



The Story of Redemption

God Reaching Out to Restore **COMMUNITY**
through the cross of Jesus Christ



What If God Were One of Us?
Part 4: Jesus' Birth, Life, and Ministry

Copyright James Nored 2003

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the author.

Unless otherwise stated, Scripture quotations in this publication are from the Holy Bible, New International Version. Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. All rights reserved. "NIV" is a registered trademark of International Bible Society. UK trademark number 1448790.

The Story of Redemption

Jesus' Birth, Life, & Ministry

Part 4: What If God Were One of Us?

*If God had a name, what would it be
And would you call it to His face, If you were faced
with Him in all His glory
What would you ask if you had just one question
Yeah, yeah, God is great, Yeah, yeah, God is good
What if God was one of us, Just a slob like one of us*

In 1996, popular singer Joan Osborne wrote the above song lyrics. While some have not quite known what to make of Osborne's song, she does raise an interesting question. *What if* God were one of us? What would he look like? Would he be short or tall, thick or thin? What name would he go by—Michael? Deion? Would he be just like us or different?

Osborne is not the only one to ever ask these questions. Others have wondered what God is like as well. Why is this? Probably because God seems so far beyond us . . . But God has not left us to wonder what he is like.



1. JESUS' BIRTH.

Matthew, the first book of the New Testament, begins by tracing Jesus' human ancestry back to Abraham. This is followed by an account of Jesus' birth, a story that shows how God chose to reveal himself to us.

¹⁸ This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

Matthew's Genealogy

- Traces Jesus' ancestry back to Abraham
- Shows Jesus is Abraham's legal descendant
- Shows Jesus is fulfillment of promise to Abraham

²⁰ But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel—which means, "God with us."

²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵ But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus (Mt. 1:18-25).

Despite all of the scenes typically seen at Christmas time depicting Jesus' birth, the most important part of the story is often missed: God became one of us. Note the following:

- ***Jesus is conceived through God's Holy Spirit***—The Holy Spirit is one of the three persons of God. Jesus' miraculous "parentage" points to his divine nature.
- ***Jesus means "Savior"***—Who is the only one who can save us from our sins? Who can restore the community between God and humanity that was lost in the Garden? Only God himself could be qualified to be our Savior.
- ***Jesus' other name is "Immanuel"***—The most significant element of Jesus' birth is summed up in this name, which means "God with us." In Jesus, God really is with us.

Amazingly, God came down from heaven, took human form, and walked among us. If we want to know who God is, we can see him most clearly in Jesus.

There is 1 God Who Is Revealed in 3 "Persons"

- God the Father
- God the Son
- God the Holy Spirit



Wise men from the East saw the star and came to worship Jesus.

After Jesus was born, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem looking for Jesus, asking,

2 "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him" (Mt. 2:2).

Indeed, Jesus is a king and is worthy of "worship," but his kingdom is unlike any other. His kingdom is a spiritual kingdom unlike the kingdoms of this world. Unfortunately, King Herod, the king of the Jews, did not understand this. He felt threatened by Jesus, and he tried to have Jesus killed. Herod ordered the deaths of all boys in Bethlehem under age two.

But God warned Joseph of Herod's plot in a dream, and Jesus, Joseph, and Mary escaped by fleeing to Egypt for a time. When King Herod died, they returned and settled in Nazareth.

What do you think of a God who would become human? Why would he do this?

2. JESUS' "NEW AGE" MOVEMENT.

The arrival of Jesus into the world signaled that a New Age was arriving. This New Age is the Kingdom of God, also referred to in Matthew as the Kingdom of Heaven. This Kingdom is not a place, but refers to the rule or reign of God. It is the type of kingdom and world that exists when God is king.

Had God been ruling the world prior to Jesus' arrival? Yes, he had. And yet,

his rule had not always been easy to see, particularly to the Jewish people. They had been a conquered people for hundreds of years, being passed from empire to empire. During Jesus' time the Jews were ruled by the Romans, and they looked forward to an end to this rule. They wanted an earthly king (Messiah) to drive out the Romans and establish an earthly kingdom of God.

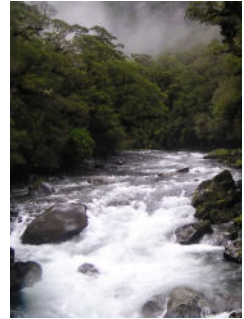
God had in mind a much different kingdom—a spiritual kingdom of “righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:16) that would rule in the hearts of humanity. Jesus ushered in the kingdom of God in a more full and visible way through his life of submission—showing God ruled his life—and his ministries of healing—which demonstrated God's rule over creation.

Were the people ready for this type of kingdom that Jesus would show them? No, not fully. But God sent someone to prepare them: John the Baptist.

¹ In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea ² and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” ³ This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

“A voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’”

⁴ John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵ People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. ⁶ Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River (Mt. 3:1-6).



People came to the Jordan River to be baptized by John the Baptist.

John the Baptist tells the people that God's kingdom is near or at hand. To be a part of this kingdom, they needed to do three things.

1. **Repent**—To “repent” literally means to turn around. It means to change one's heart and mind from an earthly perspective to a godly one.
2. **Confess their sins**—To “confess” sins means to say or admit that we have done wrong in our lives. Until we do this, we cannot be a part of God's kingdom.
3. **Be Baptized**—To be baptized literally means to be immersed. While the purpose of John's baptism was different in some ways from Christian baptism, it prepared the people for what would come.

Many of the people listen to John's message and are baptized. The Pharisees and Saduccess, however, two of the Jewish religious groups, do not respond to John's preaching. Some refuse to be baptized, and others are apparently insincere in their response. John has tough words for these religious leaders:

⁷ “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? ⁸ Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. ⁹ And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. ¹⁰ The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire” (Mt. 3:7-10).

While we have seen that God is a God of grace, he also cannot let sin go forever unchecked. There is punishment for us if we do not change our lives, and nothing can save us if we refuse to change. The Pharisees and Sadducees thought that they would escape this punishment because they were “Abraham’s children.” However, John tells them that God will only bless those who are Abraham’s *spiritual* descendants—those who, like Abraham, have faith in God and do what he says.

In addition, John tells us that our repentance must show “fruit”—that is, we must not just talk about changing our lives. These changes must be real and visible. Those who do not repent will be “thrown into the fire.” John says,

11 “I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. 12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (Mt. 3:11-12).

Who was this “more powerful” person who would come after John? It was Jesus, who would baptize with the “Holy Spirit and with fire.”

John’s Baptism--for repentance and forgiveness of sins
Christian Baptism--also includes the indwelling of the Holy Spirit

- **With the Holy Spirit**—When a person is baptized into Christ, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell inside of him. According to Old Testament prophecy, when the Messiah came he would have the Spirit. Jesus fulfills this prophecy.
- **With fire**—In the context, this seems to refer to the fire of punishment.

John is telling the people they have a choice. When Jesus comes, they can either follow him, submit to baptism, and have God’s Holy Spirit live inside them. Or they can refuse to repent, and then they will face the fire of punishment. Each of us faces that same choice today.

Jesus himself would go to John to be baptized. Though he had no sins to repent of, he again became “one of us,” showing us the proper response to God. Note what happened at Jesus’ baptism:

16 At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. 17 And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased” (Mt. 3:16b-17).



The ultimate way for God to rule our lives is for him to dwell inside of us through his Holy Spirit. When Jesus was baptized, the Spirit came upon him. And the promise of the Spirit is now available to all believers through baptism.

What do you need to “repent of” or change in your life?

3. JESUS' TEMPTATIONS.

Jesus was God in human form. But what does this mean? Was he ever hungry? Did he get tired? In short, was he like one of us or not?

While the Spirit came upon Jesus at his baptism, this does not mean that he no longer had to face the difficulties of life. In fact, after this,

¹ Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. ² After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread" (Mt. 4:1-3).

How did Jesus face temptation? First, he was human, and to be human is to be tempted. Life presents numerous opportunities to lie, cheat, be sexually immoral, and a host of other sinful activities. Jesus knew what it was like to have a scantily clad woman cross his line of sight. His ministry put him in contact with prostitutes, ruthless rulers, and corrupt politicians. He lived in this world.



We can overcome temptation in the same way that Jesus did--through, self-control, prayer, and dependence on the Spirit.

Second, he was led out into the desert by the Spirit to be tempted. God wanted to ensure that Jesus would face temptation. Why? So that Jesus could understand our problems. He faced every type of temptation that we will ever have. Though he never failed this test, he understands when we do. This should give us confidence that God hears us when we pray (Heb. 4:14-16).

Some have asked the question, If Jesus was God, could he really be tempted? The answer is yes. Paul, an apostle and one of the writers of the New Testament, would write to a group of Christians in the city of Philippi, reminding them how they should act. His words give us insight into who Jesus is.

⁵ Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness (Phil. 2:5-8).

When Jesus was in heaven, he did not face temptation. He did not know hunger or hardship. But Jesus did not consider being equal with God something to "be grasped" or held on to. He gave up his divine power and his comfortable home, and he became human. So he had to overcome temptation in the same way that each of us must: through self-control, prayer, and dependence upon the Spirit. Truly he was one of us.

What do you think the hardest part of becoming human was for Jesus?

In the next part of the story, we will look at what it means to be a disciple (follower) of Christ as the *Story of Redemption* continues.

QUESTIONS:

Match the following names of Jesus with their meaning or significance. One answer will be used more than once.

1. _____ Son of God a. Means “God with us”
2. _____ Jesus b. Means “Anointed One”
3. _____ Immanuel c. Shows that Jesus submits to the Father
4. _____ Christ d. Means “Savior”
5. _____ Messiah

Multiple Choice.

6. _____ When does Matthew tell of the Holy Spirit coming upon Jesus “like a dove?”
 - a. When he was born.
 - b. When he was baptized.
 - c. After he was tempted.
 - d. None of the above.
7. _____ When does the Holy Spirit come to live within us?
 - a. When we first believe.
 - b. When we confess our sins.
 - c. When we are baptized.
8. _____ The Kingdom of God is all of the following EXCEPT _____:
 - a. The rule or reign of God.
 - b. An earthly kingdom.
 - c. Made more visible in the life and ministry of Jesus.
 - d. Something that requires repentance in order to become a part of it.
9. _____ When Jesus became human _____.
 - a. He gave up his divine power.
 - b. He had to face temptation.
 - c. He left the comfort of heaven.
 - d. All of the above.

True/False.

10. _____ John’s baptism included the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.
11. _____ Though God is made up of three persons, he is still one.
13. _____ To repent literally means “to say I’m sorry.”
14. _____ Jesus had to overcome temptation in the same way that we must.

For questions and/or to receive part 5 in the *Story of Redemption*, contact:



LIBERTY CHURCH
OF **CHRIST**

1401 Glenn Hendren Dr.
Liberty, MO
64068

816-781-5134
libertycoc@sbcglobal.net
www.libertychurchofchrist.org