

OpenTheo

Pre-existence and Birth of Christ



Survey of the Life of Christ - Steve Gregg

In his discussion, Steve Gregg explores the concept of the pre-existence and birth of Christ. According to Gregg, while Jesus pre-existed as the eternal Son of God, the term "Son" was not used to refer to Him prior to His incarnation. Gregg notes that biblical support for the doctrine of eternal sonship is unclear, and that the term "the Word" is used in reference to Jesus prior to His incarnation. Gregg also delves into the details surrounding Jesus' birth and the expectations of both Jews and Gentiles at the time.

Transcript

When we say that we're going to be studying the life of somebody, as we are now studying the life of Jesus Christ, we normally mean we are going to be discussing the events relevant to their earthly career. If you're going to be doing a study of somebody's life, you'll probably study something of their ancestry and their birth circumstances and their nationality and their upbringing and how they launched their career and whether or not they were married and had family and what their great accomplishments were and how they came to their end. In other words, when we talk about the life of some historical character, we usually mean the events of that person's life, and probably too often when we think of the life of Christ, we're thinking of little else than that.

We may be thinking of the events recorded in the Gospels. The Gospel of John, uniquely though, begins his portrayal of the life of Christ very differently than just considering the events, even the birth events. The earliest events of the earthly life of Jesus are not where John begins his Gospel.

John begins by talking about the actual life of Jesus. It says in John chapter 1, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.

All things were made through him, and without him nothing was made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. Now, the life the Word is here referred to as a hymn.

There's a personification of a term that is not usually thought of as a personal noun. A

word we usually think of as an utterance, as a sound that proceeds from vocal apparatus of a speaker, and it is not a living thing at all. I mean, we might metaphorically or with some flights of poetic fancy speak of words being charged with life or whatever, but as a matter of fact, the Word in this case actually is alive and is personal.

In him, a personal pronoun was life, and it is of course the case that in verse 14, John tells us this Word, whom he has so mysteriously described in the opening verses, became flesh and tabernacled among us, and he's obviously referring to the earthly life of Jesus Christ, whom he describes as the Word who has been made flesh, and this Word who has been made flesh in the historical person of Jesus was prior to that time the Word in whom was life, the Word through whom all things were made, the Word who was with God, and the Word who in some mysterious sense was God. And John never explains this. He only declares it to be so, but you can see immediately that in considering the life of Christ, the life of Jesus, there's another way to consider the life of Jesus than just in a catalog of the events of his personal history, but rather the essence of who he is, what kind of life was in that individual.

You remember that the disciples at one time were in a boat on the Sea of Galilee in a storm, and Jesus was asleep in the back of the boat, and the disciples were terrified. The boat was filling with water and threatening to sink. A very severe storm.

These were seasoned sailors or fishermen who had been on the sea most their lives, and yet this was a terrible storm that had them at their wits' end. And they aroused Jesus from his sleep, and he commended the storm, and it stopped immediately. We read that after that they were greatly afraid.

I mean, they were afraid when the boat was about to sink and the storm was threatening, but when the storm stopped and all was safe, they were even more afraid. And they said, what manner of man is this that he commands even the wind and the waves and they obey him? And they got a glimpse at that moment, a momentary revelation that this man, the events of whose life they were experiencing and could bear witness to and later would in the Gospels, had an essence to who he was or the kind of being that he was that they had not perceived prior to this. They said, what manner or what kind of person is this? Now, they had seen many miracles of his before, but miracles were done frequently in the Old Testament by prophets and by Moses and so forth.

But they were beginning to get a glimpse that Jesus was not just working miracles in the same sense that miracle workers in the Old Testament had done, that he actually was obeyed by the elements, by nature. Of course, in John's Gospel we read that all these things were made through him, that he is their Lord and their creator. Perhaps to say that he is their creator is not biblically precise.

God is the creator. Jesus is the one through whom all things were created. Now, prior to

his existence on earth, it's interesting that classic Trinitarian theology has said that Jesus eternally existed in heaven as the Son of God, the eternal Son.

This is how the doctrine of the Trinity has come down to us, that God has eternally existed in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Of course, on that view, when Jesus was incarnate, one of those three persons, one third we might say of the Godhead, came down in the form of a man and became a baby and lived out a lifetime among us. This is, I think, what would be regarded as the most orthodox description of how the incarnation took place, the second person of the Godhead, who is the eternal Son of God.

Now, frankly, I don't have any serious objections to that orthodox formulation. It seems very glorifying to Christ, and I'm always in favor of formulations that bring adequate glory to Jesus. But I will say this, that I have not been able, in my adult life, searching the scripture, I've not been able to find a passage that says that Jesus, before his incarnation, was the Son of God, or was God the Son.

I find references to him having been God, and the term that the scripture uses in describing his pre-incarnation is that he was the Word, God the Word, we might say. But God the Son is not a term found in scripture. And therefore, there has been for many centuries, actually from the earliest centuries of the Church, a dispute.

The side that I personally favor in the dispute lost the argument, and therefore was not considered orthodox, and probably still isn't, but there is the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son. That Jesus has eternally been generated from the Father, and has therefore eternally been Son of the Father. And this is the orthodox viewpoint, that he has eternally always been the Son of God.

I grew up with this doctrine and have no emotional revulsion to it at all. I can accept it in order to make peace with the Church, but I have simply not been able to find biblical support for the notion that Jesus, prior to his incarnation, was ever called the Son. Or that the relationship he bore to God the Father was that of a Father and a Son.

It may be so, and I cannot deny that it was so. I just can't find biblical support for it. I find, however, I can say with assurance that Jesus was, before his incarnation, God the Word.

The Word was with God, and the Word was God. If he was also the Son, that is a subject upon which the Bible is silent, although the Church has spoken on it as authoritatively as on any doctrine that the Church has ever spoken on. It's interesting that the famous single Trinitarian verse in the Bible, in 1 John chapter 5, which by the way, the pedigree of that verse is highly questionable in terms of its manuscript support.

It is said that Erastus could not find this verse in any Greek manuscript when he was putting together the eclectic text that he was commissioned by the Church to make of

the New Testament. He had many manuscripts to work from, both Latin and Greek. This verse, he said, was not found in any Greek manuscript.

It was in the Latin, but he omitted it from his eclectic text because of its total absence from any Greek manuscripts. When challenged on this, he said, well, the reason I didn't put this verse in is because I couldn't find it in any good Greek manuscript. You give me a Greek manuscript that has it, and I'll include it.

So they did. They obliged him. They came up with one.

Why they didn't have this available before he asked for it is a hard question to answer, unless they manufactured it at that moment in order to support the verse. But because of that, Erastus went ahead and put it in, and it's found in what's called the Textus Receptus today. Although Erastus put a footnote in there that he doubted its authenticity.

But the verse I'm referring to is very well known, and it's the only verse in the Bible that can be said to state the Trinity doctrine in any clear terms, if this be considered clear. In 1 John 5 and verse 7, it says, For there are three who bear witness in heaven, the Father, the Word, notice it doesn't say the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one. So here we have the only clear statement of Trinity doctrine in a verse whose authenticity is open to serious question.

Now, when I say it's open to serious question, I don't mean to say we can necessarily rule it out as being authentic. The fact that it did not exist in any of the older Greek manuscripts available to Erastus does not mean that it was never in any earlier Greek manuscripts. It did, after all, exist in Jerome's Vulgate, and the Vulgate was translated from earlier manuscripts still.

So we don't know whether Jerome or some other copyist of Jerome made up this verse and added it, and that's why it wasn't in the Greek, but it was in the Latin. Or if it was in earlier Greek manuscripts but lost to us and only preserved in the Latin translation, we don't know. All I can say is this verse may or may not be authentic.

The King James and the New King James include it as authentic because they follow the Textus Receptus. Most other versions do not include it except possibly in a footnote and say that some manuscripts include such a verse. But what I'm saying is that even if this verse is authentic, it's doubtful, but even if it is, if we had grant that this is an authentic verse, it's interesting it does not say there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, but rather the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit.

Now if this verse is authentic, then it certainly gives us biblical reason to speak of the Trinity not as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, at least not in their eternal relation, but as the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit. And if the verse is not authentic, there is still

reason to use that language because John used the term, the Word for Jesus, before his Incarnation, though he never referred to him as the Son prior to his Incarnation. There are, when I have asked scholars and friends who study the Bible carefully and who hold to the view of the eternal Sonship of Jesus, that is, he was always the Son of God, when I've asked them to find verses of Scripture that demonstrate that he was the Son prior to his Incarnation, usually only two Old Testament texts have ever been suggested.

One is Psalm 27, which says, You are my Son, this day have I begotten thee, obviously the Father speaking to Jesus, or possibly to David, or both, but it says, You are my Son, today have I begotten thee, and obviously that was uttered prior to the birth of Jesus, and therefore we have a case in the Old Testament where Jesus is referred to as the Son, begotten of the Father. The problem with trying to make a doctrine of eternal Sonship from that verse is twofold. A, it speaks of a day in which he was begotten.

It obviously does not speak of eternal Sonship, it speaks of a particular day that he was begotten. Now, in some of the study Bibles, trying to get around this and trying to establish the eternal Sonship from that verse in Psalm 27, they said, well, day is used figuratively here of eternity. Well, that's an interesting comment whether there's any basis for it in exegesis is another question.

It seems obviously to be a comment based upon the needs of a theological proposition. To my mind, when it says, this day I have begotten thee, it seems to be talking about a particular point in time, a day, when the beginning took place. Furthermore, the other objection to the use of Psalm 27 to prove this doctrine is that Paul quotes that very verse in Acts 13, 33, I think it is, and there he applies that verse to the day of the resurrection.

He says that God raised up Jesus, even as it is written in the second Psalm, you are my Son this day, have I begotten thee? So, Paul applied that verse not to some eternal generation of the Son, he applied it to a particular day, the day of Christ's resurrection, where he was begotten from the dead, a term that Paul uses of Christ, the first born from the dead, or the first begotten from the dead, in Colossians 1, 18, and Jesus uses that of himself, or else John does, in Revelation chapter 1 in verse 5. So, we know that that verse, which is one of the two that is generally used to prove the eternal Sonship of Jesus, actually doesn't prove that point at all. If anything, the Bible gives us a better interpretation of that verse and does not involve that particular theological viewpoint. The other Old Testament passage that is thought to teach the eternal Sonship of Jesus is Isaiah 9, 6, which says, unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, referring to Jesus, and in saying a child is born, a son is given, it sounds as if it may be that this child already was known as a son before he was given, before he was born.

However, that is very difficult, very difficult to press into the mold of an eternal Sonship doctrine. I'm not saying the eternal Sonship doctrine can't be true, I'm just saying that verse doesn't very well prove it. To say, unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given,

could easily be referring to that child being the son at the point of his birth.

Furthermore, it is possible that the givenness of the Son is on the cross, where God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son to be crucified, to be offered up. And therefore, it could be saying a child is born, and then at the crucifixion, the Son, who has since his birth been the Son, he is now given as a sacrifice for us at the cross. I don't know which of those is the best interpretation of that, but I can say this, there is certainly no way to compel the traditional doctrine of the eternal Sonship from that verse.

I think there's at least a couple of other possibilities that are more likely from that verse. We would need something clearer than that to teach such an unusual doctrine. I think it's an unusual doctrine.

It's not unusual in the Church because it's been taught for centuries, but it's unusual in terms of making sense to the mind that someone could be someone else's son forever and ever and ever and ever and ever and never have begun. Usually people become sons of other people by being born from them, before which time they were not their son, and they become their son in that point in time. Now, God can do anything.

As far as I'm concerned, there are many things about God that baffle me and I don't ever expect to understand. And if one of those is that he could be forever a father of another person who is forever a son, but that person never became his son, he never generated him, but they've just always forever and ever existed in such a relation, it seems to me that father and son are given more as titles than as descriptive of a real relationship. If two persons are equally eternal, and we call one of them the father and the other the son, I think we're just giving them gratuitous titles, unless there's some mystery that it's far beyond what I can fathom.

And that is possible. That is possibly the case. The thing is, the doctrine is peculiar, the doctrine is difficult to fathom, and I accept certain doctrines that are difficult to fathom, so long as the Bible teaches them.

If the Bible doesn't teach them, I'd rather not tweak my brain too much trying to sort them out and defend them. And this is where I'm belaboring right now the fact that the Bible does not, to my knowledge, ever refer to Jesus as the son before his birth, but it does refer to him as the son after his birth. And in fact, there is evidence that his birth is that which caused him to be called the son, and that he was not called the son before that.

I can't prove that beyond question, but I'd like to show you Luke chapter 1, where Mary is visited by an angel. And this angel is, of course, giving her the information for the first time that she is going to be the mother of Jesus. And she asked in Luke 134 this question, how can this be, since I do not know a man? In other words, I'm a virgin, how can I have a child? Notice that that is the question when you hear the answer.

Verse 35, the angel answered and said to her, the Holy Spirit will come upon you. The power of the highest will overshadow you. Therefore also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the son of God.

Now, the word therefore is a word that has a function in grammar. It means for this reason. Now, therefore, or for this reason, the one who will be born for you will be called the son of God.

Why? Why will he be called the son of God? Wherefore? Well, because you have not known a man, but you become pregnant nonetheless by the agency of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, your son will have no human father. He will have only God as his father.

Therefore, he will be called the son of God. Now, there might be other reasons for him to be called the son of God, but the angel doesn't say so. The angel could have said, well, this child that is coming has always been the eternal son, and now he will become your son.

But no, she's asked, how is it that I will conceive when I'm a virgin? And he says, that's no problem. God can work everything out. God will, by a supernatural act of the Holy Spirit, enable the egg within you to be conceived as a child.

And because there will be no human agency, no man will be participating in this. Therefore, that child will be called the son of God. It sounds like the term son of God is based upon the fact that Jesus was born in history without a human father, and only God was his father.

And I frankly, I've searched because I want to know, and I have not been able to find any evidence in scripture that Jesus was the son of God prior to that time of his birth. Now, this is not in any sense an attack or a diminishing of the deity of Christ. If anything, I affirm the deity of Christ more strongly than most Trinitarians probably do.

Because most Trinitarians say that Jesus is one third of the Godhead. I mean, they wouldn't say it like that, but that's essentially how it's seen. There's three persons, father, son, Holy Spirit, and one of them came down and became a person.

I understand the Godhead a little differently. That doesn't mean I understand it correctly, and everyone will have to, you know, sort out the Bible for themselves to see what they must believe about it. But I see Paul saying in Colossians 2, 9, that in Christ dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.

Now, Godhead is a strange word. It doesn't appear very many times in the Bible, but certainly whatever is meant by the Godhead, Paul's own view of the Trinity would almost certainly be subsumed under that word Godhead. Whatever he would have described the Trinity as, had he ever been, had the occasion to describe the Trinity, which interestingly enough, he never did.

But whatever he understood about the Trinity, he would have intended, I think, by the use of his word, the Godhead. And in Jesus dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead. Not a third, not a portion, but the fullness.

Now, you might think that I have demolished, or attempted at least to demolish, a traditional view in order to put in its place something, some specific alternative that I have come up with. I don't know that I could do that. I believe that the incarnation of Jesus is very much a mystery.

I believe that the Trinity is very much a mystery. I believe, as I believe we must if we're going to follow scripture, that the Father is God, and that Jesus is God, and that the Holy Spirit is God, and yet there's only one God. And for that reason, I believe there is an intermingling of those individuals into a unity of the Godhead and a distinction between them that is very, very hard to distinguish between.

And I guess here's my, I'll just put in a nutshell what my idea about it is. I don't know that we're supposed to make the hairline distinctions that theologians have always been trying to make. I don't know that talking about a hypostatic union and identity of essence and difference of person and all that kind of stuff, those are terminology that the church has historically used to try to work it out.

How could Jesus be God and not be the one God the Father and so forth? Actually, of course, to say that Jesus is not the same God as God the Father does violence to other plain statements of scripture, like the one we mentioned earlier. Isaiah 9, 6, unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, that government should be upon his shoulder, and his name should be called Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty Father. Interesting it doesn't say the Mighty Son.

And this is one of the two Old Testament verses used to prove the eternal sonship of Christ. And it says his name should be called the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, the Mighty God. Now, it seems as if Isaiah were trying to present some notion that Jesus, prior to his incarnation, was known as the Son of the Father.

He could do little to confuse the matter more than what he did by calling him the Eternal Father. Now, I begin to sound like one of the Jesus-only's here, I think. Although I'm not really sure what the Jesus-only's believe, because I've never conversed with them or read their literature.

But I will tell you in a nutshell what I think is a possible scenario that harmonizes the day to the best I've been able to do. And I will have to say at the outset that I do not cover all the bases, because I don't know how to cover all the bases. I believe there is a mystery in the Godhead, a mystery in the Trinity, that we do well to leave in that category.

In 1 Timothy chapter 3, in verse 16, Paul said, without controversy, great is the mystery

of godliness. God was manifested in the flesh. Now, the Alexandrian text doesn't say God was manifested in the flesh.

It says he was manifested in the flesh, which is a great matter of dispute between the King James Only type people and others, because in the King James and the New King James, which follow the Textus Receptus, it says God was manifested in the flesh. The Alexandrian text doesn't say God was, but he was, and therefore robs the Church of one of its great texts on the deity of Christ. We do not know for sure, of course, what the original said, though I've read some very elaborate discussions of the syntax and the grammar of the passage that seem to confirm that the Textus Receptus makes no sense.

First of all, the sentence doesn't make sense otherwise, because in the Alexandrian text, it says who was manifested in the flesh, without any antecedent to the pronoun who. Anyway, I don't want to confuse you with technical things. All I can say is that Paul said that the manifestation of God in the flesh is a great mystery, and I'm willing to concede that point, and leave it at that.

It's a great mystery to me. What I can say is what little we know of the Incarnation, from what John has told us in the beginning of his Gospel, is that Jesus was no ordinary man. His life did not begin in Bethlehem, or it didn't begin in the womb.

It did not begin at conception. His life began, or never began. His life was an eternity past.

There's a statement in the book of Micah, Micah 5, verse 2, that says, But thou Bethlehem, Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet from you shall he come forth to me, who is to be the ruler of Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting. Now it's interesting, because that verse at once tells of Jesus' earthly origin, Bethlehem is that city from which the Messiah will come, he who is to rule Israel. So it speaks of his birth in Bethlehem.

It is the clearest prediction in the Bible of such a birth. In fact, when the wise men came looking at Herod's house to find out where the Messiah should be born, he consulted the scribes and they looked up this very verse and said, it's got to be Bethlehem. This is where it says that.

But the same verse tells us of this one who will come forth from Bethlehem. It says his goings forth are really from of old, even from everlasting. Perhaps the clearest statement in the Bible to the eternity of Christ, that he has never really begun, that he is co-eternal with the Father.

The word was with God, which sounds like he's someone other than God, and yet says he was God in John 1.1. And that is, of course, caused so much perplexity that some, namely the Jehovah's Witnesses, have felt the easiest way to solve it is just to

retranslate it and say the word was with God and the word was a God. That's a little easier than the word was God and the word was with God. However, that translation is not valid.

First of all, it's not theologically correct. Jesus was not a God. He was God.

There's only one God. And secondly, the Greek does not allow it either. It's a dishonest translation, translated by the Jehovah's Witnesses for the sake of convenience, not for the sake of faithfulness to the text.

Now, having said that, we could play around with the idea if we wish to. I don't want to do so for very long because I think we will end up frustrated if we try to understand it all. But we can say that there must be a reason why Jesus, before his incarnation, is referred to as the word.

And it is mentioned, of course, that the word was instrumental in creation. This really, of course, reminds us, and I think John deliberately by his opening words of the Gospel of John, reminds us of Genesis chapter 1 because he opens his Gospel with the exact same words with which the Old Testament opens, in the beginning. And I don't think that John did that accidentally or coincidentally.

I think that he deliberately wants to call our attention to the identity of the opening chapter of Genesis with the time frame that he's talking about here. In the beginning, that is, when God began to create and so forth, the word was already there and the word was instrumental. All things were created through him.

Now, he was not himself one of those created things, could not be, because it says all things were made through him, John 1, 3, and without him nothing was made that was made. So, he cannot belong to the category of those things that were made, else he would have made himself. Without him, nothing that was made was made.

He was instrumental in the creation of all created things and that instantly, of course, excludes him from the class of created things himself. In Colossians chapter 1, verse 16, or even before that, it says it twice in Colossians chapter 1, well, in verse 16 it says, for by him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers, all things were created through him and for him. Now, obviously, this says the same thing John says, that everything was made through him, nothing was made except through him, and therefore he can't be one of the things made.

The Jehovah's Witnesses, recognizing how this impacts their own doctrine, that their own doctrine is Jesus is a created being, the first created being through whom all other created things were made, they've simply had to introduce a word in this passage that isn't in the Greek text at all in order to preserve their doctrinal position. Namely, the last

line and the first line of verse 16 both say all things were created through him. They simply add the word other things, all other things were made by him, meaning, they imply, all created things except himself, who also was a created thing.

The interesting thing is that their introduction of that word in the text is an admission on their part, that as it stands, their doctrine cannot be supported from that verse, but is in fact refuted from it, and they have to add words into the text that are not there in order for their doctrine to be preserved. Jesus is not a created thing, all things were made through him that were made. Now, in calling him the word and saying that he was involved in creation, what we're being told is that when you read Genesis chapter 1 and you read God saying, let there be light, and there was light, and let there be a firmament, and divide the waters from below and above the firmament from each other, and let the dry land appear, and let the earth bring forth fruit and grasses and all that kind of stuff, whenever God commanded something to be so, and it came to pass, we have of course, although Genesis chapter 1 does not use the term the word of God, we have the word of God described as taking place, God speaking.

God speaks, and what people speak are words, and so God's word goes forth and things come about. In Psalm 33, we have this story in Genesis alluded to in poetic terms, but the terms of Psalm 33 seem to allow the word to almost have an existence of its own. In Psalm 33, in verse 6, the psalmist wrote, by the word of the Lord, the heavens were made.

Now see, that's just a summary of what we read in Genesis 1. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, and goes on to talk about his speaking, but see, in Genesis, we don't have any reference to the word of the Lord, per se. Here, the psalmist speaks of the activity of God creating through speaking, but he emphasizes that the agent in creation was the word of the Lord. By the word of the Lord, the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.

And it goes on to give some more poetic detail there. In verse 9, it says, he spoke and it was done. He commanded and it stood fast.

This ability of God to speak and something happens when he commands it is sometimes called God's creative fiat. It doesn't mean that he designs automobiles in Italy, but it means that a fiat is sort of a decree that carries its own such authority that it's brought to pass by the very commanding of it. And so we read of God creating by fiat in the Old Testament, and we read, actually, this was the word of the Lord by which he did this.

And John goes further and personifies the word of the Lord as somebody and recognizes that Jesus, before his coming to earth, was in existence in the form of God's creative words. Now, we have to realize that we have a dynamic here associated with words that we don't usually associate with ordinary words. Jesus said in John 6, 63, he says, the words I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life.

And there is something about God's word that is different than other words. It says in Hebrews 4, 12, the word of God is alive and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword. It's a living word.

Peter said the same thing in 1 Peter 1. He says, we've been born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible by the word of God, which lives and abides forever. So we have this concept that God's word is not just so much sound as our words are, which convey symbolic meaning to the hearer who understands the language we're speaking. But God's word is something alive.

And more than something alive, it is someone alive. God's word has a personality of his own and an existence of his own. Now, to say that God's word was with him and was him, if we're not personifying word, then it's not too hard to deal with the fact that a person's words were with him and were him.

In a sense, my words are me, my mind, my thoughts, my interaction with other human beings is all through the medium of words. Then they reflect who I am. They come out of my heart, out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaking.

My personality is conveyed through my word. I remember someone once a long time ago accused me of saying and teaching certain things that I actually was not teaching. And a friend of mine who had not seen me for a while, he said, that's not the Steve that I know.

Now, see, he was the words that were allegedly from me. He said, that's not Steve. That's not Steve's words.

I mean, he knows that my words would convey who I am. And in fact, the word here that's translated word, Logos, although as near as I can tell from what I've studied, the English word word is the best translation of it. It is a word that has a somewhat broader meaning.

Logos is the Greek word behind our word logic. And all of those words in the English language end with ology, like biology, and anthropology, and geology. The ology at the end of those words comes from the Greek word logos.

And obviously that means something like the word about bios, the word about life, the word about anthropos, anthropology, the word about man, and the word about Geo, which is earth, geology. And yet we understand that it means something like the study of those things, or the information content of what we're studying about those things. The term word indeed means word, but it focuses, I think, on the information content, on the thought, the logic, the thinking behind it.

And to say that in the beginning, God's word existed and was him, and was with him. There's a sense in which my words proceed from me and go on and can have a career of their own separate from me. But they do not do so without bringing me with them.

I am them and they're me. I mean, I don't want to get too philosophical. I can't help it.

John's the one who got us into this. He's the troublemaker. All I'm saying is that the metaphor of human speech and human words, when applied to the Godhead, probably is intended to be instructive and tell us something about who Jesus was before he came to earth.

And if we could say Jesus, before he came to earth, was the living personal expression of God's heart, like our words come from our hearts, that he was God in that sense. And he was with God. He had, in a sense, an identity of his own.

But he also is nothing but the expression of the heart of God himself. He's not created. He's part of God himself.

He's an aspect of who God is. And God throughout eternity, I don't know about eternity, but at least throughout recorded history in the Bible, from the very beginning where he created the heavens and the earth, he spoke. His word was instrumental.

His word was with him. His word was active. Some people actually, of course, when they read in Proverbs chapter 8 about wisdom, and wisdom is personified as speaking and having been with God when he created the universe and so forth, many people think that wisdom there should be identified with Jesus.

And there are some arguments that would support that, some that make that problematic. But the point is, God has always, A, had thoughts, and B, expressed those thoughts. He did so when he commanded the universe to communicate with us.

He did it again when he walked with Adam and Eve in the wilderness and communicated with, I mean, in the garden, became a wilderness, in the garden and communicated with them. He did so through the prophets, the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, the word of the Lord came to Isaiah, the word of the Lord came to Elijah. This word from God has been in expression as long as God has been interacting with the created realm, and no doubt longer.

We don't know what went on before the created realm came into being. In fact, I'm sure eternally. And it is that word which we could express, we could say God's mind being expressed, God expressing himself, expressing his heart, which took the form of creative fiats at the creation, which took the form of inspiration of the prophets, eventually took the form of another form, and that is in the form of a human being who is the very embodiment of God's communicative nature and has no personality apart from that of God's self-expression.

It says in Hebrews chapter 1, in the opening verses, God, who at sundry times in diverse manners spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by his Son, whom he has appointed heir of all things, through whom he made the

worlds, who being the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person and upholding all things by the word of his power, etc., etc. When he goes on and talks about his redemptive work. Let me just say this.

The wording is interesting. God in the past spoke to us by the prophets, but has in these last days spoken by his Son. The coming of the Son, the incarnation, is God's ultimate way of speaking, superior to the way he spoke in the prophets, superior to all other expressions.

Jesus is the ultimate manifestation of the mind and heart of God. He is the last word, as it were. I don't mean to say that God doesn't continue to speak by the spirit to us, but it is the spirit of Jesus.

It's the same word speaking, I believe, through us. Now maybe I'm getting into theological gobbledygook there, because the word is distinguished from the spirit, it would seem, in some passages. So I don't want to get all too mixed up.

And I am a little mixed up. But let me just say this. If you look further in the Gospel of John, it says this.

Now this is still, I believe, prior to the incarnation, talking about the word of God that was with him in the beginning. The reason I believe verse 10 and 11 is prior to the incarnation is because we read of the incarnation in verse 14. And I have reason to believe that most of the discussion about the word in the previous verses is talking about his activity and existence and career before the incarnation.

If you're not familiar with the word incarnation, it just means incarnate, in the flesh, when Jesus came in the flesh, became a human. It says in verse 10, well verse 9, that was the true light, the word that we're talking about was the light of men, and he was the true light which gives light to every man coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, and the world did not know him.

He came to his own, and his own did not receive him. Now, we picture Jesus coming to the Jews and being rejected by them in this picture. However, his incarnation is described as taking place in verse 14.

I am inclined to believe that what we're being told about here is that God's word, A, he tells us was instrumental in the creation. B, was enlightening every man that's ever come into the world. Verse 9, he is in the sense that any man who has ever come into the world was in any sense enlightened with the awareness of God and of truth and of whatever God would later reveal through the scriptures.

But people who've never seen the scriptures sometimes have had the enlightenment of those things. Well, that was Jesus too, enlightening them. He was the light that enlightens every man that comes into the world.

Beyond that, he came to his own. How? Through the prophets, through Moses, through the law. The word was inscripturated and committed to the nation of Israel, and they didn't receive it.

They rejected the word of God, as Jesus pointed out through their traditions, or as Stephen pointed out, that they always reject the word of the Lord. The Jews did not receive the word through the prophets. They killed the prophets instead.

So finally we read in verse 14, the word was made flesh and dwelt among us when we beheld his glory. So we have in these opening verses, I'd almost say the early life of Jesus before his incarnation, but it wasn't really early if he was eternal. There's no earlier or later in that way of seeing things, but we can say the prior existence of Christ before his incarnation, and his incarnation is seen in verse 14, the word became flesh and dwelt among us.

Now there is a statement in verses 12 and 13 that I'd like to give some consideration to. It says, but as many as received him, this is after saying he came to his own, they didn't receive him. It says, but as many as did, some did obviously, those who received him, to them he gave the right to become the children of God, even to those who believe in his name.

I believe this still belongs to the portion that is prior to the incarnation, that those who received God's word and believed in his name were entitled to be called sons of God. But then verse 13 says, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. Now that sounds like it's saying that those who received the word actually experienced regeneration.

They were born of God, they had a rebirth. Now this is a little troublesome for my thesis, because I'm suggesting that these... Prior to the incarnation, the faithful Jews of the Old Testament time, David, the prophets, you know, Moses, Abraham, those guys, they received the word. They are called sons of God.

In the Old Testament, the term sons of God is used sparingly for godly people, not as frequently as in the New Testament. But the problem here is it seems to be saying that these people were born of God in the sense that was later spoken of being born again of the spirit. And the reason I have a little problem with that is because I'm not so sure that theologically we can say that the saints of the Old Testament experienced regeneration as is available to Christians today.

Maybe they did, but it seems to me like regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit coming into us, and that seems to be the unique feature of the New Covenant that was promised in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. And that prior to the New Covenant, this was not necessarily experienced. On the other hand, maybe it was by individuals, whereas in the New Covenant, the whole community of Christians received it.

Not all Jews were born of God in the Old Testament, but maybe the remnant were. I can't sort that out entirely, but I would point this out that verse 13 of John 1, there is a textual variant. It is not usually considered to be a very authoritative one, but there is a manuscript or two where verse 13 reads, who was born, not who were born, who was born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor the will of man, but of God.

And if that reading were the correct reading, that is the singular, who was born, rather than who were born, then the antecedent to that pronoun, who, would be him whose name is at the end of verse 12, Jesus, those who believed in his name, him, he who was born, not of blood, nor of the will of man, nor of the will of the flesh, but of God. And it would be a reference possibly to the virgin birth of Christ. Most scholars would not accept this as the most likely reading, and I'm not sure that we should.

I bring it up because there is at least one or so witness to this particular reading, and it would make this John's only reference in his entire gospel to the virgin birth. It would seem strange for John not to mention the virgin birth, given the lofty concept of the incarnation that we get from John that we don't even get from the other gospels so much. Anyway, those are just some theoretical and questionable aspects of this.

What is not questionable is that prior to Jesus coming to earth, he existed. He existed equal with the Father. He was God, but in another sense, he had a distinguished existence separate from some other aspect of God, obviously, and that he was the one instrumental in creation and in communication to the saints of old, and eventually took on a human form in the person of Jesus.

Now, John, interestingly, does not ever give us any detail about the birth of Jesus. He says that the word was made flesh and dwelt among us, but when he begins to tell the story, it's all about Jesus' adult life. We don't have any record of Jesus' birth or childhood in the gospel of John, nor do we in Mark.

Mark also begins his gospel with the adult life of John the Baptist and Jesus, and to know anything about the events surrounding the birth of Jesus, we have only two witnesses, Matthew and Luke, and they devote each of them the first two chapters of their respective books to discussion of the events surrounding the birth of Jesus and John the Baptist in the case of Luke's gospel. Now, we have two chapters at the beginning of Luke and two chapters at the beginning of Matthew that is the total information that we have from Scripture about the life of Jesus prior to age 30. Even these are fragmentary, and they don't overlap each other very much.

I mean, they pretty much are very independent accounts, each giving different details of the birth of Jesus. In Luke's gospel, which is chronologically earlier than Matthew's, and not in its time of writing, but in the material it covers, Luke, well, I shouldn't say that because Matthew gives a genealogy at the beginning of his, and that goes earlier, but when the story really begins, Luke gives earlier information. Luke tells about the

announcement given by an angel to old Zacharias in the temple, a priest, that his aged wife Elizabeth, who had been barren all her life, sort of like a more recent Abraham and Sarah kind of story, that she was going to have a child, their prayers were answered, and she would bear a son, and this son would be more than a little significant.

He would go before the Lord and the spirit and power of Elijah. He'd prepare the way of the Lord, and essentially the wording of the angel in Luke chapter one was that this child would be the fulfillment of the prophecy in Malachi, that God would send Elijah before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to the fathers, lest, he said, I come and smite the land with a curse. So the land was in danger.

The land of Israel was in danger of being smitten by God with the curse, the curse, and that curse was, of course, threatened back in Deuteronomy 28 by Moses, that if they rejected God's laws long enough, he was going to banish them from the land, and he did so, of course, shortly after the time of Jesus, but before doing so, he sent two important messengers, John the Baptist, to warn them and to turn their hearts, and then, of course, the Messiah himself, and it's interesting that all four of the gospels, although not all of them go back as far in the narrative as each other do, all four of them definitely begin with John the Baptist when they tell the story, and this includes John's gospel, and John's emphatic, that John was not that light, he was just sent to be a witness to that light, but we got to tell about John first anyway. John is the beginning of the story of the ministry of Jesus Christ, and even Luke gives the birth narrative of John before giving the birth narrative of Jesus. You know, Mark opens his gospel with these words, the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and then when he starts telling the story, he says John came baptizing.

John's baptism was the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, according to Mark. Of course, Mark doesn't talk about the birth of either John or Jesus, but Luke does, and so in Luke chapter 1, we have the announcement made to Zechariah in the temple that his wife would have a child miraculously, not a virgin birth, of course, but miraculous like Sarah's birth of Isaac, or conception of Isaac was miraculous. She was too old and had always been barren, and it's sort of like a replay of the old Abraham and Isaac story.

Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac. And so he goes home, and his wife does become pregnant, and three months later, the same angel goes to another town, a village of Nazareth in Galilee, the other end of the country, and appears to a virgin named Mary, and gives her information that she too is going to miraculously become pregnant and have a child who would also be significant, and the angel himself mentions that this is connected with Elizabeth's child, because Mary and Elizabeth were in some remote sense relatives, and she knew about Elizabeth's situation. And of course, he told Mary that her child is going to be the Son of God, and that he's going to be the Messiah.

And Mary received this, and that is what occupies chapter 1 of Luke, with the exception that before Luke ends his first chapter, he tells actually of the birth of John the Baptist. Mary actually goes and visits Elizabeth for the latter six months of her pregnancy, of Elizabeth's pregnancy, and leaves and goes back to Nazareth about the time that John's born. When John is born, his father, Zacharias, receives a spirit of prophecy, and prophesies of the great significance of the days in which they're living, and of the significance of the birth of John, and more significantly, although he mentions John will go before the Lord and so forth, he prophesies more about Jesus, who had not yet been born.

But at the birth of John, the father of John prophesies about Jesus, and also addresses the Son and says, you son shall go before the Lord and so forth, and prepare the way. Now, I would just point out something that has puzzled some people. When Zacharias was told by the angel that he was going to become a father, and that his wife would have a child, he expressed some incredulity.

He said this, he didn't say how can this be, but he said, you know, how shall I know that these things are going to happen? And he was told, well, you'll be struck dumb, unable to speak until the child is born. Mary expressed incredulity also. She said, how can this be? I have not known a man.

But she was not struck dumb. She was, in fact, not in any way rebuked or anything. There does seem to be a disparity in the way that Mary and Zacharias were treated when they received the announcement, and both of them expressed some doubt about it.

Some Christians have tried to resolve the problem of why God did one thing with Zacharias, not the same thing with Mary, have said, well, Mary didn't really express doubt. Mary just said, how can it be? She was asking for an explanation. I don't know that she was not expressing doubt.

I think that's an attempt to make Mary more righteous than Zacharias in the situation. He did say, how shall I know that these things will happen? Which is definitely, or I don't know, it sounds like an expression of doubt at some level. But I would point out to you that striking Zacharias dumb is nowhere said in Scripture to be a judgment or a punishment of him.

It is said to be a sign to him. He wondered how he would know this would be. Now, Gideon was never punished for asking God to give him a sign.

There are a number of people in the Bible who were entitled to ask God for signs when they were told that something would happen. Hezekiah was told he was going to recover, but he said, well, how shall I know that I'll recover? And Isaiah allowed him to name a sign. And there's no stigma attached to that, asking for a sign.

Why would Zacharias be struck down? Well, I don't believe that was a punishment of Zacharias. I believe it was the sign. I think it was a sign to confirm it.

Here's the sign. You wonder if what I'm telling you is true? You wonder if it's supernatural? Well, here's what's supernatural. He was made mute for the whole period of the pregnancy, and that was supernatural.

It gave the man a sign. He apparently needed a sign, but it was more than just a sign to him. I believe the muteness of Zacharias and the whole circumstances of those two women becoming pregnant, Elizabeth, the old woman, and Mary, the young woman, and the children that they bore, I think all of that has a deeper significance.

And I never knew this. I've never read this. It just came to me as I was studying it a few years ago, and it strikes me as probable.

I've never heard anyone say this before. But the birth of Jesus, of course, marked the entrance of a new era. John the Baptist announced that new era, but he never really experienced it.

John died before the new covenant was instituted, and he lived and died his whole life as an Old Testament character, really, although his story is found in what we call the New Testament. He was an Old Testament man. He lived under the Old Testament economy to the day of his death.

But he was the greatest example of it. Jesus said, among those born of women, there's not arisen a greater prophet than John the Baptist, and certainly he is the greatest example of Old Testament piety, according to Jesus' own statement. He is the epitome of godliness in the Old Testament.

Jesus, of course, is something beyond that, something greater than that. But John came from an old woman. Jesus from a young woman.

Perhaps there's some symbolism there that Judaism and the piety associated with that was kind of growing old. It didn't have much time left. It had once been young.

It had once had a life, but it was now old and had become sterile, barren. And yet Mary was a young woman, full of promise, youthful, probably what we would call a girl rather than a woman today, probably just having reached puberty. And therefore, Jesus and the new wine and the new thing that he was bringing comes from a new woman, a young woman.

John the Baptist, the symbol, possibly, or the representative of Old Testament piety in general, comes from an old, aging woman, probably not far from death, and one who had had a younger, more vibrant life, but that was in the past. And it may well signify the passing of the torch from the old woman of Judaism to the young woman of the New

Covenant. And it's interesting that the young woman visited the old woman and received a blessing from her and a commendation from her and a prophecy affirming her and so forth.

I mean, the Old Covenant does confirm the new. But here's another interesting thing, to me interesting anyway. Zechariah, the father of John, was struck silent until the birth of John.

Now, you may well know, I've told you before, that the prophetic voice lay silent for 400 years from the close of the Old Testament period to the birth of John the Baptist, really. John the Baptist's birth brought an end to God's silence. There had been no prophets sent by God until John for 400 years.

Malachi had been the last that we know of. And therefore, we call those 400 years the silent years. But with the birth of John, God's silence was broken and the prophetic spirit began to function again in Israel.

I suspect that the silence of Zechariah during the time of that period of the gestation of John and his breaking of silence and prophesying again at the birth of John the Baptist perhaps was a sign of some spiritual significance. The silence of the old man might well represent God's own silence during the preceding four centuries. But his breaking of silence with a prophecy at the birth of John the Baptist would symbolize the fact that God's silence is now broken.

God is now speaking again. The prophetic spirit is now given to Israel again in the person of John the Baptist. Anyway, that's fairly speculative, but I've got the pulpit.

I've the right to reject the speculations. So in Luke chapter one, we have the birth of John the Baptist and that's how the chapter ends. The birth of Jesus is found in chapter two of Luke and also in chapter two of Matthew.

But we haven't talked about chapter one of Matthew yet. In Luke chapter one, we found that an angel appeared to Mary and told her she'd become pregnant. Sure enough, she did.

And that's the last we hear of her after she visits Elizabeth. Matthew tells us a different story, not a conflicting one, just a different detail. And that is an angel appeared to Joseph after he had heard that Mary was pregnant.

Now, here's an interesting thing. Mary, as soon as she became pregnant, apparently went to Elizabeth's house and stayed there for six months until John the Baptist was born. Am I right? Is it six months or three months? I believe she stayed six months, didn't she? Anyone read this more recently than me? I read it the other day.

My head gets mixed up sometimes. Let me get this right. Elizabeth, verse 36, this is now

the sixth month.

Okay. I'm glad I looked that up. I had doubts about my accuracy there.

Mary became pregnant six months after Elizabeth did, not three months. And went and stayed with Elizabeth for three months until the time of the birth of John the Baptist. Now, what's interesting is that a woman doesn't really begin to show very much her pregnancy until at least the third month, generally speaking.

And by the time Mary left Elizabeth and went back home, she'd just be starting to show. She'd be three months pregnant just at that time. And it seems like if she went to Elizabeth's in order to escape the embarrassment of pregnancy in her hometown, knowing she was not a married woman, she was certainly taking a risk going back to her hometown just at the very time when her pregnancy would not be able to be hidden.

I suspect that she went to visit Elizabeth specifically for this reason. That Mary, of course, knew that her baby was not conceived by man. But who else would believe her? Well, Elizabeth would.

Elizabeth also had been supernaturally impregnated. And she was a relative. So, Mary's family would know Elizabeth, would have known the story of Elizabeth.

Six months earlier, Elizabeth had become pregnant and everyone was talking about it. Certainly, news would have reached Mary's family. Mary, I'm sure, was not ignorant of it before the angel mentioned it to her.

And therefore, if Mary needed someone to vouch for her and say, I'll vouch for it. This woman had, you know, she's, God did this. You know, this is not a man's intrusion here.

Elizabeth would be the most credible witness she could hope to have given her endorsement. And she got it. And so, having spent the time with Elizabeth, Mary could now go back to Nazareth and where her family was.

And, you know, she could basically go there with the blessing and endorsement of Elizabeth who, and it would give her, it would probably make her less vulnerable to being stoned when she was found to be pregnant. Now, in Matthew chapter 1, we don't read any of that stuff we've just discussed, but we read about Joseph's reaction when he heard about her pregnancy. This is probably when she was three months pregnant and had come back from Elizabeth who was now back in Nazareth.

Joseph, it says she was found to be with child. And Joseph, being a just man and not wanting to make a public spectacle of her, decided to quietly divorce her. It is sometimes been said, it is usually said, in fact, that Joseph assumed she was in fact unfaithful, but he was a gracious fellow.

And although he could have had her stoned under the law, he wasn't a murderous sort. And he just assumed quietly divorced her and so forth. And then, then an angel comes to him in a dream and says, don't be afraid to marry this woman.

That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And he, and the angel told Joseph the child to be named Jesus. He shall save his people from his sins.

And you go ahead and marry her. And the first chapter of Matthew closes with Joseph doing that. He went and did what he's told.

He married Mary. Although he did not have sexual relations with her until she had born Jesus, who is called her firstborn son, which of course anticipates the fact that she had four more sons and several daughters, some daughters, according to other passages of scripture. Jesus was her firstborn, we're told in the closing verse of Matthew.

Now, uh, I like to speculate a little bit about Joseph here. Uh, Joseph is an interesting character too. And I, I've done a lot of thinking about the gospels.

I've spent most of my adult ministry, uh, meditating on the gospels probably more than any other part of scripture. And it's, uh, Jesus is my fascination. And I've, and so these stories have rolled over my mind many times.

And I have come up with some conclusions here and there. I just come to me and I don't know where they're from or if they're right or wrong, but I was always told and always had the impression that Joseph probably didn't believe Mary's story. And that's why he wanted to divorce her.

He figured, well, she says it's supernatural, but whoever heard of that ever happening, I'm just going to quietly divorce her and we'll get out of this deal. And, and that it took an angel to convince him that she was in fact pregnant by the Holy Spirit rather than by another man. And then he changed his whole perception of the situation.

I now think somewhat differently. It may be that Joseph believed her story. Certainly she wouldn't have said she would have said something.

I mean, in communicating to her fiance that she was pregnant and she knew she had not been with another man. I'm sure she would have communicated that she had not been with another man and that this was God. And he probably would have told him about the angel and what the angel said and all that stuff.

Furthermore, I'm of the opinion that Joseph probably would have believed her. Now I can't say for sure. I don't know him personally.

I don't know what kind of man he is, but I know what kind of woman Mary probably was. And I think Joseph knew what kind of woman Mary probably was. In all likelihood, Mary

was able to also tell about Elizabeth's situation.

And there was no one able to dispute the supernaturalness of Elizabeth's pregnancy. She was an old woman beyond childbearing age. And therefore, I'm of the opinion that with the kind of character Mary had and Joseph knew her to have, with the testimony of Elizabeth standing behind her, I have a feeling Joseph probably believed her.

Which is why it never crossed his mind to stone her. But divorcing her might still enter his mind. I mean, what would you think, you guys, if you engaged a girl and you found out that God was having a baby by her? Wouldn't you feel like, you know, that's kind of too sacred for me to be.

I guess I'll just quietly get out of this situation. Not because I think she's been unfaithful, but because I don't think I'm worthy, for one thing. I mean, what have I got to do with this situation? I guess I picked the wrong girl.

God may pick the same girl. I'll let God have her. You know, honestly, I'm not trying to be I'm not trying to be, you know, crude at all.

I'm just saying the kind of thoughts that I would probably have. And I wouldn't be surprised if Joseph, she probably seemed too sacred. Now, you can go with the other opinion if you want to.

But I think I think I think it would be strange for Joseph, who probably knew Mary fairly well, or else he wouldn't have become betrothed to her, to not believe her story, to believe she'd make up such a strange story and to believe that she was such a girl as would go out and have an affair and not admit it. And then, of course, she's come back from Elizabeth's place and everyone knows something's gone on there supernatural. And Elizabeth seems to believe Mary's story.

I think Joseph believed her. But I think he still wanted to put her away because he probably didn't think it was appropriate to marry this girl, the mother of God's son. And it's interesting when the angel appeared to Joseph, he didn't say, now, Joseph, I'm going to I'm going to set the record straight here for you because you don't have the right opinion.

He said, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife. Interesting wording. Joseph was afraid to take her as his wife.

It wasn't that he thought she was an unfaithful woman. He thought she was off bounds to him. Probably he thought she was too holy, too sacred.

You know, God had done something unique in this case. And he just thought, I'd better, you know, I don't think I'm quite worthy to be in on this situation here. And then he says, don't be afraid to take her as your wife.

Go ahead, do it. Now, if he thought she'd been unfaithful, why would he why would that what fear would there be of taking her? It'd be more like disgust or something like that. So I suspect from the wording of the passage and from what strikes me as a reasonable train of events that Mary came back from Elizabeth's, told Joseph about it.

He was stunned, of course, by the news, but I don't think he doubted her word. But he just figured, I guess now what am I supposed to do? You know, here I'm betrothed to this woman and God's already picked her for his own purposes. I guess I'd better try to quietly kind of bow out and, you know, just call this a divorce or something.

And then the angel said, no, don't be afraid to marry her. Go ahead and do it. And he did.

And thus Matthew chapter one closes. So that brings us to the end of both Matthew and Luke chapter one. And the second chapter of those two books then tell the the birth narratives.

Now, the birth narratives, interestingly, don't overlap each other very much. The birth narratives in Luke are chronologically earlier than those in Matthew. Matthew simply begins by talking about Jesus having been born in Bethlehem, that the wise men visited.

That's how Matthew starts chapter two. However, before the wise men got there, several other things happened. Luke tells us the story.

We read in Luke chapter two that Mary and Joseph, who normally resided in Nazareth, which is in the northern end of the country in Galilee, had to make a trip to Bethlehem at the southern end of the country down south of Jerusalem by about six miles because a decree from the Caesar in Rome had determined that all people had to go to their ancestral homes for a registration for future taxation purposes. And they were descended from David and David had been born in Bethlehem. That was the city of David.

And so those of Davidic lineage had to go down there for their registration. Very inconvenient for Mary and Joseph since she was due to have a baby at any time. In fact, at that very time, but they made the trip, which would not be an easy one to make.

It would take approximately a week probably at the speed that she would be able to walk or ride a donkey if she rode and not comfortable either, you know, not a comfortable trip, but they are we're told that there was no room for them in the end, probably because so many other pilgrims of the same lineage had to travel to Bethlehem. There were a lot of people descended from David. He had a lot of wives and that was a thousand years earlier than this.

So he had a lot of descendants by this time. And yet Bethlehem was a small town, probably not a lot of accommodations for guests. And by the time Mary and Joseph got there, apparently there weren't accommodations available.

So they went into a cave where the where the animals were kept of the travelers and they had the baby there. And when the baby was born, Luke tells us angels appeared to a group of shepherds nearby on the probably same hills where David attended sheep when he was younger, a thousand years earlier, same hills, same occupation, same city. And these shepherds on the hillside of David, sort of David's successors to those hills as sheep herders, had visitation of the angel who announced that Jesus was born in Bethlehem and that they could find him in line in a manger.

And then a host of angels, probably innumerable, the sky just filled up with angels singing praises to God. And speaking of the significant times in which these shepherds were living and when the angels disappeared, not surprisingly, the shepherds said, let's go see, let's see if this is true. And they went on down to Bethlehem and found the baby there and they worshipped him and went out and told everyone else.

And that's the last we hear of the shepherds. Now, after that, Luke continues by telling of the circumcision of Jesus, which obviously would be eight days later. This is still before the wise men ever got there.

Matthew skips over this part. Luke tells us that on the eighth day, Jesus was circumcised and named Jesus, taken to Jerusalem for that purpose. Of course, being born in Bethlehem, that was not far from Jerusalem, a couple hours walk, three hours maybe.

And he was circumcised and named. And then 40 days after his birth, according to the law of Moses, he had to be dedicated to the Lord. And Mary had to do the sacrifices associated with her purification.

Under the law, if a woman had a male child, there was a period of 40 days. If it was a female, it was 80 days. I don't know why the difference, but no doubt symbolic of something.

But after 40 days, having had a male child, the woman had to go through a purification process, offering a few sacrifices and stuff. And that was the time she also brought Jesus to be dedicated. The first born son of every family was to be dedicated to the Lord.

And Jesus was not unique in that particular respect. All first born Jewish boys were, but he was her first born. And therefore, on the same occasion of her going at the end of her period of uncleanness to be purified, Jesus was taken to the temple.

On that occasion, while they were there, two people were encountered who were told something about. One was presumably an old man. His age is not alluded to, but his language sounds like he's not young.

His name was Simeon, and the spirit of God was upon him. Interestingly, because the prophetic spirit, now that John the Baptist had been born, the prophetic spirit apparently was revisiting others in Israel, because here's a man named Simeon, and the spirit of

God was upon him and had told him that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah. And, you know, Mary and Joseph bringing their baby into the temple probably would have looked like any other couple bringing a baby, but he recognized through the spirit that it was Jesus and came to him and prophesied over him, prophesied that he was set for the rise and fall of many in Israel and that Mary herself would have a sword pierced through her soul, no doubt referring to the fact that she stood at the cross and saw Jesus pierced there.

Not certain, but that seems very possible. And so this man prophesied about the baby Jesus, and then an older woman whose age is given, and her age is either 84 or 104. Her name is Anna, which is the Greek form of the Old Testament name Hannah, and she was an old widow.

It says she had lived with a husband for seven years from her virginity. If she married at age 13, and that's of course about the earliest that's likely to have happened, and she was married for seven years, she would have been 20 when she was widowed. And then it says she was a widow of about 84 years.

Now, that either means she was a widow who was aged 84 years old or that she had been widowed for 84 years. If so, then she'd be about 104 by this time. She is specifically said to have been of great age, and she might well have been 104, but she spent all of her time in the temple fasting and praying.

And when she saw Jesus, we don't have any record of the words she spoke on the occasion, but she recognized him and she went out and spoke to all those in Jerusalem who are looking for redemption, which would mean the Jewish remnant. Now, this gives occasion for me to give some side comments here about the Jewish remnant and about the expectation of the coming of the Messiah. The Jews had a general sense that the Messiah would be coming around this time, and so did some of the Gentiles, according to Tacitus and Josephus and some others.

The Jews, of course, had several prophecies that would not exactly pinpoint, but give a general idea of when the Messiah could be expected. Jacob had said on his deathbed when prophesying over his son Judah in Genesis 49.10, he said, The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from before his feet, until Shiloh comes, and unto him shall the gathering of the people be. Shiloh means him to whom it belongs, him whose it is.

And therefore, the scepter would remain in the tribe of Judah until the coming of the one who really earned it, who really deserved it. And that is reference to the Messiah. Now, 37 years before Jesus was born, or around 35 years, something like that, a man named Herod the Great was appointed by Caesar Augustus to be the ruler of the Jews.

Herod was not a Jew. And when he came to power, after battling for three years against

the inhabitants of Jerusalem to take his position there, they lost, he won, and therefore he became king of the Jews in 37 BC. When that happened, there were rabbis who said, Woe unto us, for the scepter has departed from Judah, and Shiloh has not yet come.

In other words, they recognized that with the passage of the sovereignty from the Judean kings to this first king of the Jews who is not a Jew, that this signaled the time that Jacob spoke of, that Shiloh must come. Now, Shiloh had not yet come, but he did before that king was dead, before Herod died, just before he died, Jesus was born. And so the Jews recognized that this is the time, if there's ever been a time, this is the time when the Messiah should come.

Furthermore, there was that prophecy of the 70 weeks in Daniel chapter 9, which we won't get into in detail, but it certainly pointed to this general time period as the time when the Messiah should arrive. So there was a general expectation in that generation that the Messiah would be showing up. And then, of course, you've got a guy like Simeon, and the Holy Spirit specifically said, You're not going to die before you see the Messiah.

Now, the remnant who believed in this kind of stuff, knowing that Simeon had been told he's not going to die before the Messiah comes, you could imagine that their expectation of the Messiah was very, very high. In fact, when John the Baptist began preaching, the first question people wanted to ask him, Are you the Messiah? And that's because there was a very strong expectation that this was the time the Messiah should come. According to Tacitus and some of the secular historians, I have quotes from them somewhere, but unfortunately, I don't think I have them right here.

I wish I did. Maybe I do. Wouldn't that be nice? There was a general expectation throughout the Roman world that a ruler was coming out of Judea about that time.

Now, I don't know how that expectation arose. It may have come about because of Daniel having lived in Persia and having prophesied such things, or it may have been through some. Here it is.

I do have it here. Let's see. Suetonius, I said Tacitus.

He's in here, too. Suetonius could write and did write, quote, There had spread over all the Orient an old and established belief that it was fated at that time for men coming from Judea to rule the world, unquote. Suetonius in the Life of Vespasian, 4 or 5. That might be one reason the wise men came from the East saying we're looking for the king of the Jews throughout the Orient.

There was a rumor. Now, remember, Daniel lived and died in the Orient, and he was the chief wise man of Persia in his day. It's very possible his writings were revered by the Persian class of wise men, the Magi.

And it may be because of Daniel's prophecy of the 70 weeks. It might have been partially because of that, that this expectation existed. Tacitus tells of the same belief, quote, There was a firm persuasion that at this very time the East was to grow powerful and rulers coming from Judea were to acquire universal empire, unquote.

Tacitus said that in Histories, 5.13. The Jews had the belief that, quote, this comes from Josephus, about that time one from their country should become governor of the habitable earth, unquote. So we've got Tacitus, Suetonius, and Josephus all telling us that at that time there was a general expectation among the Jews and the Gentiles that a ruler or rulers from Judea would rule the world about that time. And so we see the remnant was expectant, and even Gentiles were expectant.

And that's the next thing we read about chronologically after Jesus at age 40 days meets Simeon and Anna. We have to skip back now to Matthew, chapter two, and there we have the story of the wise men coming. And that occupies almost the entire chapter of Matthew, chapter two.

These wise men from the East come. We're not told how many of them there were. Of course, we typically think of three men on camels.

There's no reason to say there were three. The Bible doesn't say there were three. The number three is no doubt arisen from the fact that there were three gifts that are mentioned that they brought.

They brought gold, frankincense, and myrrh. But nothing compels us to believe that each man had one gift. There might have been a great host.

There might have been only two of them. There might have been 10, 20, 30. There might have been 100 of them.

We don't know. But they came into Jerusalem looking for the king of the Jews, according to Matthew, chapter two. And this is after Jesus was born in Bethlehem and he was still living in Bethlehem.

But it was apparently a couple of years later. The reason I say that is because Herod inquired. The wise men said they'd seen a star from their home in the East.

They'd seen this star and followed it out this way, and therefore they knew the king had been born. Herod, who had known nothing of this and was not at all pleased to hear it, asked them, when did the star appear? It says he inquired diligently of them when the star had appeared. And they told him.

It doesn't tell us what they told him. But later in the same chapter, it says that when he's ordered the execution of the babies in Bethlehem, he says, kill all the babies two years and under, according to the time which he diligently sought from the wise men. In other

words, his choice to kill children two years old and below was based on his having inquired and received an answer from the wise men as to when the star had appeared.

And therefore we would conclude that Jesus had been born probably a year or two earlier and the star had appeared that long ago. And that's why Herod chose that age as the cutoff point. Now, it could have been a little shorter time.

Herod might have just wanted to play it safe. Maybe the star had appeared a year earlier and just to play it safe, Herod said, kill them all, anyone under two years, just to make sure we don't miss it. We do know this, though, that when the wise men visited Jesus, he was not in the stable.

These creches that you see at Christmas time with the shepherds and the wise men there and Jesus in the manger are not agreeable with scripture. It says that when they came to Bethlehem and they came, it says in verse 11, Matthew 2, 11, and when they had come into the house. So Mary and Joseph were now living in a house, we can't suppose that they lived for years out in the barn.

They didn't need to. After the season of registration was over, apparently many of the pilgrims left, they were able to find housing. And why they stayed in Bethlehem is not known.

They lived in Nazareth prior to that. On the other end of the country, Joseph no doubt had a business in Nazareth, but he stayed in Bethlehem. It's probable that they just felt like, well, you know, things are kind of out of our control here.

God had us, had the baby born in Bethlehem. Probably by this time they realized that the scripture predicted he would be. Maybe they felt somewhat obligated to raise him in Bethlehem.

David had been, and this was David's successor, the second David and so forth. Probably they just didn't feel the liberty to make any changes without direction from God. And the next change they made was by direct instruction from God, because of course we find that Herod decided to kill all the babies in Bethlehem under two years old in order to prevent Jesus from getting away from him.

And before that decision was made, or at least before it was carried out by Herod, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him to get Mary and the baby out of there. So he took them down to Egypt. And they remained there until Herod died.

And then when Herod died, an angel told Joseph, you can come back now to Judea. So we read in the closing verses of Matthew chapter two, they returned from Egypt to Judea. Joseph found that Archelaus, the son of Herod, was reigning in his place and knew Archelaus was not a good guy.

In fact, he was such a bad guy that even the Romans deposed him in 6 AD and replaced him with Roman procurators. And so Joseph, instructed by an angel, went back up to his original home in Nazareth. So Jesus grew up in Nazareth.

Now in the telling of this story, Matthew quotes a number of Old Testament passages, some of them strangely. In verse six, we have Micah 5.2 about the birth of the Messiah in Bethlehem. That's clear enough.

That's not a hard one to sort out. But with the slaughtering of the infants, or I should say with the flight of Mary and Joseph and the baby to Egypt, in verse 15, Matthew says they were there until the death of Mary, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet saying, out of Egypt I called my son. The prophet who's being quoted there is Hosea.

It's in Hosea 11.1 that the prophecy is found. Strangely, the prophecy is not apparently a prediction about the Messiah at all. It is a statement about Israel's early history.

The prophecy actually says, when Israel was young, I loved him and I called my son out of Egypt, a historical reference to the Exodus. Matthew, however, saw apparently that Israel, in its infancy as a nation, was a type of the Messiah in his infancy. Many things in the life of Jesus actually can be shown to correspond in a typological sort of way with historical events in Israel's history.

Apparently the apostles had no difficulty seeing the career of Israel, in some respects, as a type of the career of the Messiah himself, the ultimate Israelite. And that being so, Matthew thought it quite appropriate to say, well, listen, the Old Testament said that God had called his son out of Egypt, meaning Israel in its infancy, and here's the Messiah. He comes out of Egypt in his infancy too.

Isn't that interesting? It's a fulfillment of the type. And I believe that's how he understands it. Then in Matthew 2.18, he quotes from Jeremiah 31, verse 15, a voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted because they are no more.

This prophecy is said to be related to the slaughter of the infants in Bethlehem. Although if you look at the prophecy in Jeremiah, it seems to be about the deportation of the Jews into Babylon. However, Rachel is one of the few people in the book of Genesis who was not buried at Machpelah.

Abraham and Sarah and Isaac and Rebekah and Jacob and Leah were buried there, and probably Joseph was after he was brought back from Egypt, but Rachel did not get buried there. She was buried near Bethlehem. She died near Bethlehem and her body would have decomposed before they could get it to Machpelah, so they buried her there.

And because the slaughter took place in Bethlehem, poetically, it is described as if

Rachel was in her grave nearby weeping. She was near enough to hear the cries, as it were. You know, it's sort of like when we say so-and-so would roll over in his grave if he could see what has become of the organization he started or something.

You know, I mean, it's figurative. It's poetic. She's not really weeping, but basically what Matthew is saying is this prophecy about Rachel weeping has more fulfillment than that which Jeremiah initially applied it to, because nearby where Rachel was buried, there was a great slaughter of Jewish infants.

The last thing he quotes is at the very end of Matthew 2, and it's difficult. Matthew 2.23, He came and dwelt in the city of Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, he should be called a Nazarene. There is no prophecy in the Old Testament that says he should be called a Nazarene.

However, Nazareth or Nazarene comes from the Hebrew word netzer, which means branch. And in the Old Testament, the prophets, plural, he doesn't say the prophet. He says the prophets.

He's summarizing something the prophets said. He's not quoting any particular prophet. But Jesus is called the branch.

He's called that in Zechariah. He's called that in Jeremiah. He's called something like that in Isaiah.

Nazareth is called the branch town, the town of the branch. And Matthew sees some significance there. The prophets indicated he'd be the branch.

How significant that he would be raised in the town of the branch. I mean, it's like saying, well, he's the bread of life, interesting he was born in Bethlehem, which means house of bread. It's not that it was predicted that he'd be called the bread of life, but there's a connection in what the prophets said with what actually occurred.

He's called the branch. Interestingly, as a sort of a coincidence of history, actually not coincidentally, the angels demanded he grew up in the town of the branch, identifying him as the branch. It's a strange use of scripture, but Matthew does so.

And I allow him that liberty. You're going to allow me the liberty to break off the story at this point because we've run out of time, but we'll talk about Jesus at age 12 and we'll talk about his genealogies, too, which differ in Matthew and Luke next time. And then we'll go on to John the Baptist ministry.