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Easter as New Birth

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HAPPY EASTER!!

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Transcript

Happy Easter! As we've gone through the story of Abraham, one of the things I hope you've noticed is how prominent stories of birth are. Within the life of Abraham and his descendants, there are a series of stories of people being born. Now, this seems a bit strange, perhaps, for a great epic story from the ancient world you might expect tales of daring do, and great journeys undertaken into hostile realms, meeting strange beasts, all these sorts of things.

But yet, when you read the story of Abraham and his family, what is central so often are these stories of women struggling to give birth. Stories of women who have miraculous, divine intervention so that they will bring forth children. Significant events within the womb.

The struggle between rivals in giving birth. We see this in the story of Hagar. The story of Sarah.

The story of the birth of Isaac takes place over a number of chapters. In chapter 17, it is foretold. In chapter 18, it is once again announced with the visiting angels.

In chapter 20, we have a threat as Sarah is taken by Abimelech. And in chapter 21, Isaac is born. All this around the story of a child being born.

The birth event is given great prominence within the narrative. As we go further on, this attention does not stop. We read the story of Rebecca giving birth to Esau and Jacob.

And as we've gone through the story of Esau and Jacob, one of the things I've highlighted is how this birth narrative is played out again and again. It is a story that hangs as a great shadow over the story of their lives. The coming out of the womb and then later on in the darkness of the father's tent, that story is played out again.

And then once again in the story of meeting with Esau and struggling with the angel. Struggling with the angel is like that event in the womb again. These two characters struggling with each other and finally coming out.

And he limps as he leaves that new womb. And then he meets with Esau and they are reconciled. The tensions surrounding their birth have been dealt with.

No longer is it a situation of them being rivals. Now the situation has changed. They can go out together.

He's received a blessing and he's received a new name. And they weep together like two children who have just been born. And we see this even further in the story.

As we go through chapter 30, we have a list of children who are born. End of chapter 29 and chapter 30. A list of children who are born to Leah and then to Rachel.

And they're struggling over this children. Leads to them being given names that are powerfully symbolic. We find other birth stories in chapters 38, for instance.

In chapter 38, the children are born to Judah first. And then at the end we have Perez and Zerah. All of these stories of birth present us with a picture in which God is deeply concerned with these events of birth.

The bringing forth of children. Not just what children do on the grand stage of history, but that very act of bringing forth children is charged with significance. And this does not end in the story of Genesis.

As we get into the story of Exodus, we see the same pattern once again. The story of Exodus begins not with some great hero coming onto the stage. But it begins with

women struggling in birth.

It begins with women multiplying their children. And Israel growing great. And then Pharaoh's attempt to kill the baby boys of the Israelites.

And the midwives, their heroism in protecting the baby boys so that they are not thrown into the Nile. In the next chapter, we see Jochebed and Miriam and Pharaoh's daughter, three great women who come onto the scene and rescue the baby Moses. In these stories then, we have the prominence of women at the very beginning.

And the prominence of stories of birth. And it's worth thinking about why this is the case. What is so significant about birth? That it should take so much space, that it should be such a significant event that shapes our account of the biblical narrative.

If we look further on in the story of the Exodus, we'll see birth themes recurring. Birth themes continue throughout that story of Egypt, Egyptian slavery. These women at the beginning of the book are struggling to give birth.

They're opposed by the great dragon Pharaoh. And then as we go through that narrative, we'll see in the story of Passover, the blood on the doorposts and coming out. And then this emphasis upon the firstborn child that opens the womb.

Given in chapter 13, the law of the firstborn. And in chapter 14, they leave Egypt as they go through the Red Sea, crossing through, going through this narrow passage and being brought out the other side, blinking into a new world as the sun rises up. This is a story of birth.

And the story that we begin the Exodus narrative with, the stories of women struggling in childbirth, the threat to the baby boys and all these sorts of things are part of a bigger story of Israel struggling in birth. In this struggling to come to birth. Israel as a nation is struggling in birth.

And then they are brought forth as the firstborn child. In chapter four, God declares that Israel is my firstborn son. And then we have the law of the firstborn and the bringing out of the firstborn.

The emphasis upon the judgment of the firstborn and atonement for the firstborn. All of these themes are so important because birth is important. As we get to the story of the kingdom in first Samuel chapter one and two, we'll see that Hannah is emphasized as someone who is bringing Samuel to birth and in bringing Samuel to birth, as God opens her womb, the nation will come to a new birth.

The nation will be reborn as a kingdom. It will become a new sort of people. This continues into the New Testament.

In the New Testament, the great story of Christ begins in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke with birth. It begins with the story of Mary and the story of Elizabeth and God opening their wombs, opening the womb of the old Elizabeth and opening the womb of the Virgin Mary. And once again, God begins his story with birth, not on the stage of history that we focus upon, but in this private space, this seed of a new creation begins.

Now, as we look back through scripture, we'll see that this theme of birth is deeply situated within cosmology itself. The very first verses of the Old Testament, the very first verses of scripture, we see the spirit of God hovering over the waters and hovering over the waters of the deep. Out of that deep will come forth the earth.

As the earth rises out of the water, it's a birth event. The earth is born forth from the deep. And then the earth itself brings forth its children.

As God says, let the earth bring forth all these different creatures. What is happening there? The earth is the mother that is bringing forth her children. The earth, the Adamah brings forth the Adam.

And these two things are connected. The earth brings forth her child, the man. The man is the earthling, as it were.

His name derived from her name, mother earth. And the man formed from the earth. And when the woman is formed, she's formed as a more elevated form of the earth.

The earth gives us our matter. We are formed from the matter of the earth. Matter, of course, is a term that goes back to the Latin for mother.

And we are formed from the matter of our mother. As you look through scripture, this is something that is highlighted in its poetry, in the poetry of scripture. We see in Job, for instance, naked.

I came from my mother's womb naked. I will return that. We see it again in Psalm 139, knit together in the lowest parts of the earth.

That I was being formed in my mother's womb. And my mother's womb is associated with the lowest parts of the earth. That we are formed from matter, from the matter of the earth ultimately, but from the matter of our mothers and matter and mother need to be connected.

These terms relate to each other. As we look at the judgment upon the man and the woman in Genesis chapter three, we see this again, there is a parallel between the judgment upon the woman and the judgment upon the man. In pangs you shall bring forth.

I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception in pain. You shall bring forth

children. The pangs that she has in bringing forth children.

And the man is told that in pangs, he shall eat of the ground all the days of his life. Days of his life, thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you. So there's the emphasis upon the earth bringing forth and the woman bringing forth and pangs involved in both cases.

And both of these verse texts refer to the man and the woman being frustrated in their relationship to their source. The woman frustrated in her relationship to the man and the man frustrated in his relationship to the earth. As we go through the scripture, this connection between the womb of the woman and the earth is one that we see developed in various places.

And it's developed in a way that brings forth deeper themes and deeper promises. Whether it's the deep and its association with the womb and places like Genesis 49. In Genesis 49, we read.

The God almighty who will bless you with blessings of heaven above blessings of the deep that lie beneath blessings of the breasts and of the womb. And those terms play off each other in the Hebrew. The point is that the heavens above are connected with the breasts, the life giving fluid that flows from heaven, the rain and the water and the milk from the breasts.

The land that flows with milk and honey connected with the rain that comes upon the land. And again, we see it in the case of the womb connected with the deep, the deep from which the earth was brought forth as the spirit hovered over the deep. In Isaiah 26, we are told that the earth will one day give birth to its dead.

That this barren earth, the barren tomb. Will be opened and the womb of the earth will become fruitful and new children will be born, children of resurrection. This theme of the earth and the womb is one that continues into the New Testament in powerful ways.

In the New Testament, we are told that the earth itself is groaning in birth pangs. The earth itself is seeking for the revelation of the sons of God, waiting to be delivered of these children. And it's struggling.

In the New Testament, we are also told that Christ is coming. That Christ is the firstborn of the dead. This is a theme that you see in Paul on a number of occasions, particularly in places like Colossians 1, that the earth is giving birth and its womb is opened by Christ.

The theme of birth, as I noted, goes back all the way to the beginning. And it's a theme that is one that suggests that there was always intended to be a new birth, a sort of resurrection, a sort of growing into a new form of life, a death and something new happening after that. We are told that Adam, the first man, is made of flesh.

The second man is soul. He's a soulish man. Whereas Christ is the man of the spirit.

He's the man who comes forth by the power of the spirit from the earth. He's a new Adam. As we look through this story, we'll see that this takes more shape.

What this means. The virgin birth is the opening of the woman's womb. This womb that has not born anything before.

It's opened up to bear new life, new life that's a new creation. Not just a continuation of the old creation, but something new. And the tomb is opened in a similar manner.

In a similar manner. We are told that the tomb in which Christ was laid was a tomb in which no man had previously lain. There's a parallel there with the womb of Mary.

And these two things give rise to new life. The earth was always going to create, the earth was always going to bring forth this new life. But God had to act in a way to open up this womb so it might do what he had always intended.

And now the earth is groaning in birth pangs, but it has brought forth its firstborn. Jesus Christ, as he opens the tomb, is the promise of new creation. I've noted before that as you read the gospels, you will see the birth of Christ paralleled with his resurrection.

We are told that when Christ is born, he's wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in the manger. At the end of the Gospel of Luke, we see a similar thing. Christ's body is taken, wrapped in linen garments and laid in the tomb.

These two things, the manger and the tomb, probably look very similar as well. Both stone containers bearing a body, a body that has been wrapped in garments and laid there. That's a very strange, it's not something you typically do with a body.

It's only something you do in a birth and in a death. And yet, these two events are held parallel to each other. At the very beginning of the gospel, we have a Joseph and a Mary.

And at the very end of the gospel, we have a Joseph and a Mary too. Joseph who lays the body of Christ in his tomb, and Mary who visits that tomb and sees the risen Christ. Mary Magdalene.

There is a new birth at the end of the gospel. And this new birth is the new birth of Christ from the dead. The new birth of Easter morning.

It's the birth that we celebrate this day. It's the mother of the earth bearing finally her seed. This barren womb of the tomb has been broken open so that children can be born.

Now I've mentioned before that there are cases in the Old Testament of a sort of symbolic birth. The birth of Israel from the womb of Egypt being brought forth through the Red Sea. And God opens the womb of Egypt so that his firstborn son can come forth.

And Christ's birth in his resurrection is a new exodus, a new opening up of the womb, a new tearing open of the deep so that the son might come forth. This is again what we celebrate on Easter morning. Throughout the gospels, this emphasis upon a new birth that's taking place highlights not just what Christ does, but who he is.

So you look through the gospels, one of the things you'll notice is that women come to the foreground of the story at two key points. At the very beginning and at the very end. Why those two particular points? It would seem strange that they seem to be so prominent at these points, whether it's the women visiting the tomb or whether it's the women of Mary and Elizabeth and Hannah as well in the temple playing such a role in the beginning of Christ's life.

Why emphasize those two periods? Well, I think it's because both of them testify to the significance of Christ's body. And birth is associated with our matter. Now, there's one thing to be someone who exercises agency, who does things, who performs great feats on the stage of history.

But to do all those things, you have to have matter. And your matter is something that you ultimately receive from your mother and ultimately from the earth. It's that that is emphasized in who you are.

Your very being is received from that source. Now, as you look through the gospels, one of the things you'll notice is the prominence of women in reference to Christ's body. We can think of this in the story of Mary.

That's the story of Mary begins with the spirit overshadowing her. And so that she conceives within herself. Now, the overshadowing of the spirit, where might that remind us of? It reminds us of those first verses in scripture in chapter one of Genesis, where the spirit is hovering over the deep, the deep that is later on in Genesis associated with the womb.

And the spirit hovers over Mary's womb so that Mary bears within herself. This child, Jesus Christ, and as he is brought forth, there is a new birth. And this new birth is also associated with new birth in the resurrection as God opens the womb of the earth.

Now, this connection with the birth of Christ is also connected with his resurrection. It's women there who are prominent women who come and visit him in the tomb. Women who are the first to see the risen Christ and the empty tomb to women who are there at the cross and the cross is described as an event of birth pangs.

In John chapter 16, verse 21, we see this described that a woman whose hour has come, the struggling in birth and bringing forth the son and the women in the cross are associated with this event of birth in John's gospel. Jesus talks to his mother and he says to John and to Mary declares that one is to be that Mary is to be the mother of John and

John is to be her son. There is a new relationship, a new child that's born through that.

And that new child is associated, I believe, with the deeper theme of the mother bearing her new child through the resurrection event. That this new child is coming onto the stage of history. And it's not surprising that the women should be prominent at that particular point.

Now, throughout the gospels, we see the men are very much prominent in Christ's mission. They do things with him. They act with him.

Whereas the women seem to have a very close relationship with Christ's body, with who he is, his very substance. We see them coming to prominence in places where his body is prominent. They are connected, for instance, in Western art with Mary holding the dead body of Christ and the body of her son.

A very powerful and poignant image. The connection of Mary of Bethany with Christ as she washes his feet with her tears and dries them with her hair. And the costly spice that's used.

All of these stories are stories that connect women with Christ's body. As we read through the gospels, we read a lot about the things that Christ does. But in the end, it seems that what is most significant is who Christ is.

Who his very being is. He is the firstborn from the dead. He is the one who opens the womb of the Virgin.

And at many points, this is what we see most clearly, that the events in Christ's life, particularly by the means of the spirit, are events that focus not so much upon his actions, but upon his body. Christ is conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, baptised in the Jordan. He is transfigured on the mount.

He is crucified under Pontius Pilate, buried in the tomb, raised again the third day. He is caught up into heaven and he will come again bodily to Judge the living and the dead. It's a story of Christ's body.

Not just the things that he does, but often things that are done to his body. And the significance of his body as a site of meaning. And the prominence there, associated with those events, is of the spirit and of women.

As we read through the Gospels, I think often we'll see the significance of the spirit in association with women. That the spirit is the one by whom Christ is conceived in the womb of Mary. The spirit is the one by whom God's presence is made known to us.

As Christ declares in John's Gospel, the spirit is the one who comes to us. The spirit is the one by whom we are begotten again. The spirit is the one that God makes his home with

us in the spirit.

The spirit is the one who is associated with the bride and says, would the bride come at the end of Revelation? And these associations should not be lost upon us. The spirit is the one who forms the body of Christ. The spirit is the one who fills God's people.

The spirit is the one by whom we are begotten again. And that connection, I think, is a very pregnant one. There's a powerful series of connections there that help us to understand what it means that Christ comes forth from the womb of the earth as the firstborn of the dead, but also the one who is born of the spirit.

The one who comes of the spirit. He's the man of the spirit at this point. And reading the stories of Easter, I think we'll return to these points and see that Christ is ultimately the one who fulfills all these themes of birth throughout the Bible.

The themes that we see in Genesis of the women struggling in birth. The themes that we see in Genesis of the earth and the deep as means of bringing forth as mother earth and the deep associated with the womb. We see it also in the story of the Exodus.

Christ is the one who brings forth God's people. Ultimately, he opens up the womb. He opens up the womb of the earth so that it's bondage.

Those who have been in bondage within it might be set free. The story of Easter then is a story of new birth. It's a story of new birth for Christ, but it's a story of new birth for everyone else.

Everyone who is in him is caught up in this event. He has been reborn so that we might be reborn too. In the story of the Exodus, we see an emphasis upon a birth event very early on, and that's the story of Moses.

And the story of Moses begins with his birth to Jacob and his being hidden by Jacob for a period of months. And then he's put in the reeds. He's put in this little ark that's created for him.

And then he's drawn out of the water. And as he's drawn out of the water and delivered, he's given a new name as a result of being drawn out of the water. What happens to Moses at that point with Miriam there to see him being taken out is something that is paralleled with the story that happens later on.

As Israel is brought out of the waters of the Sea of Reeds and Miriam is there singing as a result, there is a parallel between these two events. What happens to Moses happens to his people. In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul speaks about the church or the people of Israel being baptised into Moses.

And in the same way they are baptised into Moses in the Red Sea, in the Sea of Reeds,

we are baptised into Christ. And as we are baptised into Christ, our bodies are implicated in his body. He has been raised from the dead so that we will also be raised from the dead.

In baptism, we are buried with him so that we might be raised by the power of God. There is a parallel to be drawn between his experience and our experience. And resurrection is such a pivotal event for everything about Christianity.

It's the belief that God will raise us up. It's the belief in new creation heralded by Christ. It's a belief in all these different themes that the creation is charged with that will be realised in him and in his people.

He has been raised up as the firstborn of the dead and all the rest of the dead will be brought forth in him. Happy Easter. Lord willing, I'll be back again tomorrow.

If you would like to support this and other videos like it, please do so using my Patreon or PayPal account. If you have any questions, please leave them on my Curious Cat account. And I hope to continue my series on the story of Abraham tomorrow.

God bless.