

Preparation For Christ's Coming

A few weeks ago we began a short series entitled *Anticipating Jesus* looking at the promise of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ into the world; the incarnation of Christ. The first indication of His coming was in Genesis 3:15 when God promised Eve a seed, a male child, who would bruise the serpent's head, but whose heel would be bruised in the act. Hebrews 2:14 confirms this to be Christ, saying, 'as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil'.

Seeing the Invisible

Thereafter, the coming of our Lord Jesus was prophesied with increasing detail over the course of hundreds of years. His name, character, task and triumph were foreseen by God's prophets and shared with God's people, who like Job were given faith to believe that their Redeemer would live and stand upon the earth to be seen of men and women in the latter day. Even the identity of Bethlehem, the village in which the Messiah would be born, was expressly recorded.

The messenger of Christ's coming

As the fulness of the time approached when the Messiah would be manifested other strands of prophecy also began to be fulfilled. Isaiah had spoken of one who would prepare the way for the coming of Christ, 'The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD'. Malachi told of God's messenger, referring to John the Baptist, who would 'prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant'.

The way prepared

As this preparation for the Lord's coming took effect, Gabriel, the angel of the Lord was busy. He visited Zacharias, a serving priest, and told him of a son to be named John, though his wife had been barren many years. He visited Mary a young woman espoused to a man called Joseph, of the house of David, telling her of the imminent and miraculous birth of her own child, Jesus, though she was yet unmarried. Gabriel then appeared to Joseph in a dream reassuring him of God's purpose in this wonderful event.

A Roman emperor gets involved

Even secular authorities played a part as God ordained they would. From Rome there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. In order to be registered Joseph and his young, pregnant wife must travel ninety miles from their home in Nazareth in Galilee, where Jesus might otherwise have been born, to Bethlehem in Judaea, where God ordained He would be born.

When stars sing and angels shout for joy

Creation was also involved in preparing for Christ's coming, 'When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy', a star appeared in the heavens to honour the Messiah-king. Somewhere out in the depths of space a bright, celestial body, formed for this very purpose at the creation of the world, bent in its orbit to travel across the night sky and catch the gaze of astronomers of the Orient.

The Star of the Morning

As the Lord's star sped towards earth it typified the Light of the world leaving the courts of heaven and coming to earth as a man, and the Sun of Righteousness rising with healing in His wings. The Apostle John tells us, 'the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us', thereby performing God's promise, fulfilling all prophecy, and securing redemption's plan.

The Dayspring from on high

In tomorrow's service we shall mention the 'mystery of godliness' which Paul describes as the manifestation of God in the flesh, and turn to the words of John the Baptist's father Zacharias who tells us Christ's coming is 'salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us', that we 'might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life'.

Amen

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