
Who is My God?

Sermon • Rev'd John Shoaf • 24 December 2023 morning

2 Samuel 7:1–11 • Romans 16:25-27 • Luke 1:26-38



May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts give glory to you, O Lord. Amen.

My God is a god of greatness and majesty, of power and might, of glory and abundance. My God fills the sky with his presence, fills the earth with the sound of his voice. My God is beyond anything my poor mind may imagine.

Yet, my God is a god of smallness and singleness, a god who can fit through a doorway, who can lie in a bed, or a manger, a god of human size.

Who is my God? The nations praise him; the mountains rise up at the sound of his voice; the seas boil, the hills leap and frolic when he walks past.

Who is my God? The people condemn him; they spit at him; they follow him in ones and twos.

My God did something gods aren't expected to do — truly amazing when you think of it: God came to earth and was born as a tiny baby in a manger, born to

a poor woman and man, far from home alone in a strange city. Of all the things that God has done, this is the centre of my faith: that God came to earth and was born as one of us. This is the greatest story ever told, for it is a story, though when I say “story” do not think that I mean a fictional story. It is our story, full of God’s truth, and it is to us a revelation.

The narrative — the story — begins with a young woman and an angel. The young woman is ordinary, a woman of her time; in fact, she could be any young woman, yet God chose her. Why? We do not know. God’s ways are not our ways, and God sees what we do not see. The woman, Mary, did not somehow earn the right to bear God’s son, yet she is the favoured one. The angel brings this good news. He greets her in this way, telling her the Lord is with her. She is perplexed, and he goes on to explain about the child to be born of her.

Gabriel says three important things about the child:

- ❖ He will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Son of God.
- ❖ He will receive the throne of David, his ancestor, and reign forever.
- ❖ He will be holy.

Right away, Luke tells us who this child will be. Remember, ancestry was very important to the people of this time. King David lived in the historical memory of Israel. David was certainly human, but he was greatly blessed by God and was favoured by God. The days of King David were days of glory and prosperity and freedom, when Israel was powerful and strong. Only one appointed by God could assume David’s throne. And only the Son of God could reign forever.

For Mary was to give birth to God’s only Son, and though he was to be born to Mary in the usual way of human birth, he is truly God himself. Mary does not know this yet, for Jesus is to bring his own revelation, when he begins his earthly ministry. The revelation of who Jesus truly is will wait for another day.

And Gabriel tells Mary that the child will be holy. This much is unsurprising, given what has been said before. Certainly the Son of God must be holy, for God is holy. Yet surely, as Mary ponders this news — Mary was a very thoughtful person — she must realise that the holiness of God’s Son, if God’s son is to enter the world, will bring holiness to her and her family and all the people he meets. She might have heard the verse from Moses, “Be holy, as your God is holy.” To be holy is to walk in God’s grace, to follow his commandments and know his love. Will this child, and the man he will be, lead others to walk in the light of God? Will he himself be the light?

Why is God doing this? Why would he send his Son to be a human? Why would he lower himself, shrink himself down to human size, in order to fit through a human doorway and enter our lives in such an immediate way?

Paul, in his letter today, suggests an answer. Listen again to what he writes about

the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith.

(Romans 16:25-26)

“To bring about the obedience of faith” — what a great phrase. Faith is obedience, and yet it is personal choice as well. We choose to follow God because God loves us, and we want to live in that love. We want to live in the light of Christ. And God wants so much for us to live in his love. God invites us daily, hourly, to come to him in faithful obedience. Ever since we walked out of the Garden in shame, we have been welcome back. But we did not see it. We did not embrace that welcome; we did not welcome that embrace. And so God sent his only Son, born into the world because that was the only way to reach us, to bring us back to himself. What great love can be ours if we simply say yes! as Mary did to the angel.

But to send his Son! Were not the prophets enough? There were many prophets before Jesus: Jeremiah, Isaiah, Micah, Daniel, and all the rest. And there are many stories, in Samuel and Kings and Chronicles, of kings who listened to their prophets, turned away from evil and turned back toward God. But there are also many stories of kings who ignored their prophets and built altars to other gods. The people of Israel were not consistent in their devotion: they worshipped God in fits and starts. And then there were all the other peoples in the world, all God’s creation! What about them? They knew nothing about the God of Israel.

And so Christ came into the world, and Mary was the first to welcome him, carrying him in her womb and giving birth in a stable. How filled with love she must have been! The love which would, one day, spread around the world, and extend down through the centuries to us right here. Thanks be to God. Amen.