

# The Incarnation Part 1 - 'Isaiah's Prophecy'

by Charles Alexander

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*The sermon explores the significance of the incarnation, where God became man in Jesus Christ, and how this event fulfills ancient prophecies and offers us salvation and hope.*

**Scripture:** Genesis 3:15, Psalm 139:23, Isaiah 7:14, Isaiah 9:6, Matthew 11:28, John 3:19, John 7:37, John 8:56, John 11:25

**Topics:** "Incarnation Of Christ", "Redemptive Work"

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## Description

Charles Alexander preaches about the profound significance of the incarnation of Jesus Christ, emphasizing the fulfillment of numerous prophecies over centuries that pointed to His birth as both man and God. The sermon delves into the miraculous circumstances of His birth, the specific prophecies foretelling His coming, and the unique nature of His dual identity as the Son of God and a child born to a virgin. It highlights the unparalleled expectation and preparation throughout history for the arrival of the Savior, contrasting the true hope offered by Christ with the limitations of other religious beliefs. The sermon concludes with a powerful reflection on the redemptive work of Jesus, who, as both God and man, overcame death to bring forth life and salvation to humanity.

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## Transcript

Isaiah 9:6: For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

That colossal word "incarnation" means that The Word was made flesh, that God became man. We all know the story, which is specially remembered at Christmas time, of the wondrous tidings and of the deep mystery; how it all came about: this birth of the Christ-Child to the lowly Virgin Mary in the cattle shed, because there was no room for them in the inn.

One of the most wonderful things about the incarnation is the fact that it was prophesied in so many different ways over so long a period of time preceding, and was one of the proofs of the inspiration of God's Holy Word. In fact, one of the most formidable of all truths is that this unique person was expected to come into the world, and indeed did come at the time appointed. Of no one in history can this be said, other than of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

It has been pointed out again and again that there is no great religious leader or founder of a religion, whether good, bad or indifferent, known to history, who was expected before His birth. As for One who was expected from the very origin of the human race, this is a marvel indeed in that it was prophesied in the words of the Lord God Almighty, the Eternal Father Himself, right at the dawn of our history, that one should come who was the seed of woman, who would overcome the serpent and his kingdom, and by that means He would overcome sin, darkness, death, and the grave.

We are told that He would come of the seed of Abraham, and this is carefully narrowed down. Abraham had two sons: one by the bondmaid, the other by the free woman; it was to be Isaac and not Ishmael who would continue the line. From amongst the twelve sons of Jacob, it was through Judah that Shiloh should come. Shiloh was the man of peace heralding the kingdom of peace; that is peace between God and man, peace through the blood of the cross.

The prophet Daniel told us, in the chronology of earthly time, the exact number of years which would elapse from a certain date in the reign of Cyrus, king of Persia, to Messiah, the Prince of Peace. So it turned out at the appointed time, five centuries later, that the Son of God appeared, was born, was crucified. The remarkable circumstances of His birth were told many centuries beforehand, seven or eight centuries before Christ came.

The great prophet Isaiah, faced by a very desperate situation in the history of the kingdom of Judah, confronted the evil king Ahaz who was ruling at the time. Ahaz had a son named Hezekiah who was to become one of the most righteous kings that ever reigned over Israel. Ahaz was a wicked man who had been besieged, being invaded by a confederacy between the king of Israel whose name was Pekah, the son of Remaliah, and Rezin the king of Syria. They had led their armies and done untold damage to Ahaz the king at Jerusalem. The king of Judea was in terror as to what was to take place and how he would be delivered. Isaiah came to him and said that God was prepared to give him a sign that enemies would be destroyed, but Ahaz refused the sign because he was an unbelieving man. He made an excuse to escape from his dilemma for he did not believe in God.

Therefore what sign could God give him, since he had no reliance upon the God of Israel? So a sign was given to him, or rather to the house of Jacob, that all the house of David from that day onwards might know about and might wait for this great event. We read of it in Isaiah 7:13-16: Isaiah said, Hear ye now, O house of David; Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel. Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good. For before the child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings.

The land that thou abhorrest was the land of Israel and Judah, which at the time had two kings; one of them was Pekah, son of Remaliah, who reigned in Samaria, and the other was Ahaz himself, who reigned in Jerusalem. The land that thou abhorrest (that is the whole of Palestine) shall be forsaken of both her kings. That is, there should be no king in Israel, either in Samaria or in Jerusalem; nor was there for five hundred years and more from the time that Jerusalem was destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar.

It would be six hundred years before Christ was born at Bethlehem, born to be King, and indeed He became King, but not in the way that these people supposed. Until He came there was no king, either in Samaria or in Jerusalem, except a usurper, a false king who was not even an Israelite; for Herod did not

come of the line of David. He had no right to the throne and, moreover, he was an Edomite, a descendant of Esau and not of Jacob.

After the destruction of Jerusalem, no king reigned in Israel for six hundred years (i.e. none of the house of David). The throne was empty as far as the Israelites were concerned, and the last heir to it was the son of Mary. Isaiah said (7:14): A virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Now Mary did not call His name Immanuel; she called Him Jesus, the name given by the angel. How then was the prophecy fulfilled? Although Mary named her son "Jesus (Saviour)", He was known by many names; and of these Immanuel (God with us) was highly significant because He was and is the Son of God.

So the prophecy was fulfilled, and at about the same time that Isaiah was uttering the prophecy concerning the birth of Immanuel, the Lord gave him this prophecy as well: For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Now you will notice the peculiar way in which the prophecy is presented to us: "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given"; "unto us" occurs twice, and the ancient fathers of the church believed, and we think believed rightly, that "unto us a child is born" refers to His earthly birth, that is his human nature; "unto us a son is given" refers to His heavenly nature and heavenly origin. "Unto us a child is born"; that is, He is man, true man. "Unto us a son is given"; that is, He is God, true God, God become man, God and man in one person, our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Now these marvellous prophecies, wonderful prophecies which have been so gloriously fulfilled and which we try to understand to this day, with all their length and breadth and depth and height, proclaim mystery beyond mystery regarding the wondrous being who has come into the world as God and man to redeem us. We find the apostle Paul writes in a certain place that we are dealing with that which is unsearchable; he speaks of "the unsearchable riches of Christ". That there should be such prophecies as these, fulfilled to the letter and yet couched at the time in such language that only the fulfilment of them has given us the key to the understanding of them, is truly remarkable. Yet sufficient was plain even in the ancient days to rouse the expectation of faithful, believing people, that this Great One was to appear. But to us it is explained in the New Testament revelation which was given to us, and was not given to them in ancient times, to compare the fulfilment with the prophecy, and see how marvellously it all worked out. These people could not see in detail, but ours is the great privilege of seeing, in the fullest possible detail, the working out of this wonderful, divine mystery. What an assurance to faith!

That is one of the first lessons that we should learn, especially those of us who have doubts about our Christian faith. Many express doubts in the following terms: "I feel I don't have sufficient faith in the Christian message; that is, I do not possess that saving faith! I believe that the message is true, but I question whether I have a really deep, saving faith!" Such people are sadly unable to join the hymnist in singing, "Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine: O what a foretaste of glory divine!"

Well this may be a means of helping such doubters to the full assurance of faith; by considering what God has done and to what lengths He has gone in order to convince them that sin, darkness, death and the grave are overcome. What about your sin, your darkness, your death, and your grave in relation to the coming of this Great Person? We should have no doubt whatever about the fundamental facts of the Christian revelation. In view of this, here is something which cannot be said of anyone who ever came into the world, other than of our Saviour Jesus Christ: that the whole of history waited upon Him; that He was expected, not for just a few months or a few years, but for centuries, for millennia. For thousands of years

He was expected, and generations of good men and women arose, died, passed away and handed on the torch to those who came after them.

The Old Testament was completed five hundred years before the Saviour actually appeared, and believers fed upon it, and looked forward expectantly to the event, like Abraham their father, of whom it is said by the Saviour Himself (John 8:56), "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it and was glad." And the great moment came so quietly, so secretly, so mysteriously at Bethlehem.

The Virgin Mary gave birth to a Son who had no earthly father, for God was His Father. Isaiah (7:14) prophesied, Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel. Immanuel is the Hebrew name for the English "God with us": God amongst us, God one of us, God partaking of human nature with us. So He was true man as well as true God; God with us: "Immanuel".

So prophecy demonstrates the truth; no honest person need have any shade of doubt in his or her mind regarding the truth of Christian revelation. If this is true then there is no other religion valid but this. There probably are some religious systems which have been invented, some religious philosophies which have come upon the earth which are in themselves quite allowable, so far as they instruct men in that which they ought to do in the matter of their common behaviour. The world has never been short of this kind of thing, be it called religion or philosophy. Some of the great classical poets of ancient days, some of the great men engaged in jurisdiction, men of great uprightness, who formed laws which are valid even to this day, convince us that we should not despise the working of the spirit of God in man, even in fallen man, to make the earth a more liveable place to be in. As a consequence of the sovereign power of God over the minds and consciences of men, even evil men have sometimes produced very precise and righteous legal systems, like Napoleon Bonaparte, who borrowed his legal system for France largely from the work of the Caesars two thousand years before him.

When all has been said upon this side of things regarding human philosophy and its occasionally divine background, there is only one true religion, one way to God. There is only one Person in whom we can trust, only one Deliverer, one means of approach to God. There is only one redemption, one assurance of forgiveness of sin, one worship, one praise, one thanksgiving; that is through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. You need look for no other means of help or grace or light.

This is the only religion ever to appear upon the face of the earth which has given us a sure and certain hope beyond the grave, an absolute assurance that the verdict of the Garden of Eden has been reversed, that a man has been born who can stand in the midst of all the ages, in the midst of all history and say (John 11:25-26), I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Wonderful isn't it? We are so used to hearing those words at funerals when they are spoken in a joyless, cheerless tone, losing their potency and meaning; but let it not be so with us.

Let us consider One who was man, who was to die Himself, but in anticipation of His being raised from the dead. But how could He overcome death, except by dying? That is the only way death could be overcome: by submitting to death, and then breaking the bands of death asunder; rending the tomb itself and rising from the dead, to die no more. Death had no more dominion over Him! Just think of it: a man who has done this, standing in the midst of the human race and proclaiming those imperishable words, "I am the resurrection and the life." Death to Him shall only be the portal of life which is yet more abundant and

glorious in the eternal world.

Now there is no other religion which can do this or say this. I stood in the midst of a crowd of Tibetan monks a while ago at the airport in Toronto, Canada. They came on to our plane for Glasgow and they were Buddhists. Now Tibetan Buddhism has no god at all, none whatever, and yet there are myriads of people in the Oriental countries, and a few in Western countries, who believe its tenets. Now the only hope Buddhism can offer is that we shall be re-incarnated and keep coming back to the earth. One monk I spoke to said he was a re-incarnation of Buddha himself and that there were about half a dozen on the face of the earth. I do not know quite what that meant; I cannot work it out that Buddha can have several reincarnations of himself at one and the same time walking the earth, and that this will go on and on and on until eventually we sink into nirvana, where all individuality is lost and all self-consciousness disappears. In other words, an everlasting oblivion is the best they can offer us.

But the Lord Jesus says that if we believe in Him we shall never die, that we shall go on living a yet more glorious life; we shall see His face and we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. Isaiah tells us, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given." We have seen that the fulfilment of the prophecy is the proof of what we have come to believe; it is something we can rely upon completely.

Now we come to a question of vital importance! Have we an interest in Christ? Have we a saving interest in Christ? Do we know Christ as our Saviour? Do we believe in Him? And have we any right to believe in Him? We certainly have no right not to believe in Him, for it would be the means of our greatest condemnation that we believed not on the Son of God, and repented not of our sins, for we would be cast away from the presence of God into the darkness we have preferred. This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. (John 3:19) But here is a word that will lead us to faith and repentance: For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given. Unto us, and for our salvation; unto us a Child is born (His human nature), unto us a Son is given (His divine nature); God and man: "Immanuel!"

According to the word of God to the wicked King Ahaz of Judah, Isaiah (7:10-11) said, "Moreover the Lord spake again unto Ahaz, saying, 'Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above.'" Ahaz replied (7:12), "I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord." In other words, he did not believe, whatever sign was given to him; it mattered nothing to him. But he was told to ask a sign from the depth beneath or from the height above, and we see here that from the height above, the Son of God came down to earth; He came to the depth beneath. He could not stoop, as God, to a lower point than that to which He came in the nonentity of the virgin's womb. Where was the deity when a single, solitary human cell was placed in the womb of the virgin? Oh what depth of mystery is here! "Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above"; and He came, who was the sign from heaven above, to the depth beneath. His divine and human nature are of the heights of heaven the highest, and of the earth the lowest. "Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given": His human nature and His divine nature. What a contrast there is between these two natures; and yet the one undivided person! That is very important in connection with the incarnation. He was not God and man in two separate persons; He was God and man in the one person, who ever lived and ever will live; the great Creator who made heaven and earth. He is the divine wisdom and power; the almightiness of God; He who was The Almighty and is and ever will be The Almighty, the source of all life and truth. This One Person became, at one and the same time, God and man in the womb of the virgin, and was born a perfect man child.

I quote from Lancelot Andrews, a thought by which I have been greatly enriched. That great man preached his Christmas sermon year after year before King James the 1st of England and the 6th of Scotland, in whom the crowns of Scotland and England were united for the first time, becoming one kingdom. Lancelot Andrews, preaching in the very early seventeenth century, pointed out the wonderful contrasts between the two natures of Christ. He says, "All through Christ's life we have the contrast between the natures: what properly belongs to one and what properly belongs to the other, and yet in contrast, almost in conflict with each other in the same one glorious person, His birth a cradle for the child, a star for the Son." The wise men had seen His star in the east, and had come to worship the King of the Jews. Shepherds came to view the child in the manger, having heard a choir of angels singing to celebrate the Son being made flesh. In His lifetime hungry, and yet feeding five thousand. Thirsty at the side of the well, and saying to the woman, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, 'Give me to drink'; thou wouldest have asked of him and he would have given thee living water. He who was the child, and therefore the man, thirsty and weary at the mouth of the well, and yet standing before Israel and proclaiming (John 7: 37-38), If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water; God and man in contrast! Bestowing rest (Matthew 11:28): Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest; yet weary with the journey, Himself needing rest; the child and the Son in contrast.

Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given. Dying, yet proclaiming, even as He went forward to His death, I am the resurrection and the life. Submitting Himself to judgment, yet announcing to the arch-hypocrite Caiaphas at the same time as He gives himself up to judgment, Hereafter shall ye see the son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. There He was condemned by men, buffeted, mocked, forsaken, cast out, blasphemed; He who was to return in the glory of the Father in all majesty as the eternal Judge of all those who stood there that day: Caiaphas, Pilate, all other men and women. You and I will be there too, standing before the Son who comes in the clouds of eternal glory, with all the holy angels, to set up His judgment and His courts, and to reduce all things to order before the face of the Eternal Father.

The child, the Son dying on the cross; and yet, even while He was dying, opening paradise to the dying thief; the contrast between the child and the Son, the human nature and the divine. Today shalt thou be with me in paradise. Who is this that opens paradise and determines who should be there, who Himself is dying and going to the grave? O wondrous faith in the dying eyes of that poor thief who could look upon the Saviour, and say to Him, "Lord, remember me, when thou comest into thy kingdom." No greater example of faith is found in the whole of the scripture, than in the case of the dying thief, that nameless man. That malefactor's name has never been handed down to us, who in that dying hour saw his Saviour and his God, and saw the child and the Son as a voice spoke to him in his innermost soul, "Unto you a child is born, unto you a son is given."

"Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" asked Nathaniel. There He was coming out of Nazareth and yet telling Nathaniel that He had known him even from the beginning, and that he, Nathaniel, would yet see Him, the Saviour, as the ladder of access to heaven, upon whom all the angels of God ascend and descend; as though He had said to Nathaniel ( as in effect He did say), "I am the ladder which Jacob saw, set up upon the earth and leading to heaven, upon which the angels of God ascend and descend, even upon the Son of man." Nathaniel believed, saying, "Thou art the Son of God. Thou art the King of Israel."

Two natures; why was it necessary for Christ to have two natures? In order that He might redeem us; because our nature had sinned and deserved to suffer the weight of God's wrath. He suffered in order that

we might live. He bore the burden of God's wrath because He was the Son, as well as the child, and was able to bear that wrath and survive the awfulness of the cross and the onset of death because He was the One of whom it is said, Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given. As man He could not overcome death, and yet as God He could not die; therefore He had to be both God and man in order that, dying, He might bring forth life out of death. We ought to have borne the burden, the curse, the condemnation; yet He did, He who loved us and gave Himself for us, that He might become liable to death. Being both liable to death and able to overcome death, He had to be the Son. Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given.

Amen

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