

**Reading:** Luke 24v13-32

**Theme:** Prophets foretold Him.

How are all the preparations and plans for Christmas going? Do you know which family or friends are or may be coming and when? Do you know where you are going or what you are doing come to that!? What about next year? Have you made plans for things that will be going on? Perhaps there is too much to be thinking about in the run-up to Christmas as none of us know for certain what the future could hold in this Covid time or what difference the vaccines will make for the future.

God has His plans - including the first Christmas - He was sure and certain about what He would be doing. He was quite specific in His planning and preparation and shared His plans and made them known - they were revealed to and then by the prophets. The hymn we sung says “*Prophets foretold Him, infant of wonder*” - after His resurrection Jesus explained this Luke 24:27.

There are amazing prophecies in OT - God foretelling what would happen through His prophets. In NT these are quoted to show this is what God planned and said. Matthew often uses phrases like “*All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet...*” (1:22) - helping people to understand, recognise Jesus was the foretold Messiah, the Christ.

All I want to do is very briefly touch on a few of the familiar prophecies fulfilled in Jesus’ birth. I hope it will cause us to refresh our confidence in God’s word - OT and NT to remind us Jesus is truly the foretold Messiah, Christ and we would come to have a greater trust in Him, or begin to have a faith,

a trust for the first time. We will look at 4 prophecies about Jesus' birth:

### **1. The place of birth.**

Micah, lived and ministered around the same time as another prophet Isaiah (730 BC) - Isaiah was in Jerusalem, had awesome visions of God and dealt directly with the Royal Palace - the king and his officials; Micah lived out in the sticks south-west of Jerusalem and mostly his prophecies were about the injustices the ordinary people were going through. Micah gives a remarkable prophecy about the little hamlet, village, town of Bethlehem in 5:2 *"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."* It is incredible the Messiah was foretold as being born there, but we are told of the One who would be ruler over Israel.

What descriptions we are given of Jesus here! I'm not going to be side-tracked, well not very much, as I touch on this verse - note His eternal existence, His rule over Israel - He is a ruler, King, one who would be King of the Jews. The place it speaks of is Bethlehem Ephrathah - both names refer to the same place - Ephrathah or Ephrath was an ancient name for Bethlehem (*Genesis 37:19 & 48:7 mentions it as the place Jacob buried his wife Rachel*). Most famously we know it as the place where David was from and we read of it in Ruth as where David's great grandparents met, were married and raised their family. It was a small country town, a village at best, even though it had royal connections - remember Micah was writing some 250 years after David. By the time of Jesus' birth, it was almost a thousand years after David!

This prophecy was known of and was fulfilled in Matthew 2:1-8 when the wise men arrived in the capital Jerusalem and caused Herod and the court to have panic attacks!! Herod consulted his royal advisers and they went easily and straightaway to Micah's prophecy. Herod duped the wise men to go there and to report back to him - but God short-circuited Herod's plans...!

Humanly speaking Jesus should not have been born in Bethlehem as Mary and Joseph were living in Nazareth, but God is the God in control of all history and He ordered it so that the timing of the Roman census happened - meaning Mary and Joseph headed off to Bethlehem and while there, Jesus is born. God **is** still in such control of events internationally, nationally and personally now – just as He was then! He orders things as He chooses, plans. God could specifically reveal such details even 730 years previously! This God is still truly amazing! This means that as we go on into all that the future holds for us, we can be sure God is there with us, working all things according to His plans and purposes for us. That is a lovely and encouraging thought.

## **2. The Royal connection.**

I found tracing my family tree was a frustrating experience and yet also exciting. When it comes to Jesus' family tree, we learn there is a royal connection. Isaiah (9:7) prophesies of the royal connection "*He will reign on David's throne and over His kingdom, establishing and upholding it...*" There is much to see from this verse and in v6 as well! Yet note the truth - He would reign on David's throne and over his kingdom. To

do that He would have to legally be a descendant of King David, having a royal connection.

Matthew and Luke show us both Mary and Joseph had descended from King David (Matthew 1:1-6, Luke 3:31) but it was many generations before and no wealth or status was theirs. Dr Luke points this out in 1:26-33 – 1st she was engaged and later married to one of royal descent, but the child would not be Joseph's, but was divinely conceived and then Isaiah 9:7 is quoted to show His royal connection and dignity.

They had to head off to Bethlehem to register in the census. Without God's planning and making His plans known, we would be clueless and in the dark, but the royal connection is also in place through the place of birth through Joseph and also by the ancestral bloodline through Mary and Joseph. Our God knew exactly what He was doing. We are to recognise our place of birth, the families we are born into, were not by chance, all is in God's hands. Our great God knows what He's doing - even before we were born and were known in the most minute of details. As incredible as the fulfilment of the Scriptures are, we need to note that God also knew and told of:

### **3. The grief occurring.**

Christmas 1981 was a strange, but special Christmas for Siân and myself. Siân was in hospital, had been for a few days; I had Christmas dinner with friends - after going up to the hospital 1<sup>st</sup> thing that morning to take Siân and our 3-day old daughter their Christmas presents! A baby born just before

Christmas adds to the chaos of Christmas and its joy, but I guess a baby born anytime causes chaos and joy!

The birth of Jesus did not cause joy to everyone. Herod and all of Jerusalem with him were disturbed at the wise men's announcement. Jerusalem was disturbed because they knew Herod was a bit of a nutter, who would take his anger out on whoever he felt like at such news! The outcome of Herod's vindictive jealousy and anger was foretold by Jeremiah (31:15) and we can read of its sad and tragic fulfilment in Matthew 2:13-18.

This is not the nicest of prophecies to consider, nor its fulfilment and it is one we do not dwell on too much, just usually mention it in passing. Herod was a despot of a king and resented any threat to his throne and did so until the day he died. On his deathbed, the day before he died, he came around out of a sleep to see his son and heir trying on his crown and he had him executed for treason! In fact, he executed most of his sons as he suspected they were after his throne - which prompted the statement, the joke in Greek "*Better to be Herod's pig (χοιρος choiros) than his son (υιος huios)*" because Herod would not kill a pig as it would offend the Jews!

Remarkably Jeremiah 31 is also a chapter that speaks of hope and comfort, of God doing something amazing even though there was weeping, deep, painful, agonised weeping, yet there was hope for the future (31:17). As the work of God goes on in our churches, our lives, we are to realise that not all around will want such and we may know opposition, even painful opposition from those we would least expect it from - state

opposition, opposition from family and friends, as well as from those who have no time for God and sadly even from those who are religious and claim to be serving God.

God's work will always go on in mysterious ways, but it can cause us hurt, grief and sadness on a personal level. In the narrative of the birth of Jesus, we see man's sin and cruelty lashing out and causing great grief, mourning and sadness to many families. Yet even this tragic event was foretold by the prophets and occurred because of man's opposition to the One born King of the Jews, the ruler of Israel, the one born to Mary there in Bethlehem. Note:

#### **4. The miraculous conception.**

Something remarkable would happen, out of the ordinary and miraculous. In Isaiah 7:14 we are told of a sign the Lord would give "*The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son,*" - this one would be called Immanuel = God is with us.

We find it is fulfilled through Mary and read of it in Matthew 1:18-25 and also in Luke 1:26-38. No human father was involved. We are not to think of this event is a crude mating of the Divine with a mortal woman. No such crude notions are attached to this. The Bible is precise on its wording - written by a doctor no less [Luke (1:35)] "*The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God."*" The One born was the seed of the woman - sounds familiar if we know the Bible, as it takes us back to the oldest promise and prophecy of the Saviour made and said just after Adam and Eve fell into sin

(Genesis 3:15). In this miraculous conception and subsequent birth, no human father was involved - Jesus was in His being the Son of God from all eternity, but He is born into this world by this incredible work of God the Holy Spirit - who did a generative, creative act in Mary, He was declared to be the Son of God as to His real physical being too.

In all this Mary was a blessed, a chosen vessel, but she was no one special. She was a Jewish girl and is never recorded in the Bible as being worshipped, honoured or highly different to any other human being; nor is she ever prayed to. Actually, Mary owned she needed a Saviour and only those who are lost and sinners need a Saviour! I wonder what Mary thought as she considered all she had been told and was going to happen in her? I feel Mary's song in Luke 1:46-55 expresses something of the wonder of what she felt.

This miraculous conception and birth are foretold by prophets, yet God hadn't finished speaking to mankind. These prophets had some understanding of what they spoke of, **but they wanted to know more** - 1 Peter 1:10-12 *"Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to **them** that they were not serving **themselves but you**, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things."* Do we long to know more too?

The book of Hebrews says (1:1-3) *“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but **in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son**, whom He appointed heir of all things, and through whom He made the universe. The Son is **the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His being**, sustaining all things by His powerful word. After He had provided purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.”* We are to listen to both OT and NT - the OT points on to Jesus and in NT we clearly see Jesus and all He did for us, all He offers to and will do for His people. We are guided into considering all He has done and promises to do for all who trust Him as their Saviour.

Some listening may scoff, not fully believe the account of Jesus’ birth as it seems so impossible to your mind and understanding. Yet so many prophecies are fulfilled not only in the birth of Jesus, but also in His life, death, resurrection and ascension and we would be foolish to ignore such. If we were to take just 8 prophecies about Jesus - the chances of them all being fulfilled in a person is 1 in  $10^{17}$ ! (16 prophecies takes that to  $1 \text{ in } 10^{157}$ !) Yet over 360 prophecies are fulfilled in Jesus’ life! We are to pay attention to and listen to God’s word, especially Jesus and all He says! We can trust Him as our own Saviour and live for Him as He wants - we will know His help, love and care - not only at Christmas, but every day of our lives and this will cause us to be amazed that this One would have such love and care for us and will take us to be with Him one day in heaven.