

CHRIST FORETOLD AND FULFILLED

1. Jesus the Messiah

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Scriptural references in this message

Genesis 3:15; Isaiah 11:1-10; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Matthew 26:52-55; Luke 2:25-35; John 1:40-1; Acts 1:9-10
Romans 8:26; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; Ephesians 3:17-18; Philippians 2:10-11; Revelation 1:7.

Handel's Messiah.

Hallelujah, Hallelujah. Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Ha-le-e-e -lu-jah! For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah. It's the centerpiece of Handel's "Messiah." Even for those whose faith is almost non-existent or whose faith has become encrusted with the barnacles of cynicism, disillusionment or intellectual doubt, this idea of Messiah, is "deep calling to deep."

What is a Messiah?

What exactly is a Messiah? A much more important question is, "Is *Jesus* the Messiah?" The word "Messiah" means "Anointed One." "Messiah" the name, or title really, given to the promised Deliverer who would some day come to the people of Israel as their great Savior and Redeemer.

You can find the "messianic" prophecies throughout the Bible. You'll find a sense of longing for the Messiah throughout the Psalms, and as early as Genesis 3:15, where the Bible refers very cryptically about God putting enmity between the serpent and Eve, between his offspring and hers. "*He will crush your head,*" God says to the serpent, "*and you will strike his heel.*" This is considered by biblical scholars to be the first messianic reference in the Bible. But you'll find the most explicit messianic prophecies in the prophets. Particularly in Isaiah, and in the Jeremiah passage read at the beginning of the service.

Messiah Foretold

Listen now to Isaiah 11:1-10 and see if you can hear the longing for Messiah in this passage:

*1. A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.*

To understand what Isaiah is referring to here about "the stump of Jesse" and "his roots," you have to remember that Isaiah is prophesying during a time when Israel as a nation was down to a stump. Jesse is the name of David's father. What God is saying through Isaiah is that "Somehow, out of this stump, from Jesse's line will sprout a branch." It's what inspired the text of that beautiful 15th Century Christmas carol, *Es ist ein Ros entsprungen*

Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming from tender stem hath sprung!
Of Jesse's lineage coming, as men of old have sung.
It came, a floweret bright, amid the cold of winter,
When half spent was the night.

2 *The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of power,
the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD -*

3 *and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.
He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,
or decide by what he hears with his ears;*

4 *but with righteousness he will judge the needy,
with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.
He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;
with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.*

5 *Righteousness will be his belt
and faithfulness the sash around his waist.*

6 *The wolf will live with the lamb,
the leopard will lie down with the goat,
the calf and the lion and the yearling together;
and a little child will lead them.*

7 *The cow will feed with the bear,
their young will lie down together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.*

8 *The infant will play near the hole of the cobra,
and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest.*

9 *They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.*

10 *In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious.*

Some are still looking, but some believed

Some are still looking for the fulfillment of these Old Testament promises in the future. They're looking toward a time when the "Messiah" will come to establish a world kingdom of peace and justice centered around the chosen nation, Israel.

On the other hand, the small group of Jewish believers who became the first founders of Christianity were convinced that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Messiah. They preached this truth with such conviction and power that not only many Jews, but by the beginning of the Fourth Century, nearly 35% of the Roman Empire believed that Jesus was and is the Messiah, and that the Lord and Savior of all humankind.

This was not a forced put by any established institution, church or certainly not the State. They had *good reason* for this faith. The Old Testament Messianic prophecies were found to be uniquely fulfilled in Jesus. There are hundreds of these prophecies, so that the possibility of their accidental convergence on any ordinary man is completely ruled out by the laws of probability.

It's fair to say however that Jesus' own disciples were more people of their own early First Century mindset than the clearer understanding that would come a few years later. The messianic expectation in the early first century was for a knight in shining armor—sort of a cross between Mother Teresa and a star from the World Wrestling Federation.

What a way to change the world!

The Messiah would not say anything like "Love one another!" And he would never say "pray for your enemies." The Messiah would be a charismatic figure who would overthrow Rome and any other reality standing in the way of God's rule of justice and righteousness. You can get a feel for this more bombastic messianic expectation the night of Jesus' arrest, when Peter took out his sword and tried to stab a Roman soldier in the face, but missed and

just got his ear. Jesus said in Matthew 26:52, *“Put away your sword, Peter, my kingdom is not about that! I’m not leading a rebellion here!”*

Just before that scene in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus had gathered with His disciples in the Upper Room and had done something so unexpected, so astonishing, so mysterious that Christians today still don’t completely comprehend it. He passed around the bread, then He passed them the cup and said, *“This is my Body, broken for you. This is my blood, shed for you,”* (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

Is this the way the messianic prophecies would be fulfilled? Is this what the Messiah looks like? Is this what the Messiah will do? His body, rising miraculous and strong from the stump of Jesse, to be broken for us? His blood, coursing up through the root of Jesse, giving life to the incarnate God? This blood is going to trickle down his thorn-dug forehead and gush from His sword-lacerated side and fall into the dirt beneath an execution cross? This is what the Messiah is about? This is what will be done to the Messiah? This is what the Messiah will allow to happen to Him? The astonishing answer is....Yes! As Michael Crawford sings in his wonderful Christmas album, *“What a way to change the world!”*

Messiah Fulfilled

In one of the many unusual transactions surrounding Jesus’ birth, a man in Jerusalem called Simeon had been particularly waiting for what Luke describes in chapter 2 as *“the consolation of Israel.”* Luke tells us in verses 26 that *“it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Christ, or the ‘Messiah’* When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, *Simeon took him in his arms and praised God.*

I have had the incredible joy of worshipping in Kings College chapel in Cambridge many times. The altarpiece on the wall behind the communion table is a painting of this scene. Luke tells us that Simeon took (Jesus) into his arms and praised God, saying: *“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”*

“The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about (Jesus). Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, ‘This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.’”

Let’s not get too sentimental

Let’s not get too sentimental about the baby Jesus. Let’s not become too idealistic about the wonderful ethos of the Christian faith. The fulfillment of the messianic longing is not like the coming of Santa Claus down the chimney on Christmas Eve. It’s the coming of a figure who will be rejected, belittled, misunderstood, written off, and smirked at in university and even high school classrooms in 2007.

The fulfillment of Messiah, especially the way Jesus fulfilled it, is no more acceptable today than it was then. Which means, if you believe today that Jesus is Lord and believe Him to be the Messiah, you can take little credit for that wonderful truth, that sublime reality lodged in your heart. As Jesus said in Matthew 16, when Peter replied at Caesarea Philippi, *“You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God!”* Jesus said, *“Peter, let me tell you something. What you have just said, what you believe here was not something you figured out on your own. You didn’t learn it in school. It was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.”*

When Peter first met Jesus, it was actually because of his brother Andrew, who had met Jesus first. John 1:40-41 tells us that Andrew, Peter’s brother, was one of two who heard about Jesus through John the Baptist and had begun to follow Jesus. John 1:42 tells us that *“The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, ‘We have found the Messiah’* (Luke adds, *that is ‘the Christ.’*)”

When I saw this passage again, describing a scene that takes place at the very front end of Jesus' ministry, and at the very front end of Andrew and then Peter's faith, I couldn't help but think: Receiving Jesus as Messiah is not that difficult to do. When you accept Jesus as your Savior, you invariably have a sense that (a) you need a Savior, or Messiah, and (b) He is the Savior or Messiah you need. But getting a grip on just how much you need him, and grasping, as the Apostle Paul describes it in Ephesians 3:17-18, "*how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love which surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God*" takes a lifetime—and perhaps even an eternity!

Communion with the Messiah

Which is one of the reasons for what we're about to do with the implements on this Communion Table. Jesus said, "Take and eat, this is my body, broken for you. All of you eat in remembrance of me." And, "this cup is the cup of the new covenant in my blood. Drink it, all of you. Drink it all of you disciples needing a Savior, knowing you need a Messiah, hoping and praying with groanings too deep for words (Romans 8:26), struggling either with the concept itself or with the possibility that God should love me this much, all of you drink this in remembrance of me! "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you show forth the Lord's death until he come."

The promise yet to be fulfilled

To which I would like to add a 21st century PS to this message. The prophecies of Jesus' coming started to be spoken as many as 1500 years before his arrival in Bethlehem. The last words of the same angels who announced Jesus birth in Bethlehem are these words in Acts 1:9-10. They were spoken after Jesus ascension back to heaven:

"After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

My fellow adventurers on this third rock from the sun, make no mistake about it. Just as the words about the Messiah's coming to earth came to pass in the fullness of time, so will these words. It's what Advent is really all about. Not the coming of Christmas, but the coming of Christ, the Messiah at the end of time as we know it, when as Revelation 1:7 describes it, "*every eye will see him, even those who pierced him,*" and when, as Philippians 2:10-11 tells us, "*at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*"

Prayer

Gracious God, the wonder of Bethlehem is not the birth of a little baby. It's not the stable and the almost too perfect picture we have imagined with shepherds and donkeys and camels around. The wonder is that You came at all! In the way You came. The wonder is that in Bethlehem's dark streets shines the everlasting light. The wonder is that the hopes and fears of all the years are met in Jesus that night. And so we come again to the Table, stumbling, like those shepherds long ago, into the unimaginable, but deeply satisfying light of Jesus, the Messiah, our Savior, our Lord, and our Friend, Amen.