



The Landing

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Advent Series 2019

“Miraculous Births: The Lord Will Provide”
Genesis 21:1-7

Pastor Brent Nelson
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Genesis 21:1–7

“The LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did to Sarah as he had promised. And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him. Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac. And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. And Sarah said, “God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me.” And she said, “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.”

Introduction: Increase Wonder at Christ’s Birth

In my reading through the Bible this year, a new idea struck me: could all the miraculous births in the Old Testament really point to the highest and most important birth imaginable, the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God? How many miraculous births can you think of in the Bible? There is Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Samson, Samuel, John and finally Jesus. But actually there are two more: Adam and Eve. So I studied all nine of them, and chose to write about Adam, Isaac, Samuel and for three Sundays of Advent, with a celebration of Christ’ birth on the Sunday before Christmas.

My Aim: Wonder

My aim in this message is to increase your wonder in the Incarnation, the miraculous birth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. You know how the recurring traditions of Christmas can dull our wonder at the stunning reality that God was born as a baby in Bethlehem. The birth of Christ is the most trivialized, junkified, banalized holiday in the world. Plastic penguins with a dim light inside excite true wonder at the incarnation of Christ in no one - ever. We’ve heard the songs, we’ve eaten the treats, and gathered with our families. Yet because of our wayward hearts, familiarity with the good news of his birth can make us bored with the greatest miracle birth: God came to earth.

May the Lord Jesus open our minds to see in the Scriptures the wonder of his existence, the wonder of his coming, and the wonder of his love. If he doesn’t open our minds, we don’t understand.

After Jesus was raised from the dead he spoke with his shocked disciples in Luke 24:44–47, *“Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”*

When Jesus reads the Old Testament he sees himself everywhere. And we should too. Jonathan Edwards, America’s most reliable Bible interpreter wrote this:

“When we read in sacred history what God did, from time to time, towards his Church and people, and how he revealed himself to them, we are to understand it especially of the second person of the Trinity. When we read of God appearing after the fall, in some visible form, we are ordinarily, if not universally, to understand it of the second person of the Trinity.”

If this is true, that the pre-incarnate Christ is active as Lord God in the flesh throughout the Old Testament, then Christ is exalting Himself. The Son of God is directing all of human history with the fierce intent to prepare hearts for his coming in the baby Jesus Christ. And if all history previous to the first Advent points to Christ, then all history prior to Christ’s Second Advent points to him as well! That means all the details of your life are meticulously ordained by God to magnify Jesus Christ. God’s promises all prove true. God’s glory is the main narrative in all the universe. And God’s glory is seen and savored most fully in those who repent of sin and trust in Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. Trusting Christ now is the only way to be ready for his world-splitting arrival in His second coming!

Today we look at the miraculous birth of Isaac, to Abraham and Sarah. Let your soul overflow with wonder at what the pre-incarnate Christ does to magnify his incarnation. You will see it in each of the ten ways I have seen that show how Isaac’s birth foreshadows Christ’s birth. Either take notes, or better just listen and check my work by my manuscript which will be available later.

Ten Ways Isaac's Birth Prefigures Christ's Birth

I. Both were born as promised by God at the perfect time.

Genesis 17:5, *"No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations."*

Genesis 21:2, *"And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him."* God had foretold Abraham that his wife would bear him a son in one year's time. Listen to Genesis 17:21, *"But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year."*

So also Christ was born at the fullness of time. Listen to Galatians 4:4-5, *"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons."*

God foretold both Isaac's and Jesus' birth. And both were born in exactly the same way and at exactly the right time God had specified. With God there are no accidents; only incidents. It is the very nature of God to not only predict but produce the future. He is not just a careful prophet, he is the prime and decisive Cause of the future. Listen to Isaiah 45:4-7,

"For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I name you, though you do not know me. I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me, that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other. I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the LORD, who does all these things."

Stand in silent wonder before the ineffable glory of God. He predicts the future flawlessly because he creates the future purposefully.

II. Both were born following angelic announcements

Both Isaac and Jesus were born following angelic announcements. In Genesis 18, three angels come as men to announce to Abraham and Sarah that they will have a son even though she is 90 and he is 100 years of age. (see verse 9 and following).

And it was Gabriel, the angel who stands near God, who was sent to announce to Mary the birth of Christ. Luke 1:30–33, *“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 will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to 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.”*”

God’s great covenantal events are all foretold by angels. They still minister today. We must be hospitable to strangers as Abraham and Sarah were to all, because we might be entertaining angels without knowing it (Hebrews 13:2).

III. Both were named by God

Third, both Isaac and Jesus received their names from God. Usually the father names his children. But in the case of both Isaac and Jesus, God names them.

Genesis 17:19, *“God said, “No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac.”*

Matthew 1:21, *“She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”*

Both names foretell the purpose for each baby to be born. One will bring laughter, for that is what Isaac means, and the other will bring salvation, for that is what Jesus means. Each of you who trust in Christ, has a new name that comes from God as well. Listen to Revelation 2, *“...To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.” (Rev. 2:17).*

God gives names, for God is the owner, director, author and audience of all of our lives.

IV. Both were born miraculously to mothers who had no natural reason to believe they would bear children.

Fourth, both Isaac and Jesus were born miraculously to mothers with no natural reason to believe they would bear children. Isaac was born to Sarah who was 90 years old and beyond child-bearing age.

Genesis 18:14, *“Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son.”*

Genesis 21:1-2, *“The LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did to Sarah as he had promised. And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him.”*

Mary was only a teenager and still a virgin when Christ was born.

Luke 1:34-37, *“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 a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.’”*

If God can cause aging couples and a virgin to bear children, there is nothing too hard for God to accomplish in order that his salvation might be known, and his glory vindicated. Do not doubt God’s power over the impossible. No matter how great your idea of God’s power, the real dimensions of God surpass all that we can ask or imagine!

Both an aged Sarah, and a virgin, Mary were stunned by God’s promise, by his plan and by his power. Miraculously, the infants growing in their wombs. What power does God lack to achieve his most wonderful promises in your life and your family? Nothing is impossible with God.

V. Both were born to mothers who had a crisis of faith.

Both mothers had a crisis of faith in hearing the news. Sarah laughed in unbelief. Turn with me to Genesis 18:9–15,

“They (the three angels) said to him, ‘Where is Sarah your wife?’ And he said, ‘She is in the tent.’ The LORD said, ‘I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son.’ And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years. The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah. So

Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?" The LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son." But Sarah denied it, saying, "I did not laugh," for she was afraid. He said, "No, but you did laugh."

Sarah laughed. Then she denied laughing! But she laughed. But God said her son would be named Isaac, which is the same word for what she did. Every time she sees her son, she would remember laughter in unbelief, and then her laughter in real blessing.

Mary had her own struggle with faith. When the angel told of the miracle, Mary said to the angel Gabriel, (Luke 1:34–38), *"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 a 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 to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her."*

Neither Sarah nor Mary, had perfect faith. Even their small faith pleased God. No matter how little faith you have, offer it to God. Let him know you believe, but ask him to help your unbelief. He will. He is merciful and kind and patient and good.

VI. Both were opposed by their half-brothers.

Sixth, both Isaac and Jesus were opposed by half-brothers. Isaac the toddler was laughed at mockingly by Ishmael his teenage half-brother. Notice Genesis 21:9, *"But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, laughing."* That word 'laughing' is the same word as Isaac's name, but in a verbal form which reflects downward on the one in view.

Ishmael mocked Isaac.

Jesus was mocked and disbelieved by his half-brothers. Listen to Mark 3:21, *“And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, ‘He is out of his mind.’”*

Remember John 7:5, *“For not even his brothers believed in him.”* Jesus came to his own and his own did not receive him.

Maybe some in your extended family, siblings, parents, children, in-laws, grand-children, disbelieve in you, or your Savior, or God himself. And they mock. They make jokes. Comedy is often a guise for unbelief. If so, you are in good company. Both Isaac and Jesus were disbelieved by their own families.

This unbelief points forward to the God-appointed destinies of both of these children doesn't it. And to yours, if you love Christ and mean to stay faithful to him (2 Timothy 3:12). As with Isaac and so with Jesus Christ, let your joy in God through faith in Christ overcome the sham joy with which others mock you. Greater is your true joy, than any pseudo-joy the world offers.

VII. Both were born into Hebrew families to Establish New Covenants

Both were born into Abraham's line. This connects them and shows they both fulfill God's prophetic announcement to launch covenants. In Genesis 17:7, God said to Abraham, *“I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.”* Both were covenant babies born to God's covenant people, not Israel. Israel hadn't been born, and the Israelite people had not yet been established. This is God's covenant to bless many nations (vs. 4,5). Isaac is a Hebrew, but not an Israelite.

Jesus is born under David's covenant, but comes to inaugurate the New Covenant, the final covenant God makes with all nations who trust in Him. Jesus said of himself, *“... likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, ‘This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood’”* (Luke 22:20).

And the Apostle Paul links Abraham's covenant fulfilled in Isaac, with the New Covenant Christ brings when he proclaims in Galatians 3:7–9, *“Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture,*

foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith."

Then at the end of the chapter Paul summarizes, *"And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise."* (Galatians 3:29).

Jesus Christ fulfills all the Old Testament covenants in himself. The New Covenant is God's gracious agreement with himself by which sinners are justified by faith in Jesus Christ. Isaac and Jesus both exist to preach the gospel of grace to you and to me and to the world!

VIII. Both were circumcised on the Eight day to enact new covenants and father multitudes of nations.

Genesis 21:4, *"And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him."* And this enacted the Abrahamic covenant which was for all nations.

Luke 2:21, *"And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb."* And Jesus' circumcision signaled he was inaugurating a new covenant for all peoples as well.

Isaac will bless the nations:

Genesis 22:17–18, *"I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."* God told Abraham that he would father many nations through Isaac!

So also with Christ will his blessing extend to all peoples:

Luke 2:10, *"And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people."* Luke 2:30–32, *"for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."*

Never think merely ethnically, racially or naturally. Think supernaturally, globally and eternally. God means to be worshipped by people from every tribe, tongue, people and nation. We must join in him in that world-wide pursuit of his glory.

IX. Both were born to make a sacrifice of their lives

Both Isaac and Jesus were obedient to their fathers – even unto death.

In Genesis 22, God told Abraham to take your son, the one whom you love, and go three days journey to mount called Moriah build an altar and make a sacrifice to me there. Abraham took his teenage son, two servants and did as God said. When they arrived Abraham told his two servants to stay at the base and he and his son would go up to worship and return. The wood was placed on Isaac's back, and father took the fire and the knife.

Then Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together. (Genesis 22:7–8). Can you hear the tremble in Abraham's voice? I wonder if he could look at his son as they walked?

Genesis 22:9–10, "When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son."

Can you imagine Abraham's face? Every muscle twitching with nervous fear. He is not laughing now. Can you imagine Isaac's face? What horror! What puzzlement! What terror possesses my father to sacrifice me? Might he be asking, "My father, my father, why have you forsaken me?"

Genesis 22:11–12, "But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."

Abraham Greet Christ in the Ram

Then Abraham lifts his eyes and sees a ram with its horns caught in the thicket. And he helps his son off the altar, unbinds him and together they bind the ram and lay the ram on the altar built for Isaac, and they slaughter the animal and have a barbecue. And I can imagine Abraham thanking God and pleading his son's mercy, and explaining he only sought to obey God. And Abraham called that mountain "The LORD will provide."

That very mountain became the location for Solomon's Temple, the Herod's Temple, in Jerusalem. Just 600 steps away is a garbage heap outside the wall, called Golgotha. There Isaac's Maker, the Ram whose mighty horns were intentionally thrust into the thicket of the world's sins, would be sacrificed. So this divine Ram would become the Lord's provision for the sins of the world.

With his fierce and mighty horns gnarled in the thicket of the world's sins Jesus... *"fell on his face and prayed, saying, 'My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will'"* (Matthew 26:39). And hanging upon the cross he cried out to his father, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* (Matthew 27:46). And Jesus paid the debt of sin we owed when he died. He was not Isaac. He was the Ram. He did not climb off the cross. He died there. Isaac was willing, Christ died.

The whole world is God's complex thicket of sin to highlight the joy of finding Jesus' ram horns snarled. He came to take your place. Get off the altar of sin sacrifice, for every effort you make to atone for your sins is an infinite insult to the final sacrifice Jesus made. His death was enough. Romans 5:6, *"For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly."*

X. Both were born for Joy

Tenth, both Isaac and Jesus were born to bring joy.

Isaac's name means laughter. When the child was born, Abraham and Sarah laughed again, not in unbelief, but in thanksgiving to God greater than words can say. Listen to Genesis 21:6, *"And Sarah said, 'God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me.'"* Isaac was born for joy. Not

just the joy of a barren and aged parents, but the joy of fulfilling God's covenant plan for all who trust in God.

Isaac was a special joy to his father. Genesis 21:3, *"Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac."* And then Abraham throws a great party when his son turns three, *"And the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned."* (verse 8).

The Father's Joy in Jesus

So also Jesus Christ was and is a great joy to his Father. Matthew 3:17, *"... and behold, a voice from heaven said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.'"* And when the Father really wants to boast in his Son, he pulls back the cloak of his humanity and let's his deity show.

Matthew 17:2–5, *"Christ was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. And Peter said to Jesus, 'Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.'"* He was still speaking when, *behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.'"*

Isaac and Jesus: Joys to the Nations

When Isaiah foretells the son of Isaac, the Son of Israel, God's suffering servant and how he will take away Israel's sin, he breaks into joy in Isaiah 54:1, *"Sing, O barren one, who did not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who have not been in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her who is married," says the LORD."*

Then Paul by the Holy Spirit reads Isaiah and applies this to the Galatians and to us:

Galatians 4:26–31 *"But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written, 'Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband.'"* Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. But just as at that time he who was born

according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now. But what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman." So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman."

So rejoice! If you are son of the free woman, Sarah and now Jerusalem, symbolizing the chosen people of God, the children of promise, then rejoice!

Jesus' birth was meant to bring even greater rejoicing. His cousin John leaped for joy in Elizabeth's womb, before Jesus was born. And after he was born the angels proclaimed to the Shepherds, *"Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."* (Luke 2:10–11). And in a few short years, the Magi from east came to worship the child King. So Matthew records, *"When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy".* (Matthew 2:10). All the nations will rejoice at the name of Jesus!

We should be the most joyful of all the people of the world. We have Isaac and all the patriarchs, we have the Holy Scriptures and the fullness of the Holy Spirit, all to transform us into beings with capacity and desire to wonder at Jesus Christ and the joy he alone brings.

Jesus is the New and Greater Isaac!

Jesus came to fulfill every promise made to Abraham, Sarah and Isaac.

One great difference: Isaac is not God, Jesus is God!

Genesis 21:33, *"Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba and called there on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God."* The only time this term is used of God in the whole Bible: Eternal or everlasting God. No other person is described this way, only God alone. It means he is above and beyond time.

So when Isaiah foretells God's Son as the "Everlasting Father" everyone is puzzled for 800 years. Then Christ comes on the scene in 4 A.D. and the Scriptures describe him as eternal and beyond time.

Listen to Colossians 1:15–17, *“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”*

“...who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Hebrews 1:3).

Christ says of himself *“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,”* says the Lord, *“who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty”* (Revelation 1:8).

Jesus alone is God. Isaac wasn't, nor are we, nor shall we ever be.

Jesus is the new and greater Isaac, because he alone is God.

Conclusion: Three Three-Word Prayers

If this is true, and it is, pray to the Lord three three-word prayers for yourself.

Fulfill Your Word – Sarah believed God. Abraham believed God. The reason he was willing to sacrifice Isaac, and still believe the promise of nations descending from him is that he believed God would raise Isaac from the dead (Hebrews 11:19). So pray these three words “Fulfill Your Word”

Lord, I'm Yours – Having all your sins atoned for in Jesus Christ, then lay your life upon the altar of obedience and say to God, “Lord, I'm Yours.” “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. (Romans 12:1). “Lord, I'm Yours”

Come Lord Jesus – and since Abraham looked in the face of that Ram and greeted Christ from afar (Heb. 11:13), look to Christ's second coming, and greet him from afar. Recognize in the provisions of God in your own life, every day, the kindness and foretastes of his sovereign grace.

“Come Lord Jesus”

The Lord's Table

Fulfill your Word. Lord, I'm Yours, Come Lord Jesus. These three three-word prayers define the Christian life, and define the Lord's Table.

The Table at which we feast on Christ spiritually, fulfills his Word, expresses to God our complete surrender to him, and yearns for his kingdom come when we drink this cup new with him.

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