

The Forever King

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[0:00] Good morning, everyone. Great to see you. If you don't know me, my name's Dan. I serve as an elder here at Watermark Church. Thanks for coming and joining us on this crisp Sunday morning here in Hong Kong. I thought I'd just start out having a little thought process. I wonder if you have any favorite books or movies in your life that you've read, you've watched them over and over again, you're so familiar with them that you know them. You know them really well. If someone asked you about it, you don't even have to think about it. You can just close your eyes and recount all of the details. You don't have to look on your phone or anything like that. But I wonder if you've ever had the experience with that book or that movie that you know really well, where one day you're reading it or you're watching it and you notice a new detail to it, something you haven't seen before.

And yeah, it really casts that thing that you thought you knew so well in a new light, in a different way. The story becomes alive. It becomes fresh again for you. As our two daughters get older, we're slowly introducing them to the world of movies. Given they're five and three and they're girls. Naturally, we've started looking at the Disney princess movies first. And so...

Julie's shaking her head. Sorry, Julie. So we are watching them first, evaluating them, and then deciding whether they're appropriate to put in front of the girls. So notwithstanding probably the slightly unusual image of a middle-aged man sitting up late at night when everyone's fast asleep, whiskey in hand, belting out, let it go with Elsa. It's been a really interesting experience for us. I think that there have been some movies that we actually thought were appropriate for them that upon watching them again are not. And even more interestingly, vice versa. Some movies that we thought were not appropriate are actually okay to watch.

I don't know if you guys are familiar with Cinderella. Cinderella is one of these movies that we've watched. Growing up, I was pretty familiar with the story, actually. My parents had all the Disney movies. But to be honest, I thought Cinderella was just a bit of an airhead, actually. Traditional, blonde-haired, blue-eyed princess. Sole purpose in life was to marry a prince.

It's not really the kind of messaging that I wanted to put in front of the girls at a young age. So we watched it again. And actually, my opinion has changed. Cinderella is actually a really kind-hearted person. She's had a really bad luck in life through some terrible circumstances, through her father passing away, and then some really oppressive circumstances in her life. We're not going to go into all the detail. But just to say that, I don't know if you guys actually know, she didn't even, when she went to the Royal Ball, she wasn't going with any intention of marrying anyone.

[3:10] She didn't even know she had met the prince when she had to rush back home at midnight, before her carriage turned into a pumpkin. So, you know, these little details shed the story in a completely new light for me. And as an aside, they've been added to our allowable set of movies for the girls. I wonder if it's a similar thing when it comes to today's story. The angel Gabriel appearing to Mary and announcing Jesus' birth through her miraculous conception and pregnancy. We read it every year at Christmastime. We can probably recall the main plot line. We've become so familiar with the story that we know it. I don't know if you have the next slides. That we know it. But I wonder, no, there's a picture of Mary and Gamble here. Boom. Thank you. But I wonder if that familiarity has also meant that we have missed the rich significance that is contained in the text. The insight into God's character, into Mary's amazing submission, and the beauty of Jesus, our King. That was certainly the case for me. And I've been humbled and challenged in my prep for today's sermon. So let's read and let's listen carefully. That we too would see the deeper gospel glories that are in store for us in

God's word today. Let me pray for us, and then I'll have EJ come up and read the scripture. Father, I just ask that your Holy Spirit would be at work now during this time, helping to lift our eyes up from

our own day-to-day circumstances, as important as they might be. But we want to see something that's even more important, something that goes above our own lives, our own circumstances, that is baked into the history of the world and the history of mankind. And is your great love for us in your son, Jesus. Help us to see Jesus. Help us to see God. Help us to see Mary and her example in a new light today, that we would love you more and know you more. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. Let us read the gospel words together. Today's passage will be Luke's chapter 1, 26 to 38. You can follow it on with the screen or with your own Bible.

Luke chapter 1, 26 to 38. In the sixth month of the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you. But she was greatly troubled at the same, and tried to discern what sort of greetings it might be. And the angel said to her, Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and be called the Son of Most High. And the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever. And of his kingdom there will be no end. And Mary said to the

Gabriel, How will this be, since I am a virgin? And the angel answered her, The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the child will be born, will be called Holy, the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has conceived a son. And there is the sixth month with her who was called barren, for nothing will be impossible with God. And Mary said, Behold, I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be to according to your word.

[7 : 39] And the angel departed from her. This is the word of the Lord. Thank you, EJ. So today we'll be looking at three main themes from the text. The nature of God, the nature of Mary, and the nature of Jesus. We will firstly see a God who is faithful to his promise and fulfills it in a very surprising way. His Son, the King, worthy of our worship and surrender, and the most blessed woman Mary, who models so well what that surrender looks like. It's a message that calls us to surrender to Jesus, for he is our eternal King. We'll firstly look at the nature of God. We only have 13 verses today, much less than our previous sermons in 2 Samuel. So we have the luxury of repeating them again. So I'll do that for us. We'll look at the first four verses.

In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, Greetings, O favored one. The Lord is with you. But she was greatly troubled at the same, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Okay. When reading scripture, it can be easy to focus on the more exciting detail. I mean, this is pretty wild stuff. Angel to Virgin Mary. Hello, Mary. How's it going? Please relax. God likes you. He's got your back. As Neil mentioned last week at the start of the book, the author Luke makes it clear his intention in his book. He wants us to have certainty concerning the life and mission of Jesus. In order to achieve this, he's taken time to carefully investigate, speak to eyewitnesses, compile an orderly and detailed account for us. There is a lot to be gained, actually, from the seemingly less interesting detail. We're not going to go over all the detail, but what definitely warrants a closer look is when Luke says that the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth. Yes, God has sent one of the few named angels in the Bible. That's eyebrow raising enough. But what of the location to which he is sent? Nazareth in Galilee. For the original readers, this would have been an astounding detail, actually. Nazareth in Galilee? In chapter one of the book of John, when encouraged by his friends to meet Jesus, who was said to be from Nazareth, the eventual disciple Nathaniel says, can anything good come out of Nazareth? For upright Jews, the town had absolutely nothing to offer. It was despised, even. It was a small, corrupt town, overrun with Roman soldiers and Gentiles, a mongrel population. It was never mentioned in the Old Testament, Nazareth specifically, and it's basically never mentioned in any other historical accounts. Most readers would have expected Jerusalem, where the temple was, the most holy place in Israel, to be the place of his most significant announcement. Or at least somewhere in the region of Judea, the heartland of God's work throughout much of Israel's history. Galilee was a nowhere region.

[11 : 11] Nazareth was a nothing town. God chose a nothing town in the middle of a nowhere region. And what of Mary? An early teenager at best, 12 to 14 years old. A poor peasant girl, a maid. Illiterate, likely living in the most humble of circumstances, of houses. She was betrothed, but she wasn't married.

And a virgin. Mary was a nobody. What about at least someone more worthy? Perhaps from the family of the line of priests back in Jerusalem? Someone with standing? Someone more believable? Someone more appropriate? No. The greatest news in Israel's history was proclaimed in the most humble of situations. A nobody with no standing in a nondescript house in a nothing town in the middle of nowhere. Why did God choose to do it this way? To those who know a little bit about God's character, it may actually not be that surprising. Firstly, and we're going to skim over this quickly, but God is faithful to his promises. He said he would do this already. In Isaiah chapter 9, one of the prophecies about Jesus, it says, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. Secondly, and more importantly, God is faithful to his nature.

He has always chosen the most unlikely people to be involved in his greatest of works. David, the runt of the family, shepherd boy, chosen by God to be Israel's greatest king.

Gideon, the weakest in the family, in the weakest clan, chosen by God to rescue the Israelites from the hand of the Midianites. Rahab, a despised foreign prostitute. Ruth, a poor, penniless foreign widow. Both women chosen by God as heroines of the Christian faith, contributing to the very line of Jesus himself. Time and time again, over status, over achievement, or wealth, or intelligence, or strength, or anything else that the world elevates and exalts, God's eyes are elsewhere. It is poverty in spirit, humility, that God exalts, because it rightly places God as sovereign, as necessary, as worthy.

God looks at our heart. Psalm 51 says, For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it. You will not be pleased with a burnt offering.

[13 : 56] The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. I wonder how much easier it is for someone of lower standing in life to be keenly aware of their need for God. Being poor or lowly in society can practically lead to greater dependency on things outside of ourselves, including God. Being dependent on God can lead to a greater awareness of God's providence and blessing for the things we have in our life. And being more aware of God's blessing renders our heart more and more towards Him. We will look at it next week, but Mary herself displays this in her song of praise later in chapter 1, giving God praise and glory for His favour, despite her humble circumstances. Watermark Church. I think it's fair to say that we're a pretty well educated, pretty well-to-do church. This is not something to feel bad about, something not to pursue.

But this passage also serves as a spotlight, as a stern warning that those things the world tells us are important, God clearly tells us are actually not that important to Him.

Where are we ultimately putting our hope and our identity in? Our finances? Our education? Our health? Our children? Our status? Or in our God, who is infinitely richer, wiser, and loftier in status than we will ever be? And so we come to Mary, the nature of Mary. Again, let's dive into the text. And Mary said from verse 34 to 38, if you have it in front of you, or up on the screen. Sorry, it's not up on the screen, if you have it in front of you. And Mary said to the angel, how will this be, since I am a virgin? And the angel answered her, the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.

Therefore, the child to be born will be called Holy, the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived the Son. And this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God. And Mary said, behold, I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be according to your word. And the angel departed from her. Young, poor, illiterate Mary, going about her daily tasks, and suddenly, bam! Literally the archangel Gabriel appears.

[16 : 30] Greetings, O favored one. The Lord is with you. I mean, it's something straight out of a movie. Probably not Cinderella, but another more exciting action movie. I don't know if you've ever encountered an angel before. I personally haven't, but I imagine it would be quite a powerful experience.

The two encounters before and after with the same angel Gabriel, firstly with Zechariah, which we heard about last week in the temple, and later on the shepherds tending their flocks in chapter 3, result in immediate responses of great fear. Remarkably though, while it does say that Mary was

troubled in verse 29, and the angel Gabriel comforted her, it doesn't say that she was overcome with fear. It says actually that she tried to discern what kind of greeting this might be.

Despite her societal standing, Mary was no skittish young pushover. Just earlier, Zechariah responded in doubt and unbelief when faced with a similar, even lesser message for John the Baptist.

Mary here is confused, but seems thoughtful and expectant. She asks, how will this be? She is accepting of what is going to happen, but still needs to understand how. She's a virgin after all, and she is betrothed to Joseph, not yet married. A pregnancy at this stage has the risk of bringing extreme shame onto her family, onto her and her family. The angel then goes to shock her even further if that wasn't enough, by saying that this baby would be conceived by the very Holy Spirit of God.

Two quick asides here. Firstly, this is not some sort of weird paranormal sexual experience. Hovering over was similar language. It was similar to the language used at Pentecost, when the tongues of fire hovered over the disciples. It is just a picture of God doing the miraculous, what only God can do.

[18:28] Secondly, we often can be tempted to dismiss this story as fantasy. People back then were uneducated. They were gullible. They were likely to believe anything. But Mary initially reacted actually quite similarly to someone today we would expect to react. But I'm a virgin, she says. That's not how babies work. Though she was illiterate, she would have heard the Old Testament in the synagogue as a child. Mary must have started to be getting a clearer picture at this stage that this child was actually the coming Messiah. She may even by this time have recalled a prophecy in Isaiah 7.

I'm not going to read the whole thing, but it's another prophecy about Jesus. It says, Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and call his name Emmanuel. Either way, what reaction would you have had in Mary's situation?

If you were Mary, Gabriel, I get your message, but I'm too young. I'm betrothed to Joseph. I am just a peasant girl. No thanks. That wouldn't be unreasonable, right? I mean, even though she may have intellectually known, she still has to apply her own circumstances to the prophecy. There is a huge personal risk and potential shame in taking that step of faith. But how does Mary react?

Verse 38 says, And Mary said, Behold, I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your words. Mary displays surrender and submission. Amazing surrender and submission. Mary submits to the message of God through the angel Gabriel. She says, Let it be according to your word. Mary's humble heart, her faith, and the surrender that comes from that are a model for us. Don't we struggle with this so often? Don't I struggle with this so often? Stepping out in faith, especially when it may come with a potential cost. Maybe it's as simple, and I know this is the case for me, as the Spirit's prompting to share our faith with a friend, with a colleague, with someone we meet. We're unsure of their reaction. I shy away from it so many times. We're happy to believe God's word intellectually and who God is intellectually until it potentially negatively impacts our life. We may also be thinking,

Mary's submission is all well and good, but she saw an angel. I mean, come on. If I saw an angel, I might be more inclined to react in the same way, maybe. But actually, if we stop and think about it, we have far more amazing communication from God than Mary did at the time. Mary did have the Old Testament. She couldn't read it, but she would have heard it. We have the entirety of God's word, the whole Bible, where so much more is communicated to us about Jesus. And we can read it. We can study it for ourselves. We even have the Holy Spirit, the helper, who shines light on the scriptures.

[21:44] And gives us wisdom and understanding, opens the eyes of our heart. So what does God's word and the Holy Spirit reveal to us exactly that allows us to respond in faith and humility to God, just as Mary did?

Well, there are many things, of course, but there is one main thing, which brings us to our third and final section, the nature of Jesus. Right in the middle of this story is the object of Mary's submission and ultimately the object of ours. In verses 31 to 35, we read, And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.

He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end. And Mary said to the angel, How will this be, since I'm a virgin? And the angel

answered her, The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.

Therefore, the child to be born will be called Holy, the Son of God. The Son of God. We will spend the remainder of our time in these verses. Of all the passages we're actually going to look at in this Advent period, apart from Christmas Day, of course, these are the only verses that directly describe Jesus and who he is. A book I read previously introduced me to the concept of pleasure stacking. I don't know if you've ever heard this term before. I like it. It involves incorporating as many things as you like and love to do in a single event, in a continuous period of time, in a single event or experience. So for me, it would probably involve exercising in the morning, going to the gym for a hike, going for a swim, something like that, having a nice brunch with my wife, washing it down with an ice cold beer, taking a nap, getting up from the nap. Very hedonistic.

And then spending some quality time with our family in the evening, preferably not watching Cinderella. We've seen that far too many times. Using these few verses, what I'd actually like to do is to pleasure stack and enjoy the amazing truths that we have revealed to us about Jesus here.

[24 : 13] Firstly, Jesus is human. Jesus is fully human. He's as human as it gets. He was born a baby. He grew into a child, then a young man, and died a physical death, just like all of us will one day. He experienced tiredness, stress, temptations, physical pain, just like all of us. He understands what being human is like, and the struggles that are associated. For those of us here that are feeling downcast, unworthy, struggling with the pressures of the world, it's not a simple thing. I'm not saying that. But do take heart. Jesus sees you.

He understands you and what you're going through. Secondly, Jesus is salvation. Jesus's name literally means the Lord saves, or the Lord is salvation. Jesus is needed. He is the most needed. All the amazing qualities we're considering may be exciting and awe-inspiring for us, but Jesus's mission was actually to seek and save the lost. Without the heart of Jesus for us, as is implied in his name, we're merely left with a person who may be actually indifferent to our day-to-day lives.

But we can go to him, not just because he is human and he knows what we're going through, but because he cares for us. He wants to save us. He wants us to come to him for salvation.

But how can we do this with any confidence if he is just a temporary human? Which brings us to the next point.

Jesus is our forever king. In the prophecy of 2 Samuel 7, we see another prophecy about Jesus.

We see, and I will give you rest from all your enemies. In verse 11 and verse 12 goes on to say, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.

[26 : 13] He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. Verse 16, and your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me.

Your throne shall be established forever. Jesus is the forever king. It's quite obvious, I think, to see the linkages from this passage to today's passage in Luke. Jesus is the fulfillment of this prophecy for a king. Verse 27, Joseph is of the house of David. Verse 32 in Luke, the Lord will give to him the throne of his father David. And you know what? We see an even more important word that comes shortly after, forever. As we have seen in our previous sermon series, David's reign was actually relatively short-lived. Jesus' reign is forever. He is the coming Messiah to whom all Israel was looking towards. A king who was God's son, and whose kingdom is established by God forever. And what will this kingdom bring exactly? Well, in 2 Samuel 7, chapter 11, it says, and I will give you rest from all your enemies. That's what this kingdom is bringing, rest.

In David's day, it was rest from Israel's physical enemies. For us, Jesus brings rest from our greatest enemy, sin. That wages war against all of humanity. He did it by his death on the cross and resurrection three days later. His kingdom's reign and rest for anyone who accepts and follows Jesus will last forever.

Lastly, Jesus is holy and divine. In verse 35, I might just read it up off the screen.

The child to be born will be called holy, the son of God. You may still have a logical question here about Jesus. How could this kingdom be able to last forever? He's a human, right? Well, actually, Jesus is also fully divine. John chapter 1 describes Jesus as the Word. 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 was not anything made that was made. It's a bit easier to read in the NIV translation, actually. It's a tongue twister. Interesting that Mary herself says in verse 38 that she submits according to God's Word. Jesus was there at the beginning of time. He

will be there at the end of time. He is currently in and through everything that we have in this life. He has a special relationship with God. He's the representation of God. He is the divine Son of God. Jesus' divine nature also necessitates that he is holy, fully set apart from us in every way, and for a specific and unique purpose, to seek and save the lost. He is utterly blameless, utterly sinless, the perfect embodiment of a godly character and life. That's a lot of information, okay? But let me summarize it for that. Let us bask in what we've just pleasure stacked about Jesus, okay? To summarize, Jesus is the most human, divine, eternal King. He is the only way to salvation. There is none like him, ever, past, present, or future. He is the only one worthy of our worship and surrender. He has done everything he can, and he's pleading to us to come to him, to surrender to him. As we conclude, I have two things for us to consider, actually. The first is a question. Do you know Jesus is your eternal King? Do you submit to him?

[30 : 23] And worship him as Mary did, because of who he is? And if not, why? I'm not going to spend too much time unpacking that question, but I just want to say, as we've seen in these verses, the Bible says that that's the only option, actually. Jesus is your only eternal King. You need to submit to him and worship him, as we all do, because of who he is. The second is to urge us to take some time out this week, perhaps, for those of us who are Christian, and even if we haven't made that decision yet in our lives, to reflect on who Jesus is, as described in these verses. To chew on it, to bask in it.

It's quite a simple application, but as you do that, ask yourself, is there one area of your life in particular where you are not submitting to God's word right now? Where you perhaps lack faith, you don't believe who Jesus is. You're struggling to see the rest that is promised as part of his kingdom and his kingship. As you answer this question, perhaps you'll have a conversation with a friend. Confess that to a friend, and vice versa. Have them confess something to you. Pray together these few verses over yourselves about who Jesus is. Pray that by the power of the Spirit, the truth about who Jesus is would capture your heart and lead you to repentance and submission.

I was tossing up whether to include this example or not, because for many of you, you've heard it over and over again. It's a bit of a broken record, but it's been blessing me in so many ways that I just can't help talking about it. I've been on sabbatical for the last six months. Before this period, I was idolizing my work. I was worshiping it. I had placed it above Jesus as the number one priority in my life.

And it was slowly and surely destroying everything in my life. My relationship with God, my marriage, my relationship with my kids, my health, etc. Work was my king, not Jesus. And instead of bringing the rest of Jesus's eternal kingdom, I was weighed down by the kingdom of the world, which was bringing a never-ending burden of stress. Sense of burden and stress. Yeah. God gave me many, many signs, actually, that I was going down the wrong path. He was making it very obvious to me. But I was still so entrapped in that worship of work that I was still justifying staying in work, giving myself over to it.

Ultimately, in his grace, he broke through with his word, a passage from the book of Exodus that convicted me that he would provide me and my family exactly what we need when we needed it. And I could trust him and take the step of faith. I'm not saying I'm anywhere near as faithful as Mary.

[33 : 22] Even in my head at the time of making the decision to go on sabbatical, there was a part of me weighing up the potential cost and risk and shame of making such a decision. But by ultimately submitting to God's word and surrendering to his plans, God brought the exact opposite of risk and shame and cost.

It has brought victory and peace and rest in my life. It is far from perfect and it has not come with its own struggles. But my relationship with God, my marriage, with my kids, my health, I can honestly say have never been better. And it's not because of me. It's because of the grace of Christ. All God's grace through King Jesus. Perhaps for you it's not work. Perhaps it's finances where you're holding on to far more than you need. Finding it hard to be generous, whether it be to the work of the church or to other people in need.

You try to control it for yourself because you just don't trust that Jesus' kingdom will last forever and it's worth investing in. Perhaps it's a particular area of sin in your life that you just can't shake, that you're ashamed of. Or you don't believe the value to bring into the light and repent. You try to fix it yourself because in part you don't believe that Jesus is truly human and understands what you're going through and understands you. Perhaps you often feel prompted to share your faith with others as I was sharing earlier.

But shy away at the last minute because of the fear of what's going to happen if they don't react well. In that moment your heart turns away from Jesus. It hides. Justifies itself in self-protection. You know the irony is that the very person we are not submitting to Jesus in those moments so that we can control the risk, engineer our rest, protect ourselves from shame, is the only person that brings us the freedom and vindication and rest in those areas.

[35 : 32] I wonder if there's been anything new today in this familiar story. Whether it be about the God who is faithful to his promise and nature, exalting the lowly and humble.

Whether it be Mary's amazing example of submission. Or whether it be about Jesus. The most human, divine, eternal king. He is the only way to salvation.

He is the only one to give us true rest. There is none like him ever, past, present or future. He is the only one worthy of our worship and surrender.

Let me pray and give praise to Jesus. Jesus. Let me pray and give praise to Jesus. Father, God, thank you for your word.

Thank you most of all for your son Jesus, whom we can read about, who we can learn about. I pray for your Holy Spirit to be at work in our heart. Reminding us of the glories of who Jesus is.

[36 : 41] Helping us to open the eyes of our heart to see who he is. To have that melt away. Whatever sin, whatever pride, whatever is in the way of us coming to you.

Whether we've been Christians for many years. Or whether we haven't made that step of faith yet. Father, would you draw us closer to you. Because of a greater understanding and love for who Jesus is.

In his name I pray. Amen. Amen.