. But in the Garden on that dark day of Adam and Eve's rebellion, the glimmer of light from the hope of that promise lay in the distant future. Countless millions of weary sinners and sufferers through the years placed their eyes on that promise and waited. Waiting is hard. It requires faith. It forces us to cling patiently to what God has said and trust His timing.

What are you waiting on right now? What promises of God are you clinging to though you haven't yet seen their ultimate fulfillment? Advent season is a time of reflection, waiting, and faith in God's promises. There is light amid the darkness. Even on humanity's darkest day, the light of God's grace is on display for sinners.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Have you had areas in your life that have felt dark and hopeless?
- Why is the promise given in the Garden of Eden so important for our faith?
- What lessons do you pray God would teach you about waiting on the fulfillment of His promises during this Advent season?

IN THE BEGINNING



IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD, AND THE WORD
WAS WITH GOD, AND THE WORD WAS GOD.

JOHN 1:1 (ESV)

It is crucial to understand the origins of Jesus. Those first moments as an embryo in Mary's womb were not the beginning of the Son of God's existence. The first cries that pierced the Bethlehem skies as Mary delivered her baby boy were not the true origins of the one they'd wrap in swaddling clothes. The one born in the manger existed eternally. The one entering the world was its author.

John begins his Gospel about the life of Jesus with echoes of Genesis 1:1. He starts his account of the life of Jesus "in the beginning." He calls Jesus the Word. The Greek origin of "the Word" is "Logos." It literally means "word." The idea here is that Jesus is the Eternal Word of God. The Second Person of the Trinity is God's Word.

The unique opening of John's Gospel grounds Jesus' existence before the incarnation. Before becoming flesh, the Divine Son existed. He was with God. This distinction of the Word from God is vital. We clearly see distinguishable Persons. The Word and God, as listed in this verse, are describing the Son and the Father. John introduces us to the Word, who was from the beginning with God, but then he jars our consciousness and proclaims, "and was God." John baffles the Jewish understanding of God. Every good Jew confesses, "God is One." While never swerving from that conviction, John reveals that the Word who is with God, is God.

These distinctions and particularities are important theologically. We see two distinct persons at the beginning of John's Gospel: God and the Logos. As the book unfolds, we discover our God is One, but reveals Himself in Three Persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The foundational elements of Trinitarian theology take on distinguishable shape in these opening words. John says (1:3) the Word created the world, without which nothing would be made. Jesus had no beginning like everything else created; He made it all.

These truths establish for us the identity of the one who "became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (vs 14). The man born in Bethlehem and raised in Nazareth, named Jesus, is the eternal Word who was from the beginning with God, and is God. Jesus isn't a man who achieves deity. Jesus is the embodiment of the eternal God who took on flesh and dwelled among us.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- What does John 1:1 teach us about the origins of Jesus?
- Why did God become flesh and enter into the world? What was the purpose?
- How does God coming into the world comfort you today in the things you are facing?

THE ETERNAL LAMB



ALSO IT WAS ALLOWED TO MAKE WAR ON THE SAINTS AND TO CONQUER THEM. AND AUTHORITY WAS GIVEN IT OVER EVERY TRIBE AND PEOPLE AND LANGUAGE AND NATION, AND ALL WHO DWELL ON EARTH WILL WORSHIP IT, EVERYONE WHOSE NAME HAS NOT BEEN WRITTEN BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD IN THE BOOK OF LIFE OF THE LAMB WHO WAS SLAIN.

REVELATION 13:7-8 (ESV)

We often associate the book of Revelation with the end of the story. In many ways, that is correct. Much of John's revelation focuses on events that would happen within the lifetimes of the first-century readers who received it, but a lot of it is future oriented to the Day when Jesus will return to defeat Satan, judge the world in righteousness, and make all things new. But our passage today carries us into the past—eternity past—to the time before the world, or anything in it, existed. God dwelled in eternity. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit lived in perfect love, harmony, and unity with one another, with a singular divine will to create a universe that displayed the glory of God.

In our passage today, John warns about a beast who wages war against the world, particularly the Church. The beast makes war on the saints and conquers them. Everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain will worship the beast. Listen to that again. As the beast makes war in the last days, all will worship him, all except those whose names were written by God from the foundation of the world (meaning before the world's formation). God wrote these names in a book entitled "*the life of the Lamb who was slain*." He named the book after Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross. This predates the world's existence. It's before sin even occurred. And those who resist worshipping the beast came solely from the in-erasable certainty of their names in that book.

This is a mystery we can never scale the heights of. We don't have to unravel the mystery in order to stand in awe of it. This passage assures us that the plan of redemption was not reactive to humanity's sin. Before people existed, and before Adam and Eve sinned, the Triune God determined to display His glory in the Son becoming a man and dying for sinners on the cross. The Lamb slain was not a Plan B option, but the plan of God from the foundation of the world. Jesus is the Eternal Lamb of God.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Why are some things in the Bible considered a mystery? Why do we as Christians have to be content with the limitations of our understanding?
- What kind of comfort does it give you as a Christian to know your name was written in the book of the life of the Lamb who was slain from the foundation of the world?
- What confidence does this passage give you today about God's plan to save us and about His strength to sustain us through trials and temptations?

A SON IS GIVEN



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 COUNSELOR, MIGHTY GOD, EVERLASTING FATHER, PRINCE OF PEACE. 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. THE ZEAL OF THE LORD OF HOSTS WILL DO THIS.

ISAIAH 9:6-7 (ESV)

Echoes are fascinating things. If you are in the right environments, you can yell at the top of your lungs and your voice will come shouting back to you. It is incredible to consider that sound waves originating from our mouths reverberate through the atmosphere.

There are echoes throughout Scripture. The first promise of the gospel, given by God in Genesis 3:15, echoes throughout the Old Testament until the arrival of Jesus. We hear those echoes in prophecies and in figures who served as types of the Christ who was coming to the world. Isaiah 9 is one of those echoes.

Our passage today echoes God's promise that the offspring of Eve will crush Satan's head. A child will be born, a son given. This is no ordinary child. The government shall rest on his shoulder. This speaks to the Lordship of the coming child. He will rule as king over peoples and kingdoms of the earth, even those who do not recognize Him as Lord.

Then God declares through Isaiah the names of the coming Son: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. There are none wiser than Jesus, the Wonderful Counselor. He directs us as the Good Shepherd who knows best. He is Mighty God, the author and creator of the universe. He brings order, commands obedience, and saves His people. He is the Everlasting Father. The coming child is not God the Father (the first person in the Trinity). Everlasting Father is a title based on His function and role as the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. The child born is Prince of Peace. He offers peace to all who come to Him by faith. He forgives sins, provides graces to the weak, and gives hope to the downtrodden.

This Scripture directs its first hearers, and us, to long for the coming child. It is an echo and reminder that One is coming who will defeat the Serpent. This Savior will redeem man from the curse, and rule as true Lord over all the earth. The first hearers undoubtedly wondered: Who is he? When will he arrive? How long, O God, until the Light will come? But we know today who He was. Jesus came born of the woman, and as the crucified, resurrected, and ascended King of the world, He has authority on heaven and earth. The government is on His shoulders. All people answer to Him. He is our Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. Seek Him today.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- What does it mean to talk about echoes of Jesus running throughout the Old Testament?
- How does Jesus fulfill the promise of the Isaiah 9 passage in His life, death, resurrection, and ascension to Heaven?
- How does the reign of Jesus in the world bring peace and assurance in our lives today?

A LIGHT TO THE NATIONS



I AM THE LORD; I HAVE CALLED YOU IN RIGHTEOUSNESS; I WILL TAKE YOU BY THE HAND AND KEEP YOU; I WILL GIVE YOU AS A COVENANT FOR THE PEOPLE, A LIGHT FOR THE NATIONS, TO OPEN THE EYES THAT ARE BLIND, TO BRING OUT THE PRISONERS FROM THE DUNGEON, FROM THE PRISON THOSE WHO SIT IN DARKNESS.

ISAIAH 42:6-7 (ESV)

At the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11), mankind is unified in its language, customs, and culture. But it also united them in their sinful rebellion against God. People have sought to live life apart from Him and erect structures to signify their greatness. This brings God's judgment against them, and He scatters them across the world. He confused their languages. He established new cultures. This developed new customs. Different skin colors developed over time in relation to their proximity to the equator. He formed new nations.

The next chapter (Genesis 12) established the call of Abram and God's covenant to make him His own. They will be His people, and He will be their God. But this choosing of a people did not mean God was turning His back on the nations. No, it is through blessing Israel (Abraham's descendants) that God's blessing goes to all the nations. God's ultimate plan of redemption included the nations. And how would that redemption come? Through the Jewish Messiah who would come as a light to the nations. Isaiah 42 opens by saying, "*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.*" Jesus is that servant.

Our passage today anchors the hope of the nations to the coming Messiah. He is a covenant for the people, meaning, through Him people are grafted into God's salvation and promises. He is the light for the nations. He leads and directs them on the path to righteousness. Only in Him do the nations have their eyes open and find freedom from their imprisonment in darkness.

Left in sin, the world sits in darkness. But Jesus is the light that leads us out. In Christ alone the nations find reconciliation to God. All nations find their inheritance as children of Adam. We all descend from the same family, and we all suffer with the same sinful nature inherited from our first parents. But the Light of the Nations leads us home. Jesus' birth into the world was not only good news for the Jews. The Jewish Messiah came to reconcile every nation, tribe, and tongue to their Creator. This Advent season is about rejoicing in the rescue from the darkness through the chosen servant who leads us by His light.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Why is it important that the Old Testament promises that Israel's Messiah will be the world's Savior?
- What does it mean that the Messiah will be a light to the nations? Why is that image important in understanding the Messiah's role?
- When did the light of Jesus shine in your life? Describe how you came to see the light of Christ.

FAITHFUL WAITING



NOW THERE WAS A MAN IN JERUSALEM, WHOSE NAME WAS SIMEON, AND THIS MAN WAS RIGHTEOUS AND DEVOUT, WAITING FOR THE CONSOLATION OF ISRAEL, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT WAS UPON HIM. AND IT HAD BEEN REVEALED TO HIM BY THE HOLY SPIRIT THAT HE WOULD NOT SEE DEATH BEFORE HE HAD SEEN THE LORD'S CHRIST.

LUKE 2:25-26 (ESV)

A lot of life is waiting. Couples who discover they are having a child wait for months for its arrival. Students wait years to finish their education. Kids wait until their sixteenth birthday to get a driver's license. Adults wait to find the right job or to buy their dream home. Waiting is an inescapable part of life.

One of the big themes found in Scripture is waiting. The people of God waited for the promises the LORD gave them to come to fruition. Abraham and Sarah waited for a child. David waited for his turn to reign as king of Israel. The nation waited for the promised Messiah. This theme of waiting for the Messiah is crucial in Scripture. God promised to send a Redeemer to the nations who would be crushed for the iniquities and sins of His people (Isaiah 53). God's people knew the promises and longed for the day of their fulfillment. Even the prophets longed to see the promises of the Messiah's coming fulfilled (Matthew 13:17).

Our passage today introduces us to one individual who waited. Simeon was a righteous and devout man. He loved the LORD, and the Holy Spirit revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah come. Imagine this promise! Millions of Jewish men and women had lived and died waiting on the promise to be realized. Their faith rested on God's faithfulness to do what He says He will do. They had to trust God's timing. They relied on His wisdom to determine when the Redeemer would come. But Simeon trusted God's word to Him. He waited with faith.

Faithful waiting is the lot of Christians. Before Jesus' birth, God's people waited for the Savior's arrival. After Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection, believers await the Day He returns to make all things new. We wait in a world filled with afflictions, suffering, and sorrow. We wait on our inheritance in Heaven, but we trust the One who made the promise. This Advent season, as we reflect on how people throughout the Bible were waiting on God's promise of the Christ to be fulfilled, let's remember He fulfilled that promise. He will fulfill His promises to us too. We can show our trust in God through our waiting with faith, trust, and hope. We do not lose heart when the wait is long. Our hearts cling to this: God keeps His Word.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Why is waiting such a difficult practice for us?
- How does God use waiting in our lives to mature us in the faith?
- What are some promises of God you are waiting on Him to fulfill?

THE SECOND MAN



THE FIRST MAN WAS FROM THE EARTH, A MAN OF DUST; THE SECOND MAN IS FROM HEAVEN.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:47 (ESV)

Every human being born into the world is born a child of Adam. This means our birth is into Adam's sin, corruption, and fall. Our first parents (Adam and Eve) were once without sin in the world, but their choice to disobey God's command (Genesis 3) brought all their posterity into their plight as sinners at enmity with God. Adam is the representative head over all of mankind.

We are not often familiar with how headship works. In our world today, it is not common to speak about someone being your head. Headship refers to representation. A foreign ambassador of the United States to China is a representative of America. He stands as the individual who represents the United States, our policies, and our commitments. Likewise, Adam is the head of humanity. God applied his actions to all his descendants, making us all sinners.

We struggle with this because we don't want someone else's actions to count against us. We don't want Adam's sin charged to us. But this is how God created the world. Adam is the first man, and he represents all of mankind. His sin and rebellion against God fracture the relationship which man existed to enjoy with his Creator. All of Adam's offspring are born into this broken relationship with corrupted natures inherited from him.

But the coming of Christ in the world is the hope of mankind. Jesus is not born like all others. He is not born of the seed of man. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. Why is this significant? Adam and Jesus are the only men to live on the earth who did not have an earthly father. This makes Jesus the Second Man. He's the Second Adam.

Our passage today, considering the Advent season, is another reminder of how Jesus' birth saves sinners. If Jesus comes like every other man, He cannot be our Savior. He would possess the same inherent guilt and sin from Adam we have. But he was not from Adam. He was not from the first man, who was from the earth. He was the second man, who was from heaven. Only as the second man can Jesus be born without sin (or a sin nature) and without Adam's guilt. As the sinless second man, he can obey where the first man sinned. Just as the guilt of the first man applies to all men, so the obedience and sacrifice of the second man applies to all who receive him by faith. Who is your head: the first man, Adam, or the second man, Jesus?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Why do people struggle with the idea of one person's actions counting against all?
- How is Jesus' birth different from every person before Him and after Him? How did He avoid Adam's guilt and sin nature?
- If we say it's not fair for Adam's sins to count against us, how does that backfire in the case of Jesus' sacrifice and obedience?

SON OF ABRAHAM



THE BOOK OF THE GENEALOGY OF JESUS CHRIST,
THE SON OF DAVID, THE SON OF ABRAHAM.

MATTHEW 1:1 (ESV)

Man's sin and rebellion against God could have been the permanent end of our relationship with God. God created us in the exalted status as image-bearers. Our lives display the glory and nature of God to the rest of the created world. Mankind held a place of special relationship with God. We were the apex and crown jewel of creation. It was only after creating humans that God added the descriptor "very good" to His work.

Our sin did not have the last word. God promised that Eve's offspring would come and bruise the head of the Serpent in victory. This didn't stop the immediate offspring of Adam and Eve from continuing in sin. The descendants of our first parents sinned and rebelled with such wickedness that God destroys the earth, preserving only a remnant of animal life and Noah's family (Genesis 6). Even after such judgment and wrath came upon the earth, by the time we reach Genesis 11, mankind has turned its back on God again. Following the scattering of the peoples and confusing of the languages, God calls a man by the name of Abram. God shows grace.

Genesis 12 introduces the story of Israel. God chooses a man through whom to create a nation. Abram will father a nation. God establishes a covenant with him to bless him and make him prosper. Abram, later named Abraham, will father the nation of Israel, God's covenant people. They were to bless all nations. Their purpose and identity as a nation was to channel God's blessing to go to the world.

In our text today, Matthew's Gospel starts with Jesus' genealogy and human origins. He is the son of Abraham. What does this mean? It means Jesus is not only from Abraham's line (Jewish), but He is also the One through whom the nations of the world will be blessed (Genesis 22:18).

It is through Jesus, and the billions of forgiven sinners whom He will make children of the promise, that we see the fulfillment of God's Word that the children of Abraham will be numerous as the stars of the sky (Genesis 26:4) and the sands of the shore (Genesis 22:17). Matthew begins his account of the life and work of Christ—climaxing in His sin-atoning death for sinners and victory over the grave—with the important signifier: son of Abraham. This Son of Abraham would bring many sons to glory through his own suffering (Hebrews 2:10).

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Why is Jesus' connection to Abraham so important for Matthew to begin his Gospel?
- What special relationship did God establish with Abram (Abraham)?
- How does Jesus fulfill the promise of countless descendants of Abraham without ever having any children? How does Jesus' life, death, and resurrection graft people into the covenant people of God?

A PROPHET LIKE MOSES



THE LORD YOUR GOD WILL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME
FROM AMONG YOU, FROM YOUR BROTHERS—IT IS TO HIM YOU SHALL LISTEN

DEUTERONOMY 18:15 (ESV)

The first great prophet in the Bible is Moses. He is an unlikely prophet because of his own self-professed lack of eloquence and not being an excellent speaker (Exodus 4:10). Moses spent his upbringing and developmental years in Egypt. He was a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but as Jacob's family found refuge from famine in Egypt, many generations of Hebrews (Israelites/Jews) grew up there. God called to Moses (Exodus 3) and raised him up to serve as a mouthpiece for God to Pharaoh. Moses' role included warning of the coming plagues and as the one who spoke God's Word to the Israelites as they roamed the desert after the exodus from Egypt.

In our passage today, Moses speaks from the Spirit of God concerning a prophet God will raise up. The people of Israel have only known Moses as their leader. He has stood as a Mediator between the LORD and the people. God has used him to communicate directly with His people. Through Moses, God revealed His character to the people (Exodus 34:6). He directed them on how to live according to His commands and laws (Exodus 20). God spoke through Moses.

The promise of a prophet like Moses would not be fulfilled in Joshua, Samuel, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, or any of the other prophets of the Old Testament. The one foretold by Moses is none other than the Messiah. How do we know that? One reason is the LORD tells of one prophet, not many. Israel would have many future prophets, but Moses is promising something different. This prophet would be one like Moses. This also sets apart the Messiah alone above all the other prophets. The LORD spoke with Moses face-to-face, as a man speaks with a friend (Exodus 33:11). The future prophets would receive visions and dreams, but not have a unique relationship with the LORD like Moses. But the Messiah, the prophet to come, would be a prophet like Moses.

Jesus is the prophet foretold in this passage. He spoke the words of God. In fact, all His words were from God (John 12:49). The Hebrew writer tells us that God spoke through the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken by His Son (Hebrews 1:1-2). Jesus fulfills God's promise through Moses to raise up a prophet, and it is to Him we are all to listen. He alone speaks the words of life (John 6:68). The Word made flesh speaks the words of God to us as our Great Prophet. In Him, we come to know God, we know God's will and commands, we know ourselves, we know His promises, and we know the way of salvation.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- What was the role of the prophet in the Bible?
- What set Moses apart from every other prophet who would follow him? Why is it significant that Deuteronomy 18:15 points to a coming prophet like Moses?
- How does Jesus fulfill the promise of the coming prophet like Moses?

SON OF DAVID, HAVE MERCY!



THE BOOK OF THE GENEALOGY OF JESUS CHRIST, THE SON OF DAVID, THE SON OF ABRAHAM

MATTHEW 1:1 (ESV)

David is one of the most important figures in the Old Testament. David's story begins in 1 Samuel. Israel longs for a king like the neighboring nations possess. The first king is one that has the stature of strength and handsome looks that the people wanted to identify their king. It was a man after the people's own hearts. But Saul was a terrible king. His rebellion led to the LORD stripping the kingdom away from him to be put in another man's hands. This man would not be perfect by any stretch, but he would be a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14).

The LORD used the prophet Samuel to identify David as His anointed to replace Saul as king. He wasn't the biggest or best looking in the nation, but he was God's man. He tended sheep, protecting the flock from predators. Zeal for the LORD consumed him. When he visited the battle lines where the Philistines and Israelites stood face-to-face with one another, he witnessed Goliath taunting the armies of Israel and mocking the LORD. This infuriated him and led him to do what no other warrior dared to do: fight Goliath. He only needed a slingshot and stones to defeat the seasoned warrior. This shot David into fame throughout Israel and made him an immediate enemy of Saul, who envied the praises people lavished on the young shepherd boy.

David eventually took the role God set apart for him years prior. Saul's death led to David's institution as king. But beyond David being a king, it was his lineage that would bring forth the Messiah. The Jewish people waited for the promised one of Israel. The One promised in the Garden, through Abraham, and by Moses came to be expected through David. Israel's Messiah would be the Son of David because the Messiah would be a king. This expectation permeated Israel.

Jesus asks the question in Luke 20:41 (NIV) "*Why is it said that the Messiah is the son of David?*" This shows that the basic expectation of the Messiah's coming was that he would be a part of the lineage of David. This explains why many throughout Jesus' earthly ministry referred to him as Son of David (Matthew 9:27; 20:31). The coming of the Son of David led to the cries of blind men to plead for him to give them mercy. He did. When crowds rebuked them for bothering with Jesus, because of how important they perceived Jesus to be and how unimportant they perceived the men to be, Jesus stopped for them.

The coming of the Son of David signified the coming of a merciful king. He healed the blind with tenderness and love. Unlike the kings of the world who use others to exalt themselves in power and comfort, this king lowers himself as a servant to comfort his people. Rejoice in the Son of David, our king, Jesus Christ the Lord. Cry out for His mercies.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Why is David so significant to the story of Israel?
- What does the title "*Son of David*" refer to? How did Jewish hearers understand it?
- How does Jesus defy all expectations of earthly kings?

THE EVERLASTING KING



HE WILL BE GREAT AND WILL BE CALLED THE SON OF THE MOST HIGH. 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.

LUKE 1:32-33 (ESV)

The people of Israel expected a Messiah who would come from the house of David. The Son of David was a title to identify this figure. He would be more than a ruler of Israel, He would reign as King of kings of all the earth and Redeemer of sinful men. Paul stood before the people in Antioch (Acts 13:23) and told them, *"Of this man's offspring God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised."* The promised one of Israel is a Savior. And His name is Jesus.

The LORD promised to David that he would never lack a descendant on his throne. His kingdom would be never-ending (2 Samuel 7:16). In Isaiah 11:1 we remember the promise of God to David when Isaiah (Isaiah 11:1) says, *"There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit."* Jeremiah 23:5 expounds, *"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which He will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'"*

In our passage today, we see the angel Gabriel tell young Mary that the child she carries will be great. They will call Him Son of the Most High, signifying His deity. Gabriel says God is giving him the throne of his father David. Jesus is the promised Son of David who fulfills the promise to David of a throne with no end.

Who is this righteous Branch from David who will reign as king, execute justice, and save his people? Matthew opens his Gospel with the genealogy of Jesus, declaring He is the Son of David. By calling Him the Son of David he is signifying to his readers that this is the promised heir. This is the Righteous Branch of whom the prophets foretold. He is the true king from the line of David whose rule and reign will never end. This is why people call Jesus the King of kings. He is rightful heir of David's throne, and his kingdom has no end. He sits enthroned even now at the right hand of the Father, King over every nation, tribe, and tongue. The advent of the Savior, the Son of the Most High, was the coming of a king whose reign has no end.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Why did Israel want a king? What role do kings play?
- What promise does God give David about his kingdom? How was David different than Saul? Why did Israel anticipate the coming of an heir from David?
- Why should the truth that Jesus' kingdom has no end bring us confidence in a chaotic world?

THE VIRGIN SHALL CONCEIVE



THEREFORE THE LORD HIMSELF WILL GIVE YOU A SIGN. BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL CONCEIVE AND BEAR A SON, AND SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL.

ISAIAH 7:14 (ESV)

The prophet Isaiah spoke more than any other Old Testament prophet about the coming Messiah, which occurred nearly 700 years later. Though he never saw in person what he testified to, the LORD used him to prepare the people of Israel for their Redeemer. In Isaiah, we see the promised light of the nations (Isaiah 42), and the son to be given on whose shoulders the government will rest (Isaiah 9). It is through the prophet Isaiah that the LORD foretells of the coming Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53). This man will bear the iniquities of his people. His sacrifice will bring pardon and redemption to those who belong to him. The book of Isaiah is rich with portrayals of the coming Messiah.

None are truer than the beautiful promise and picture of our passage today. Isaiah prophesies about the coming of Immanuel, God with us. The sign that this child is no ordinary child is that he will be born of a virgin. For a woman who is a virgin to conceive means there was no man involved in her conception. This pregnancy would be a sign of the Lord's work because—like today—virgins don't get pregnant. They no more expected a virgin woman to conceive and have a child than they expected to jump and float into outer space.

For many throughout church history, and in the church today, they view the virgin birth as superfluous to His coming into the world. Most do not connect the significance and necessity of the virgin birth to Jesus' ability to save sinners and redeem humanity. The virgin birth is not a miracle for the sake of miracles. God isn't trying to increase our "wow" factor. The virgin birth is necessary because if Jesus is born from the seed of man, He is born into the curse of sin. If Jesus begins in the womb like everyone else, then He possesses the sin nature of everyone else. He had to be born of the virgin. This is the fulfillment of God's promise in Genesis 3:15 that the offspring of the woman would crush the Serpent.

Jesus' conception in the womb of Mary by the Holy Spirit is miraculous. It is a wonder to behold. But it was necessary for Jesus to be born without the sin nature and guilt that plagues mankind. As the Apostle's Creed states: **He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. The God-Man was unlike any other.**

As the child born of the virgin, Jesus is Immanuel. He is God with us, come to save us. His sinless nature allows for Him to obey God where humanity fell. His absence of guilt allows for Him to live truly righteous before God. And at the cross, bearing the wrath of God for the sins of man, He exchanged His righteousness for our guilt. When we come to Him by faith, we exchange our guilt for His righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21). Behold the child born of the virgin!

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- What is the importance of God giving signs to us?
- Why was it necessary that the Savior be born of a virgin? What is the practical reason?
- What comfort does it give you today that Jesus is Immanuel (God with us)? How does that encourage us in our daily lives?

YOU SHALL CALL HIM JESUS



**SHE WILL BEAR A SON, AND YOU SHALL CALL HIS NAME JESUS,
FOR HE WILL SAVE HIS PEOPLE FROM THEIR SINS.**

MATTHEW 1:21 (ESV)

Joseph was ready to walk away. He learned Mary was pregnant, and he determined to divorce her quietly so as not to bring further dishonor upon her. In their days, marriage engagements functioned like a legal contract. So it required a divorce and legal separation. The reason he was leaving was because he realized she had not been faithful. Women don't get pregnant without a man in the first century any more than they do now. He thought he knew the reason.

But he didn't. And God was going to make sure he didn't leave her and walk away. In a dream, an angel appears to Joseph and tells him not to fear taking Mary to be his wife. Why? Because the child in her womb is from the Holy Spirit, not a man. She hadn't been unfaithful. No, God had found her faithful, and chose her as the instrument to bring forth His Son. Mary's womb held a baby boy. But this was no ordinary boy.

In our passage today, the angel reveals to Joseph that the boy in the womb is coming to save His people from their sins. Who are His people? This answer is two-fold. First, He is coming to save the Jews. He came to His own, even though they would not all receive Him (John 1:11). Second, He is coming to save all whom the Father has given Him (John 6:37). Jesus comes into the world to save a people from every nation, race, tribe, and tongue in the world. God is becoming a man, not for the human experience, but to save us from our destruction.

The child Joseph would raise would not be his own biological son, but Joseph would adopt Jesus and raise him as his own. In the same way, as humans born into sin and rebellion, we are not naturally children of God. We are children of wrath (Ephesians 1:3). But through faith in the finished work of Jesus, the adopted son of Joseph, we become adopted sons and daughters of God (John 1:12).

Have you trusted in the one born of Mary who takes away the sin of His people? He saves His people from their sins. In Christ, all your sins are nailed to the cross and buried in His tomb. Jesus' resurrection in victory left those sins in the grave. They will never surface again to condemn or shame you. Jesus saves us from sins penalty of eternal separation from God. We need the child born of Mary, Jesus of Nazareth, to save us from our sins. And that's what He came into the world to do. Trust Him today.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Why did the Lord reveal the truth of Mary's pregnancy through an angel?
- What are the two ways "he will save his people from their sins" is meant? Who are Jesus' people?
- As a Christian who has put your faith in Jesus, how is your life a fulfillment of the angel's promise in this passage?

THE FAITH OF MARY



AND MARY SAID, "BEHOLD, I AM THE SERVANT OF THE LORD; LET IT BE TO ME ACCORDING TO YOUR WORD." AND THE ANGEL DEPARTED FROM HER.

LUKE 1:38 (ESV)

The angel Gabriel visited a young girl named Mary (Luke 1:26-38). He tells her not to be afraid, but that she has found favor with God. Why do you imagine Gabriel assured her not to be afraid? Because Mary didn't have regular encounters with angels. This experience terrified her. The angel assures her and tells her she will conceive and bear a son. His name will be Jesus. The child will be great and called Son of the Most High. He will sit on the throne of his father David and the reign of his kingdom will have no end.

This is great news, right? Mary should be excited, right? Her response is a question: How? How is this going to happen, since she is a virgin? She's unmarried and has never been with a man. Gabriel explains that the Holy Spirit will come upon her and overshadow her. Her conception will be miraculous. But above all, it will be from God. He tells her, "*Do not be afraid.*" This injunction isn't just because of his presence, but also because of his message. This is the work of God.

After Gabriel explains this, and her cousin Elizabeth's situation to her, he reminds her that nothing is impossible with God. The God of the universe is not hindered or restrained by anything or anyone. Our God is in the heavens, and He does all that He pleases (Psalm 115:3). Mary responds to Gabriel with these awe-inspiring words, "*Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.*"

Our passage today brings us face-to-face with the faith of Mary. She doesn't understand everything about what God is about to do. She doesn't know the mechanics of how it is going to happen (we still can't explain her conception with mechanical precision). We know, by how the Gospels unfold she didn't grasp the full picture of the child she would carry in her womb. But here is what we know from our passage today: she submitted to, and believed, God's word.

In our lives, we don't always know why God is doing what He does. We don't know the mechanics of how God is going to work something out or keep His promises. We often lack the clarity of how our circumstances will ripen in God's wise purposes and plans. But we can, and should, imitate the faith of Mary. She was willing for what God said to shape her response. She didn't have to know everything in order to submit to what God told her. We can too. Mary's faith, as she discovered the Lord had chosen her to carry the Savior in her womb, is a testament to us, that we too can trust the Lord in the circumstances of our lives. We can say with Mary, "*I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.*"

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Why does the angel tell Mary not to be afraid? What reasons does Mary have to let fear grab hold of her heart?
- Why is our passage today such a good picture of faith? How does Mary display incredible faith?
- What examples in our own lives can we take from Mary's response to the angel?

THE FALL & RISING OF MANY



AND SIMEON BLESSED THEM AND SAID TO MARY HIS MOTHER, "BEHOLD, THIS CHILD IS APPOINTED FOR THE FALL AND RISING OF MANY IN ISRAEL, AND FOR A SIGN THAT IS OPPOSED (AND A SWORD WILL PIERCE THROUGH YOUR OWN SOUL ALSO), SO THAT THOUGHTS FROM MANY HEARTS MAY BE REVEALED."

LUKE 2:34-35 (ESV)

The world today swarms with divisive figures. It always has. There are people who some love and adore, and others despise them. Athletes, musicians, and actors can divide audiences. Politicians are especially controversial in the reactions they elicit. People either love them or hate them.

It seems odd to think that God would be a divisive figure. One might imagine that the Creator of the world, including mankind, would be loved by that world. But people don't. Some love God. Others despise His very existence, even going so far as suppressing the truth of God (Romans 1:18) despite the indisputable evidence. Many people hate God.

Our passage today points to this reality. The coming of Christ into the world would showcase the wickedness of human hearts. Man-centeredness would rear its ugly head when Jesus stepped onto the scene. A man named Simeon knew he would live to see the promised Messiah. Mary and Joseph arrived at the Temple with their infant son. He took Jesus into his arms and, filled with Holy Spirit, blessed him (Luke 2:28-32). Just consider the amazing nature of this scene. This man owed his life to the One he is cradling in his arms. Marvel at the thought!

Then Simeon turns to Mary and pronounces that Jesus' coming means the fall and rising of many. What does this mean? Simeon is harkening back to Isaiah 8:14-15, where Isaiah said the Christ will be "*a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.*" The fall of many shows their misery, suffering, disappointment, and even ruin. Jesus' words and works, as the Gospels display with clarity, showcased the pride and self-righteousness of many in Israel, including the religious leaders.

Perhaps the greatest fall the coming of Jesus ushered in was the fall of Israel into ruin. After they put Jesus to death, within several decades, the Romans crushed Israel, destroyed the Temple, and scattered the people into the nations.

However, Jesus' coming would bring the rising of many in Israel. Many in the land found salvation through Jesus' death and resurrection. The poor, outcast, and humble received him. They experienced pardon of sin, and restoration to God. They found comfort in their sorrows and fears. Jesus divides people. Some reject Him and fall. Others receive Him and rise to new heights of joy and peace. Does Jesus call you to fall or rise?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Why does Jesus' coming signify the fall of many? In what ways?
- How does Jesus' coming bring the rise of many?
- What kind of joy do you think it gave Simeon to see God's promise of seeing the Messiah in his lifetime fulfilled?

THE LIGHT IS COMING



IN HIM WAS LIFE, AND THE LIFE WAS THE LIGHT OF MEN. THE LIGHT SHINES IN THE DARKNESS, AND THE DARKNESS HAS NOT OVERCOME IT.

JOHN 1:4-5 (ESV)

Darkness is disorienting. If you have ever awakened in the middle of the night during a power outage, the darkness can confuse you. Darkness is the absence of light. Physical light radiates and draws our attention when we are in darkness. If you wake up in the middle of the night on a normal occasion, your eyes often catch the lights from electronics, streetlights outside, and light from other rooms in the house. The light illuminates the darkness. When the power goes out, and we awaken to the darkness, our eyes are unable to find light. That darkness leaves us blind and unable to see.

In the Bible, the imagery of light and darkness is used to communicate spiritual realities. Light often represents truth, holiness, and obedience. Darkness represents being spiritually blind, living in rebellion and sin, and separation from communion with God. The Scriptures teach that darkness pervades our sinful and broken world. We see it evidenced soon after Adam and Eve's sin when one of their children murdered the other one. We find the display of this darkness in terrible stories of rape, murder, and idolatry. There is a low-humming groan pervasive in the storyline of the Bible that begs for relief. Darkness that craves light. Despair that yearns for hope.

Our passage today captures the glory of that hope and light that bursts onto the scene. The Word who was from the beginning, with God, and as God, had life in him. And his life was the light of men. In the Word was spiritual life, which is the opposite of what the world had known to that point—spiritual death. The spiritual life that Jesus brings is the light of men. When you receive Jesus, you receive the life. And when you receive the life, you receive the light. Faith in Jesus overcomes the darkness in our hearts. With new life we walk in the light instead of the darkness. We find spiritual life and vitality only in the Word who is from the beginning coming into the world.

Jesus' entrance into a world of darkness is incredible. The darkness has no power to fight against the light of Jesus. He pierces the darkness. The world marked by evil, sin, death, judgment, and unbelief dwells in darkness. But Jesus comes into that world and that darkness is no match for Him.

The world is dark. We feel it. We see it. There are tremendous political and social divisions in our country and world. Darkness is all around. But Jesus has come. He is life and that life is the light of men. We can stand confident that the darkness has not and will not triumph. Jesus, the true light, who gives light to everyone (John 1:9), came into the world so rescue men, women, and children out of the darkness and into his marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9).

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Has there been a time you've experienced the disorienting nature of darkness? What feelings did it create?
- What is the significance of describing the broken world as darkness and Jesus as the light?
- What does it mean for us to walk in the light and not to walk in darkness? If we are in Christ, how does He keep the darkness from overcoming us?

BORN IN BETHLEHEM



AND WHILE THEY WERE THERE, THE TIME CAME FOR HER TO GIVE BIRTH. AND SHE GAVE BIRTH TO HER FIRSTBORN SON AND WRAPPED HIM IN SWADDLING CLOTHS AND LAID HIM IN A MANGER, BECAUSE THERE WAS NO PLACE FOR THEM IN THE INN.

LUKE 2:6-7 (ESV)

The journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem in the first century could take anywhere from four to ten days. Nazareth is in the northern part of Israel, and Bethlehem is in the south. The distance in a straight line is 70 miles. But to traverse the landscape, including the political conflicts that existed with Samaria, increased the mileage of the trip.

Why is the journey so significant? Because Mary and Joseph would take this trip as she neared the end of her pregnancy with Jesus. Caesar Augustus was the emperor of Rome during this time. He decreed an edict throughout the empire's conquered lands that everyone had to register at their place of origin. This census served many purposes for the ruler. He learned the size and scope of his empire. The registration informed Rome on how to tax people and gave them a picture of the property and duties those living under their rule held. But in God's purposes, the census moved Mary and Joseph from Nazareth, where they lived, to Bethlehem, where Joseph was from. This fulfilled the prophecy of the Messiah's birth in Bethlehem from Micah 5:2 of a ruler over Israel who is from old, from ancient of days.

Our passage today tells us that while they were there in Bethlehem, the time came for her to give birth. We don't get many details about this. It is not clear whether they expected this to happen or if it was a surprise. But Mary goes into labor while in Bethlehem. We can assume her water broke, and contractions ensued. The promised pain of childbirth surfaced yet again in another woman's delivery (Genesis 3:16). She pushed and labored as the Redeemer of the world made His way through the birth canal and into world He came to save. And then the cries of a newborn baby filled the air. The One who hung the moon and stars now laid underneath them as a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes.

The birth of the Savior lacks the sound of trumpets from the Roman armies. No couriers took the news around the four corners of the earth to share about the God-Man's birth. No, the most significant event in human history had unfolded in relative obscurity. The Savior of the world was born and placed in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn.

Our text today reminds us that our Lord humbled Himself when He came into the world to redeem us. It also admonishes us that great and significant things in the eyes of God do not always garner the world's attention.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- How does the census decreed by Caesar Augustus teach us about how God's sovereignty is displayed in accomplishing His will in and through the actions of men?
- How is Mary's delivery of Jesus significantly different than of celebrities today who give birth? What does this teach us about what is significance in the eyes of God versus the eyes of the world?
- How can Jesus' obscure birth be a source of encouragement to us in our lives?

THE FULLNESS OF TIME



BUT WHEN THE FULLNESS OF TIME HAD COME, GOD SENT FORTH HIS SON, BORN OF WOMAN, BORN UNDER THE LAW, TO REDEEM THOSE WHO WERE UNDER THE LAW, SO THAT WE MIGHT RECEIVE ADOPTION AS SONS.

GALATIANS 4:4-5 (ESV)

Waiting is not something human beings thrive at doing. Each successive generation gets less skilled in the art of waiting, especially as technology in our hands connects us to people, information, shopping, and virtual entertainment at all times. Our patience in waiting is thin. We want immediate fulfillment and satisfaction. Even waiting for our technology to update or load is far too inconvenient for our tastes.

However, waiting is the posture that marked the people of God for several millennia. The promises of God given throughout history required His people to watch and wait for their fulfillment. Many waited and never saw their fulfillment in their lifetimes. This reminds us that God plays the long-game and has no problem with letting His plans unfold over long stretches of time. We want instant results. Promises given to Adam and Eve, Abraham, Moses, David, and through the mouths of the prophets spanned generations of time. The people of God waited.

What were they waiting for? Or perhaps the better question is: Whom were they waiting for? The promised One. The Messiah. They awaited the king whose kingdom would have no end. They waited for the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53) who would take the iniquities of God's people onto Himself and bury their sins. They awaited the light to the nations who would reconcile every nation, tribe, and tongue back to God.

The waiting ended when the fullness of time came. In our passage today, we see that the waiting was not arbitrary. God's timing always connects to His plans. The plan of God to send His Son into the world spans back to eternity's past. Its fulfillment was determined, not spontaneous. Paul tells us that when that fullness of time came, God sent His Son into the world. And He did it just as He said He would—born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14).

The promised Messiah came, born under the law, so He could redeem those under the law. He experienced hunger, thirst, pain, and fatigue. His knees popped when he got up from the floor. It took Him a few steps in the morning to get His legs walking normally. He was human. Jesus came under the law we are born into so that He could redeem us. He had to become a man in order to save man. And all of this came to pass when the fullness of God's plans came to fruition.

In our own lives today, we can rest confident that God's promises come to pass. His timing is perfect. His plans ripen in due time. It is for us to trust His plans and timing. We cling to the promises and wait. He forms us into the people He wants us to be as we wait for the fulfillment of all He has said. Jesus' birth reminds us it is so.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- What is an experience where you grew impatient in waiting for something?
- What kind of temptations confront us when we have to wait for something to happen? What does Galatians 4:4-5 teach us about God's timing and promises?
- How does waiting for God's promises to be fulfilled today grow our faith?

IMMANUEL



**“BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL CONCEIVE AND BEAR A SON,
AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL”**

MATTHEW 1:23 (ESV)

The God who created the world stays united to the world He created. God is other than His world, but He is in the world. Throughout the Scriptures, we see God remind His people that He is with them. God’s presence is a theme of Scripture, and it is a crucial topic for our own lives.

We learn from Genesis 3:8 that God walked in the cool of the day with Adam and Eve. We do not know the specifics of how they experienced His presence with them, but we know He was with them because they hid from Him after they sinned. God visits with Abraham and Jacob in ways that they knew they had been with Him. He promises Moses and Joshua that His presence would be with them. He led them as a cloud by day and pillar of fire by night. Nathan tells David to do all that is in his heart, and that God is with him. The Temple in Jerusalem marked the place of God’s constant dwelling with Israel as His presence filled the holy of holies. He spoke through the prophets about His presence with them (Isaiah 41:10).

The idea of God being with His people runs throughout the Scripture. However, how God was with His people remained shaped by their sinfulness and His holiness. Humanity could not experience the fullness of His presence. The result of mankind’s fall was a marked distance from knowing God’s presence as intimately as was possible. But the promise of Isaiah 7:14 was that the virgin would conceive and bear a son called Immanuel. Immanuel means: God with us. The coming Savior would be the embodiment of the Living God in the world, and with His people.

Our passage today strikes the chord of that promise in Isaiah. The promise to Joseph from the angel was that the child in Mary’s womb was from God. His name would be Jesus because He would save His people from their sins. He would be Immanuel, God with us. Paul emphasizes this in Colossians 2:9 when he says that in Jesus the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily. Jesus is a human being. But He is not a human being who became God. He is God, the Second Person of the Trinity, who became a man. And it is not a part of the deity or some of the deity that dwells bodily in Him. The fullness of deity dwells in Jesus. He is Immanuel. God came to the world.

As Jesus walked the world, the people experienced the full presence of the Living God with them. And after Jesus ascended to Heaven, believers still experience His full presence with us, through the Holy Spirit that dwells in us. In fact, before Jesus ascends to Heaven, He reminds His disciples that He is with them always. God came to us. And He is here to stay with us. Forever.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- How does knowing God is with us bring peace and comfort in our lives?
- In what ways did Jesus’ birth change the experience forever of God being with His people? How did it differ from before Jesus’ coming?
- How is Jesus, Immanuel, with us now? How will He be with us for eternity?

CREATOR BECOMES CREATED



ALL THINGS WERE MADE THROUGH HIM, AND WITHOUT HIM
WAS NOT ANY THING MADE THAT WAS MADE.

JOHN 1:3 (ESV)

The baby lying in the manger under the sky of Bethlehem looks like an ordinary child. He cries for his mother's milk. His reflexes respond if you tickle his feet. Mary's soothing touch comforts him. On appearances alone, this child is like all others.

If you were to follow Joseph and Mary into Egypt when they are told by the angel to flee Herod's command to kill all baby boys under two years old, or travel with them to Nazareth when they return to Israel, you would watch as the young boy matured and grew as all others. You could observe him getting tired as the evening hours grew later. You would watch him laugh as he played with other boys outside. You could hear his stomach growl when the time for a meal drew closer. He looks like everyone else.

But our passage today reminds us that the one born in Bethlehem, raised in Nazareth, and who ministered throughout Israel, is not like any other before Him. He is one-of-a-kind. Yes, He is a human being with all the characteristics and experiences just described. However, what sets Him apart from all who came before Him and all who ever come after Him is He is the creator of the universe.

Our passage today teaches us about Jesus' nature. The first lines of John's Gospel anchor the God-Man's existence back to when He was only God, not man. Unlike every other person, whose existence begins at conception in the womb, Jesus' existence has no beginning. He is the Word who is from the beginning. He was with God, and He is God.

Then John drops this bombshell in our laps: All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. Jesus is not only present in Genesis 1 and 2, but as the Father says, "*Let there be light*," it is the Son of God who executed that command. As the universe is being formed, and the world is taking shape with galaxies, mountains, and lizards, the One fashioning the life and contours of it all is the Word who became flesh. Nothing that is made can locate its origins apart from Him.

The apostle Paul in another place tells us that the Jesus who walked among us is the One responsible for the earth He walked on. Colossians 1:16 tells us, "*For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.*" All things were created through Him. The Savior of the world has the right to save it because it is His world. It exists through him, and for him. His work of redeeming man's sinful heart fueled His coming, but His work to save includes restoring the world He made. He comes to heal the groaning from brokenness that the creation longs to be set free from (Romans 8:22). The Light has come.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Why does the reality that Jesus is the creator of the world blow our minds when we take time to reflect on it?
- What are some basic things we learn about Jesus just from the fact that He is the creator of the universe?
- How is Jesus' redeeming work extending to creation? Why does that matter?

CONCEIVED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT



BUT AS HE CONSIDERED THESE THINGS, BEHOLD, AN ANGEL OF THE LORD APPEARED TO HIM IN A DREAM, SAYING, "JOSEPH, SON OF DAVID, DO NOT FEAR TO TAKE MARY AS YOUR WIFE, FOR THAT WHICH IS CONCEIVED IN HER IS FROM THE HOLY SPIRIT."

MATTHEW 1:20 (ESV)

What are the mechanics of a miracle? How does something that otherwise would not happen come into being or reality? What things unfolded in those jars of water when they turned to wine (John 2:1-11)? How did the fish and loaves of bread continue multiplying to feed the thousands of gathered people (Matthew 14:13-21)? When Jesus touched the leper, how did his diseased skin heal and repair (Matthew 8:1-4)? The Bible doesn't answer these questions with any mechanical detail.

Jesus' conception in the world is another miracle. Virgins don't get pregnant. In the same way that water doesn't magically turn to wine, women do not conceive children without a man. To get an outcome like this requires a magnificent power to overcome the natural barriers and limitations. And only God possesses such a power.

This brings us to our passage today. Joseph's discovery of Mary's pregnancy led him toward the actions of parting ways with her. But the angel of the Lord speaks to Joseph in a dream. He is told not to fear taking Mary as his wife. The reason? The child conceived in her womb is from the Holy Spirit. The virgin womb of Mary would be the place of a miracle. The Holy Spirit would create the material elements needed for an embryo of a man to germinate and develop in Mary's womb.

The angel Gabriel, in response to her question about how in the world she would conceive a son, being a virgin, answers her, "*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.*" A special experience of the Holy Spirit's power took place in Mary. Like the Spirit who hovered over the face of the deep (Genesis 1:2), here He overshadows young Mary and brings about the beginnings of the God-Man.

This event holds massive significance in the Christian faith. Christians believe the virgin Mary's conception is essential to the sinlessness of our Savior. Jesus could not be born of the seed of man, but in order to save us He still had to become a man. Man owed the sin debt to God but could not pay it. God alone has the power to pay the sin debt but does not owe it. Man owes, but only God can pay it. So, the Savior must be both fully God and fully man in order to pay for sins. That which is conceived in Mary is from the Holy Spirit. This is the work of God. Only the power of God can bring this about, and He has. Do not fear receiving Christ as your own and living for Him.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- What is the significance of the Holy Spirit being the agent of Mary's conception, and not a man like everyone else who is conceived?
- Why did the Savior have to be fully God and fully man?
- How does the uniqueness of Jesus remind us of His worthiness of our lives?

FALL DOWN & WORSHIP



WHEN THEY SAW THE STAR, THEY REJOICED EXCEEDINGLY WITH GREAT JOY.
AND GOING INTO THE HOUSE, THEY SAW THE CHILD WITH MARY HIS MOTHER,
AND THEY FELL DOWN AND WORSHIPED HIM. THEN, OPENING THEIR TREASURES,
THEY OFFERED HIM GIFTS, GOLD AND FRANKINCENSE AND MYRRH.

MATTHEW 2:10-12 (ESV)

We often hear the idea that God made us to worship. The statement's intention is correct, but it doesn't capture the whole truth. God did not create us to worship, He created us as worshipers. Worship is not something that we turn off and on, so that sometimes we are worshipping and other times not. Worship is not an aspect of our being, but the essence of our being as God's image bearers. All of life is ceaseless worship.

We live in a continuous state of worship because God made us as worshipping creatures. Nobody teaches us to worship, it's the essence of who we are. Atheists, agnostics, Christians, and everyone in between are unceasing worshipers. The issue is not about knowing how to worship, it is about knowing who and what to worship. The object of our worship matters.

In our passage today, Matthew tells us of the Magi's visit of Jesus from either Persia or Arabia to worship Jesus (Matthew 2:1). Magi studied the stars. They were experts in astronomy, philosophy, and served as priests. They followed a star to the place where the baby Jesus stayed with Joseph and Mary. These foreigners came bearing gifts for the king, the true King, worthy of the worship of all people, from all nations, at all times. They faced danger to bring worship to him. Their perseverance should fuel our hearts to worship Christ at all costs, despite all barriers.

The fatigue of an Eastern traveler was far greater than we can understand. The time such a journey occupied was great. The dangers were many. But none of these things deterred them. There were great discomforts and inconveniences, but none of these things derailed their aim to worship the King. Their commitment and perseverance serve as a worthy example for us. Distance did not keep them from seeking Jesus, and each of us should pursue Him with equal fervor today.

When they reached the house they rejoiced with great joy. The reality hit them that they were meeting the King of kings, and they erupted in rejoicing with exceeding joy. The Magi fell down and worshiped. They offered their gifts to Jesus. Their actions teach us about worship. True worshipers delight in worshipping Jesus. When love for Christ abounds, we give not only our words or songs, but our possessions and treasures as well. Worthy and acceptable worship of Jesus comprises giving our lives and our gifts to him.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- What does the worship of the Magi (Gentiles) teach us about the kingship of Jesus? How are they a foreshadow of things to come?
- How frequently do we make excuses about things that prevent us from worshipping as we should?
- Why is it important to note the gifts the Magi brought to Jesus? How should we view giving as a part of our worship?

GLORY TO GOD



FOR UNTO YOU IS BORN THIS DAY IN THE CITY OF DAVID A SAVIOR, WHO IS CHRIST THE LORD. AND THIS WILL BE A SIGN FOR YOU: YOU WILL FIND A BABY WRAPPED IN SWADDLING CLOTHS AND LYING IN A MANGER." AND SUDDENLY THERE WAS WITH THE ANGEL A MULTITUDE OF THE HEAVENLY HOST PRAISING GOD AND SAYING, "GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST, AND ON EARTH PEACE AMONG THOSE WITH WHOM HE IS PLEASED!"

LUKE 2:11-14 (ESV)

Everything in the world changed the day of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem. It may not have been news that traveled around the town very far. It didn't arrive to the courts of kings of the earth. But the birth of Jesus, the world's Messiah and true King, would forever mark time around the event.

Who were the first to know of this world-shaking, history-changing news? Shepherds. The responsibility of shepherds was to tend to flocks of sheep. They were not the educated elites of the nations, nor were they revered like the religious leaders. Yet it pleased God to announce to shepherds keeping watch over their flocks by night the Savior's arrival into the world.

In our passage today, we see an angel of the Lord appear to shepherds in the field. This spectacular display lit the skies in glory as the shepherds looked on, witnessing something of this nature for the first time. The Savior, Christ the Lord, had been born, and the angel of the Lord is proclaiming the news. The shepherds knew the city of David was Bethlehem, and the angel told them the sign to know they had found the right child (he would be wrapped in swaddling clothing and lying in a manger).

Before the shepherds can even leave to go into town, a multitude of heavenly host join the angel of the Lord praising God at the news of Jesus' birth. They shouted, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased." Glory to God! Jesus' birth elicited spontaneous eruptions of praise.

Why did God choose these simple men to reveal the greatest news in history? Why shepherds instead of kings, religious leaders, or wealthy merchants? God does nothing arbitrarily. The likely reasons for God's choice of recipients to this news are: their humility in receiving it, and their willingness to tell others. We see both happen in this story. They hear the news and go to Bethlehem (Luke 2:16). They glorified and praised Him for all they had seen and heard (Luke 2:20). These humble men rejoiced at the news. There was no threat to their ego. They also shared the news with others (Luke 2:17). Aside from the angels, the shepherds in the fields were the first evangelists to tell the good news of Jesus.

We should view the response of the shepherds as a cue for our own. We ought to receive God's Word with humility, seek Jesus personally, glorify and praise Him openly, and tell others of the Savior.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- What was the news of the angel of the Lord? How do you think it changed the lives of the shepherds forever to see and hear the display of the heavenly host?
- Why would God choose shepherds to reveal the good news of Jesus' birth, and not more prominent people?
- How did the shepherds respond in the story? What lessons does it teach us?

TO ALL WHO RECEIVED HIM



HE CAME TO HIS OWN, AND HIS OWN PEOPLE DID NOT RECEIVE HIM. BUT TO ALL WHO DID RECEIVE HIM, WHO BELIEVED IN HIS NAME, HE GAVE THE RIGHT TO BECOME CHILDREN OF GOD, WHO WERE BORN, NOT OF BLOOD NOR OF THE WILL OF THE FLESH NOR OF THE WILL OF MAN, BUT OF GOD.

JOHN 1:11-13 (ESV)

The coming of Jesus included a mission. It had purpose. Sin had brought wreckage and ruin to the world. Humanity suffered under slavery of sin, the power of Satan, and afflictions from a broken creation. Our universe itself groaned under sin's curse.

The Word from the beginning, who was with God and was God (John 1:1) came into the world (John 1:14). The eternal Son of God, who was a spirit and did not have a body like us, became flesh. Mary's womb contained the eternal Son of God. Jesus' cries at birth was the voice of the One who formed vocal cords, eardrums, and sound waves (John 1:3).

Our passage today tells us about the coming of the Light of the world, and man's response to it. John tells us He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him. The nation of Israel is in view. He came to His own (the Jews), but they did not receive Him. In another sense, He came to His own, the people of the world, and not all received Him. The reason the world is His own is because He created it (John 1:3).

What does John mean by "receive Him"? He is speaking about faith. To receive Christ is to take Him in on His terms. He is the perfect sacrifice for sins. Jesus is the Great High Priest who is the mediator between God and man. He is Lord of all and claims rights over our beliefs, actions, and hearts. To receive Him is to say "yes" to His terms of being your Lord.

Not all received Him. But to all who received Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God. Believing in His name is to agree with the angel's words to Joseph "you shall call His name Jesus for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). To believe in His name is to believe He will save you from your sins. Everyone who believes in His name becomes a child of God. God's covenant people receive entry into this family through faith and belief in Jesus. This is the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

The last lines are crucial for understanding how this covenant is different. The children of God are now born by faith, not by bloodlines connected to the right tribe or people, not by the will of man's flesh to try harder or do better, but by God. God's power supplies the change of heart (Ezekiel 36:26) needed to believe. This is the work of God (Ephesians 2:4-5). Have you received Him? Many harden their hearts and walk in their sins. Ask God to fuel your heart with desire to receive Him. To all who receive Him and believe in His name, He gives the right to become children of God.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- What are some reasons Jesus' own people did not receive Him? Who are His own people?
- What does it mean to receive Jesus? How can we encourage people to do that today?
- What kind of rights do we now have as children of God who have received Jesus?

THE RADIANCE OF THE GLORY



HE IS THE RADIANCE OF THE GLORY OF GOD AND THE EXACT IMPRINT OF HIS NATURE, AND HE UPHOLDS THE UNIVERSE BY THE WORD OF HIS POWER. AFTER MAKING PURIFICATION FOR SINS, HE SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE MAJESTY ON HIGH.

HEBREWS 1:3 (ESV)

Why does the world function as it does? How does the earth continue to orbit at the exact distance from the sun and precise axis tilt to allow for life to flourish? Why do our hearts keep beating, blood keep circulating, and all the systems of our body keep operating without our help? Think about all the things we take for granted about how the world works, and how our bodies function, that we don't control. Most people don't spend a second worrying about whether our planet will float off into oblivion. In fact, we rarely even think about the fact that we are spinning on a massive rock hurtling through space.

Couple these questions, and realities, with the fact that Scripture says God is the one who holds all these things in the palm of His hands (Psalm 24:1-2). He didn't labor in creating a universe with infinite complexity and scale. He spoke the word and it came into being (Hebrews 11:3). Many look at the world as created by God, but mindlessly operating. They view it like a clock God wound up, and now it is just ticking on its own.

But our passage today tells us something far greater is at work, and Jesus is the center of the story. The person of Jesus, born in Bethlehem, raised in Nazareth, and crucified and raised on the third day in Jerusalem, is the one who is the full radiance of the glory of God. His nature is the exact imprint of the Father's, meaning He is divine. And what is the resurrected and enthroned Jesus (Acts 2:33) doing right now in Heaven? He is upholding the universe by the word of His power.

What does this mean? It means Jesus is the One who keeps the world spinning. He keeps the planets orbiting. His power upholds gravity, our beating hearts, and the tides of oceans. The world continues functioning like clockwork, not because God hit the play button and watches it function independently. Rather, it keeps going in the way it does because Jesus upholds it. His command for it to operate as it does is why we can rely on it to be so.

The baby born in a manger is the King who upholds the universe. He is the exact imprint of the Father's nature. He is eternal, sinless, all-powerful, righteousness, and just. He is God in the flesh. After He bore our sin at the Roman cross, forgiving all His people who would call upon Him, He sat down beside the Majesty—His Father—on high. This revelation of Jesus' nature, power, and ongoing work of sustaining the world, helps us to see that the God-Man is glorious beyond all comparison.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- In what ways is Jesus the exact imprint of the Father's nature? What does that mean?
- How should we understand the meaning of Jesus upholding the universe by the word of His power? What are some examples of things He upholds?
- What things today should you trust Jesus with since He upholds everything by the power of His word?

HUMBLING HIMSELF



WHO, THOUGH HE WAS IN THE FORM OF GOD, DID NOT COUNT EQUALITY WITH GOD A THING TO BE GRASPED, BUT EMPTIED HIMSELF, BY TAKING THE FORM OF A SERVANT, BEING BORN IN THE LIKENESS OF MEN. AND BEING FOUND IN HUMAN FORM, HE HUMBLING HIMSELF BY BECOMING OBEDIENT TO THE POINT OF DEATH, EVEN DEATH ON A CROSS.

PHILIPPIANS 2:6-8 (ESV)

A reoccurring theme of human history is mankind's propensity to play God. Kings and queens of the earth have exalted themselves as deities. Rulers of armies have deemed themselves invincible. People of power love to deceive themselves and others to believe they have more power than they truly do.

But it isn't only powerful people who do this. Everyday people do too. Each of us is prone to make ourselves the center of the universe and ask others to comply. We want to do what we want, when we want, with whomever we want, and wherever we want. We live as if we have all power and authority to do as we please, but those illusions come to a screeching halt when we're faced with death. We are mortal. We may live like we are gods, but we die like all men.

Our passage today reminds us that the gospel is an entirely different story. Men pretend to be God, but the Bible reveals to us that the Living God became a man. The Son of God became a human being. He was in the form of God (spirit) but did not count equality with God as something to be held. He didn't fight to maintain His exalted status as the Son of God. Hailed by angels and saints alike, this was not something he sought to keep in His grasp. Rather, He emptied Himself of countless privileges and powers and took on the form of a servant. He came as a man. The God of the universe entered the world He created through the means He established. He became an embryo that matured into a baby delivered by a young girl. Jesus learned language, customs, and culture. He ate food, drank water and wine, and stubbed His toe on furniture (and it hurt!).

But the greatest act of humility displayed by the Son of God who became a Son of Man was His willingness to die a sinner's death on a cross. Even though He knew no sin, he became sin, so that His children could inherit the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). This defies all worldly wisdom. Paul called the gospel and the cross the foolishness of man, but the power of God (1 Corinthians 1:18).

The world is full of men pretending to be God, but the One True God became a man and came into the world. While we seek to exalt ourselves, our Savior humbled Himself. He emptied Himself. And for what reason? To become obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. There are no words that capture the full splendor and glory of this story. But Advent is a time of reflecting and rejoicing on this reality to recount the wonders of His love displayed to us in the coming of Jesus.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Why do people work so hard to live and pretend as if they are God?
- What makes the gospel, as we find in this passage, so shocking? How does it contrast what we think about what God should do?
- What example does Jesus provide for us in our own lives for humbling ourselves? What are some practical ways we can do that?

GRACE & TRUTH



FOR FROM HIS FULLNESS WE HAVE ALL RECEIVED, GRACE UPON GRACE.
FOR THE LAW WAS GIVEN THROUGH MOSES; GRACE AND TRUTH CAME
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST. NO ONE HAS EVER SEEN GOD; THE ONLY GOD,
WHO IS AT THE FATHER'S SIDE, HE HAS MADE HIM KNOWN.

JOHN 1:16-18 (ESV)

In Exodus 20, God gave the ten commandments to His people through Moses. Those commandments would outline His expectations for how to live as His people. The law reflected the heart and character of God. The law was good. But the people could not keep the law. The LORD was giving Moses the commandments to give to the people; meanwhile, the people fashioned a golden calf from their jewelry and bowed before it in worship.

Jesus' entrance into the world was not to deliver a new set of laws, but to fulfill the law. Sinners are incapable of perfect obedience. Jesus didn't come to give more laws that were impossible to keep, but to give grace to sinners incapable of keeping it at all.

The law came through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. How did grace come through Jesus? He came into the world, in the flesh, to save and redeem sinners. Just as Moses came down from the mountain to give the law of God to His people, Jesus came down from Heaven to give the grace of God to His people. His coming into the world in the flesh was to reconcile people of every nation, tribe, and tongue to God. Sinners receive pardon through Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross and resurrection from the dead. And His mission to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10) began in the womb of Mary.

The one born in Bethlehem is God in the flesh. In our passage, John mentions specifically that no one has ever seen God. The LORD reveals Himself through His creation, but He is not His creation. He spoke through burning bushes, led His people with a cloud by day and pillar of fire by night, and often shows up in mysterious figures like Melchizedek (Genesis 14), the three men who visited Abraham (Genesis 18), and the man who wrestles Jacob in the night (Genesis 32). But in all these appearances and glimpses of Himself, no one has ever truly seen God. When Moses asks to see the LORD, he is told that he would die (Exodus 33). Nobody throughout human history had seen God face-to-face. But when Jesus, God in the flesh came into the world, He made Him known. To see Jesus, was to see God. God became a man.

Jesus' birth is the coming of God to the world in the flesh. Physical eyes from mortal men could behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6). We do not see Him with our eyes today, but we see and behold Him with the eyes of our heart. We behold Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18) as we await the day we too can see God face-to-face. This is only possible because He came and gave us grace.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Is the law of God good or bad? Why can't man perfectly keep the law?
- Why has no man ever seen God before Jesus? What does this tell us about God and what does it tell us about man?
- Are you spending regular time beholding the glory of God in the face of Jesus? What are some ways we do that?

COME, LORD JESUS, COME!



HE WHO TESTIFIES TO THESE THINGS SAYS, "SURELY I AM COMING SOON." AMEN.
COME, LORD JESUS! THE GRACE OF THE LORD JESUS BE WITH ALL. AMEN.

REVELATION 22:20-21 (ESV)

The day has arrived! For twenty-eight days we have journeyed together through the Scriptures and watched as the people of God waited for the Light to come. We discovered promises given along the way, and descriptions of how the Messiah would come, that fueled anticipation in the hearts of men for the Redeemer's coming.

On this Christmas Day, we celebrate the promised seed of Eve, the offspring of Abraham, the king of the line of David, the Suffering Servant, the child on whose shoulders the government will rest. The Light of the World has come to the world. He comes to redeem. He comes as the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world. Jesus' birth is the fulfillment of those long-awaited promises. Those birth pangs filling the air in Bethlehem gave way to the newborn cries of the Savior of men.

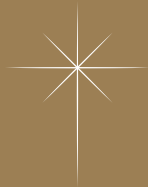
We celebrate today. We remember God fulfills His promises to us. Jesus' coming signifies to us the love of God. He sent His only Son into the world that, through Him, sinners would know forgiveness and restoration to God. Jesus' birth was the first logical step of our redemption that culminated in his death on a Roman cross, and his exit in resurrection from Joseph of Arimathea's tomb. The baby born in Bethlehem would eventually march up Calvary's hill and willingly give up His life as a substitute for ours. The wrath of God poured out on His head so that He could divert it from ours. Come, let us adore Him.

But as we finish this season of Advent and reflection, we direct our hearts to the promise remaining that Jesus is returning. As we have watched the promises of God in foretelling of the Messiah's first coming, we cling tightly to the promises that tell us He is coming again. Our Savior, Jesus, is coming back to the world in triumphant glory and with shouts of acclamation. His purpose in coming again will be to put the world to rights.

The dead will one day rise from their tombs. Our bodies will be restored. The judgment of humanity will ensue and because of Christ our verdict will be favorable. The world as we know it will pass away, and a New Heaven and Earth will reign for eternity. Our resurrected bodies will unite with our souls to never die again. No more sickness. No more funerals. No more sin. Our Savior promises to come and make all things new. So, as we walked with the saints of old in remembering our Savior's first coming in the flesh, we continue walking with an eye on the Savior. We are still waiting on Light to come. And His coming will transform everything as we know it. So, we join with all of Heaven, and saints here below, and cry out, "***Come, Lord Jesus, come!***"

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- How has your journey through Advent helped you appreciate the longing of God's people for the Savior?
- How does the waiting of God's people then inform our waiting on His Second Coming *now*?
- Give thanks to Christ today who came into the world to save us and is coming again to make all things new.



IN THE BEGINNING was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

JOHN 1:1,4,14



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