

Unique Christ

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[0 : 00] Now, like for a few moments if you would turn back with me to the passage you read together in Matthew chapter 1 and the birth of Jesus.

And I just want to say a few things about this today and challenge us to consider his birth again in an ongoing way for us in our life and in our thinking.

There are two primary things that I want to say about his birth. The first is that it was unusual and the second is that it's unique.

So the two things, no rocket science, just some pastoral thoughts on both the unusual nature of his birth but primarily the unique nature of his birth.

I think even by kind of 21st century standards his birth is unusual. It's not that common.

[1 : 01] It's far away for a start. It's far away in geography terms. It's far away in time terms. Over 2,000 years ago an unmarried teenage girl gives birth.

Very ordinary people. Nothing that set them aside as being special or spectacular. Bethlehem, a small town in a Roman province of no great significance.

Not born in the winter in a shed, feeding trough, cave, as we saw last week.

But not necessarily a normal birth at many levels. Unusual birth, unusual factors are part of that birth.

But as an unusual birth it doesn't really rate with other unusual births. And we may feel as undetached or we may feel as uninvolved or as detached from this birth as we would from any other unusual birth that we hear about or that we come across.

[2 : 22] Lots of unusual things happen, don't they? That doesn't mark this out as special. Lots of unusual events happen, lots of unusual births happen. It's just another dramatic birth story for so many people.

It doesn't affect you. It doesn't affect your life. It's pleasant. It's a pleasant story for many people to hear at this time of year. It's warming.

It's interesting. It has a human touch. All of these things which will attract it to people at this time of year.

Unusual. But what I want to stress, and I know that you know this, but it's good to be reminded of it in our lives and reminded of it in our relationship with God.

Because not only is it an unusual birth, but it's a unique birth. We saw that last week. I just want to stress that again this week. A unique birth in that heaven was parted when Jesus was born.

[3 : 32] Heaven's unique involvement in this birth. This birth was one that was sponsored by and was motivated by and came from heaven.

Heaven was both its source, its instigator, its inspiration and its intimate involvement in this birth as never before and never again.

Which gives it a universal significance. Now I believe that someone walked out of the carol service last week and said, what a lot of rubbish.

And I know that there will be people who react very strongly against the whole idea of Jesus' birth having great significance, not just generally but for them.

And the whole uncomfortable aspect of heaven being opened and Jesus coming to be the Savior, to deal with a huge and real issue in our lives, can't be bothered with all that stuff about judgment or about God coming to forgive our sins.

[4 : 50] That will be the reaction of many people to the message of Jesus. But we recognize though, when we recognize today, don't we, our mortality and the shortness of life and the reality of death.

And the reality of death so often, and I don't want to dwell on this, and I'm not speaking specifically about the context that we've lost to people this week and death as close to us at that level.

But when you think about death, not in natural terms or at the end of a long life, when you think of death that enters into the experience of the world so often, what we would say unnaturally or in an unexpected or in a gruesome way, is so often, is it not often connected with evil?

Is it not the expression so often of evil? It's how evil would express itself most if it could involve itself in the death of life.

The most strongest expression is the death of life, is the end of life. It's not just the gentle slipping away of an old life well lived, it can be, but even then there's the whole aging and the whole ending of life that comes with it.

[6 : 24] But evil's expression is so often at its zenith death, isn't it? And it reminds us of the spiritual lesson that we come to learn this morning, that God's coming into the world has this unique purpose, the only person born to die at that level, to die as a savior, as a substitute, as a redeemer for his people.

And it's a unique birth, and so many differences, unique because God promised this birth. The whole of the Old Testament points towards this coming, right from Genesis, right from the beginning, Jesus promised someone who would come and crush the head of Satan, where death entered the world at that point, that Satan would be crushed and the seed of the woman's heel would be bruised.

Right from the beginning, and we've seen that, haven't we, over the last number of weeks we've looked at different times and different ways and different places, how the Old Testament is, the womb of Christ is where his people were being protected, his genealogy was being protected so that he would come into the world at the right time.

And the story of Esther, which the children were learning, and the story of Jericho, which the children were learning, reminds us that there was a spiritual mal going on to try and destroy the people of God and the seed of the woman and the coming of the Messiah and that the prophecies wouldn't come to fulfillment, but we recognize that he has come.

He is the one who is prophesied and who is expected, the anointed one, the victor over death, the mighty God, the prince of peace, the servant, the preacher of good news, the sin-bearer, all of these different titles used of Jesus Christ prophesied and protected, the one who would be rejected, the one who would be betrayed for thirty pieces of silver and if you can come tonight, I hope you can come tonight, but don't invite anyone tonight and say there's going to be a carol service and don't invite anyone saying there's going to be a Christmas theme about the nativity because it's not, we're going to do Samson, okay, so it's not a Christmas, eh, but it's the last of Samson.

[8 : 37] I wanted to finish Samson before the end of the year, we've been looking at Samson in the evening and it's Samson in Delilah, the last story of Samson and his defeat, but it's hugely, I think, also messianic.

There's great parallels in Samson's life, the redeemer of his people, the judge of his people, the Savior at a human level between Samson and all his failure and Jesus obviously in all his perfection, there's massive differences, but he too, and I'm starting preaching tonight's sermon as well, but he too was betrayed for silver, if you remember, but anyway, Jesus prophesied, betrayed for silly, his crucifixion prophesied, his resurrection prophesied, a planned, completely expected Savior who's coming his life, his death and his resurrection, meticulously and eternally uniquely planned by God, unique in the angels preparing the parents, Joseph, you know, a son who's going to be the Savior, Mary, Gabriel comes to her, you'll have a son, the son of the Most High, a king forever, amazing announcement, annunciation of birth in this remarkable way as heaven breaks into these ordinary people's lives with this remarkable preparation and message of preparation for the sun coming, unique in the Holy Spirit, breaking nature's cycle, the virgin birth, not just a fanciful thought, but a hugely significant theological point, not just in the Holy Spirit, breaking nature's cycle, but a recognition that this birth is miraculous, it is God's will and God's power that creates the baby and the womb and divine intervention comes through that. And we've seen, haven't we, right through the Old Testament again, God miraculously providing children for women who were unable to bear children, but he was miraculously making clear that there would be a genealogical line to Jesus through his miracle, through his involvement, through divine intervention, never before, never again, the whole of heaven celebrating that birth, the angelic choir, the outworking of promise, the surprise of that, the announcement of the child, unique, never before, never again, it's an absolutely

unique birth and the angel arranging new visitors to the birth of Jesus and to the family of Jesus, unique witnesses of the birth of Jesus. Not great kings, not significant and important people, isn't it again and again the wonderful picture of Scripture, particularly of the New Testament of the Gospels, that Jesus doesn't go to the emperors and doesn't go to the politicians and doesn't go to the rich and the famous and the influential to spread his good news, to tell him he goes to the poor and the brokenhearted and the downtrodden and he takes the message to the shepherds. But he doesn't forget the kings, but he takes the kings from far away and he brings them to meet the Messiah and to celebrate his birth. And today, when we're so unimportant and insignificant and uninfluential in this world, when we have no power and no say and no significance, when no one listens to what we say and we are not part of the chathrin classes, we don't get our opinions shared in public or in the news or in the media, Jesus comes to us with this great good news and he shares with us eternal life and we become children of the Most High God, we are part of his family and we're part of his family forever as Christians. So it's a unique birth and the most significant thing in this uniqueness, certainly I think in the passages here, are the names that are given to Jesus. Two names are given to Jesus here and the names are given by God Himself. They're significant and they're descriptive. I don't think we really use when we have babies now, I may be wrong and correct me if I'm wrong, all of you have recently had new children.

If there's deep and specific meanings to the names we give our children, usually just because we like them, because they're nice, sometimes they're named after other people. But biblically names were hugely significant and hugely important and they said something very significant.

And we're told that Jesus would give birth to a son and they will call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us. Isn't that just so clearly descriptive of why Jesus came and who Jesus was? Can I link you again with the Old Testament? How so much of the Old Testament said, I am with you, I will be with you, I will not leave you, that God is with you, that even in the New Testament, the Great Commission, I will be with you always. And this Emmanuel is God with us, God with us, not God abandoning us, not God far away from us, not God at a distance, however sometimes it might feel like that, but God with us, Christ becoming man, Christ becoming human, Christ living in our life, knowing what it is to be a child, to be dependent, to grow up in a family, to earn money, to, we presume, be at the graveside of his father when his father died, and to look after his mother and then to do this great and solemn work that he came to do and to accept rejection and failure and misunderstanding and all that went in his perfection and his glory, he becomes one of us and becomes one of us all the way to death, isn't it, all the way to the grave.

[15:02] So we sung Psalm 23, a paraphrase of Psalm 23, ye that I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, why? Because you are with me, can you see that? You see that? When you grow older, you see that when we face death, that we don't face death when we believe in Jesus and have taken trust in him, that we don't face that great unknown alone and we don't face it without knowledge of what lies beyond it. I'm not saying it doesn't remain fearful for us, I'm not saying it's not an issue for us, I'm not saying it's not, it becomes easy, but this thing has been removed because of what Jesus has done, having dealt with our sins and taken the sting from death in the cross. It means that we can live our lives and face these realities, knowing that God is with us in all of his life, in his perfect life and yet in his substitutionary death on the cross.

God is associating with us, God with us, God beside us, God among us, God between us, God including us with him, God as our companion, God in fellowship, God weeping with us, God suffering on our behalf and understanding what it's like, God experiencing death in a way that we will never know and experience with its forsakenness and its judgment and its lostness. Not even the most brutal, worst, unrepentant, godless, atheistic sinner will experience death and hell and judgment in the way that Christ did on the cross. And He accepts and takes that God with us in our place. And Jesus, He's also called, maybe we use Him in that way more often, we use that name for Him, don't we? More often, Jesus, we know Jesus and we love that name, Jesus. And verse 21 tells us that she will give birth to a son and year to give him the name, Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins. So right at this incarnational story, this nativity story, there's this absolutely clear cut expression of why Jesus has come. And this is a great time of year to be able to explain that to people. Do you know what the name of Jesus means? It means Jesus is the one who will save his people from their sins. The Lord is salvation. He comes with a specific reason to redeem us and to save us. There's a purpose behind it all for you and for me. God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes Him should not

perish but have everlasting life. Taking our punishment as our redeemer. Have you ever thought of yourself as needing a Saviour? You know, the terminology, the language to us is so common, isn't it? It's so much part of our spiritual ritual.

It's so much part of our nomenclature of church and of the Gospel. Do we genuinely see ourselves as people on a daily basis who need God's salvation, who need to be redeemed, who need our consciences forgiven, our sins forgiven, who take the guilt that we sense and feel and see Lord making a mess of things. It doesn't need to be great and significant and important but there's this recognition that we're broken and we need healed. We're selfish and we abandon God and we leave Him out of the picture. The kids were speaking about Adam and Eve and about from the very beginning how they chose to disobey God and that core reality being at the very heart of our lives that we choose to go our own way with all the implications of that. And Jesus has come to save us from ourselves. We're good at looking around, aren't we, in our lives and seeing how good Jesus would be for someone else. Oh yeah, they're really good Jesus, they're really bad. And yet the great message of the Gospel is, every day I need Him, my lostness, my self-centeredness, my pride and my death. And do you know that today? And I just challenge you and invite you to consider that. Consider Jesus Christ for yourself if you're not a professing believer in Jesus Christ, if you've never put your trust in Him, if you've never invited and asked Him to take your life and to come into your life and to forgive your sins and to be your Lord and Savior. It's kind of difficult sometimes, Christmas does get a bit choked, isn't it, with lots of things. But I would ask you in the beauty of fellowship and friendship and family and gifts and presents that you do take time to pray, that you take time to set aside with God, go on your own somewhere and be with Him, thank Him for who He is, thank Him for what He's done, thank Him for your family that you'll be with, thank Him for all your privileges, thank Him above all for His grace that you've known, thank Him for the suffering you've gone through and the inexplicable events of the year that you can't understand are not random and meaningless, thank Him that He knows the end from the beginning, thank Him that His time will be right for you to go and in His arms you will enjoy the experience of heaven that Mary and Joseph glimpsed when it was opened, when Jesus was born, thank Him that you one day meet again the people that you know and love, we trust in Him Jesus, thank Him for the people who have gone this year who knew and loved Jesus, thank Him for the preachers who preach the gospel faithfully and whose life is over, thank Him, take time to thank Him on these days, we might not meet formally for prayer on Wednesday, we recognise that you will, many of you have lots of family around but don't forget Him, we're not saying prayer doesn't matter, we're not saying it's insignificant, we're saying thank Him, take time to thank

Jesus Christ for who He is and for who He's done. Amen, let's wear our heads and pray. Lord God we ask and pray that we would come to you today with thankful hearts, that we would not do that most awful thing which sometimes we experience in our own lives, in our own thinking and our own situations when we forget to thank people for their great gifts at Christmas time, when we take for granted what they've given to us and when we don't even really think we have to bother, forgive us when we see that in ourselves and think how ugly it is and also when we see it in others we feel saddened by it but above all may we not be people this time, this Christmas time who will be thankless spiritually, who will be so filled with what's happening and celebration and parties and everything else, presents of no time, no time to give thanks for the greatest gift of all and for that gift of

[23 : 46] Jesus Christ who has utterly and completely transformed this world, who on that cross defeated forever the power of death and evil for all who will put their trust in Him and who is victorious over the grave and who as we saw last week will one day return to claim his own and to usher in a new heavens and a new earth of righteousness, no more battles, no more doubts, no more fears, no more death, no more evil, no more sin, no more brutality, no more greed, selfishness, pride, arrogance, no more lust, no more drunkenness, no more self-absorption, no more of all of these things but a life of joy and celebration and pleasure in his company. Lord we thank you for that hope, that hope that is sealed in the resurrection of Jesus and for that we give thanks today. Amen.