

5. Promises Kept: The Life of Jesus

The Roman centurion in charge of the execution watched the whole thing unfold. All along, one condemned man had seemed different from the others. He endured the taunts and mockery of the soldiers without flinching. He endured a flogging that was brutal enough to kill a man, and after that he carried his own cross with slow, determined footsteps towards the place they called Golgotha. Finally, he collapsed from exhaustion and had to be helped by a foreigner from the crowd.

When they reached the crucifixion site, the centurion continued to watch this condemned man exhibit unusual behavior. As the soldiers pounded the nails through his hands and feet, instead of the usual foul-mouthed curses he prayed “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” As abuse was hurled at him by the members of the crowd, instead of responding in kind he simply bowed his head and took it. The only words he spoke were a gentle promise to the criminal beside him, who was begging him for mercy.

But the strangest part of all was the end. Complete darkness came over the land, and a sense of mounting apprehension gripped the centurion and his men as it stayed pitch-black for three hours in the very middle of the day. At the end of that time, the condemned man cried out one more time in a loud voice to God, and then he bowed his head and died. At that precise moment a massive earthquake shook the ground so powerfully that the very rocks split in two.

The earthquake was the last straw. There could no longer be any doubt about the true identity of the condemned prisoner, the one they called Jesus of Nazareth. Falling to his knees, the centurion exclaimed, “Surely this was the Son of God!”

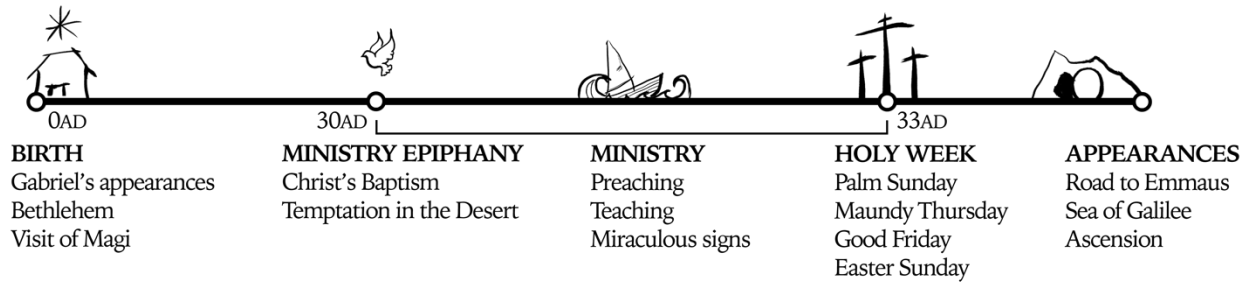
The centurion was right. Somehow, the man on the cross before him was also true God. And yet the soldiers had just killed him. How is this possible? What can all of it mean?

(adapted from Matthew 27:45–54)

Thousands of years’ worth of promises were kept, as God sent his Son, Jesus, into the world to be our Savior. Today’s lesson focuses on Jesus’ birth, life, and death on the cross, and his glorious resurrection from the grave on Easter.

WHAT IS THE BASIC STORY OF JESUS' LIFE?

Jesus' life, as recorded in the 4 Gospels, can be summarized in five major parts: his birth, the epiphany (revealing) of his public ministry, ministry, Holy Week, and resurrection appearances.



We'll take a brief look at each part of Jesus' life, noting that at every stage God is fulfilling specific prophecies that he made in the Old Testament.

5-6 B.C. JESUS' BIRTH

Jesus' birth is riddled with the fulfillment of prophecy. Note the examples below, which are just a sampling of all those recorded in the Bible.

- **An offspring of Adam:** Genesis 3:15 → Luke 3
- **An offspring of Abraham:** Genesis 12:1-8 → Matthew 1
- **The virgin birth:** Isaiah 7:14 → Matthew 1:18-23
- **A birth in Bethlehem:** Micah 5:2 → Luke 2:4

30 AD. EPIPHANY OF PUBLIC MINISTRY

Jesus' baptism marked the beginning of his public life, identifying him as David's heir, the Son of God. Jesus' temptation in the wilderness demonstrates his ability to stand up to Satan:

- **Baptism:** 2 Samuel 7:11-16 → Matthew 3:13-17
- **Temptation in the Wilderness:** Matthew 4:1-11

30-33 AD. JESUS' PUBLIC MINISTRY

Jesus' ministry was primarily a teaching and preaching of the good news of salvation from sins. Jesus also did many wonderful miracles. The miracles showed that Jesus was:

- the fulfillment of the OT promise for a **Prophet**: Deut. 18:16-19 → John 5:39-47
- a divine Savior, with all the power of God: Matthew 9:1-7

33 AD. HOLY WEEK

During Holy Week, Jesus' mission on earth came to its climax. The majority of the gospels is dedicated to these eight days.

Sunday: Triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Matthew 21:1-11

Monday: Jesus cleanses the temple. Matthew 21:12-17

Tuesday: Jesus teaches openly. Matthew 21-26

Wednesday: Jesus rests.

Thursday: Jesus institutes the Lord's Supper. Matthew 26

Friday: Jesus is tried and crucified, our ultimate *Priest* and sacrifice. Isaiah 53:1-7 → Matthew 27

Saturday: Pilate sends guards to the tomb.

Sunday: Jesus rises from the dead. He proves that he is our *King* who will rule eternally. Matthew 28

RESURRECTION APPEARANCES

After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to many people, to confirm to the world that he was who he claimed to be: God come to earth as a man to save sinners from their sins. Major appearances include the women at the tomb, to Thomas and the disciples behind locked doors, and the ascension into heaven.

The Life of Jesus recorded in the gospels is meant to be the clear continuation of the Old Testament, as the promised Messiah finally comes to save the world. To see the close connection between the Old and New Testaments, compare Psalm 22 with excerpts from the gospels below.

Psalm 22

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest...

I am a worm and not a man, scorned by everyone, despised by the people. **All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads.** “He trusts in the Lord,” they say, “let the Lord rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him...

Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; **they pierce my hands and my feet.** All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me. **They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.**

Matthew 27:46

About three in the afternoon Jesus cried in a loud voice, “Eloi, eloi, lama sabachthani?” (which means “**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**”)

Mark 15:29-31

Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, “So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, come down from the cross and save yourself!”

John 19:22-24

When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. “**Let’s not tear it,**” they said to one another. “**Let’s decide by lot who will get it.**” This happened that the Scripture might be fulfilled that said, “They divided my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.” So this is what the soldiers did.

WHAT BOOKS OF THE BIBLE RECORD JESUS' LIFE?

God has preserved four records of the life and ministry of Jesus. They are called *gospels* (books that tell the *good news* of the life of Jesus.) Each writer had his own background, perspective, and specific audience. When we keep this in mind, it clears up any apparent discrepancies between the accounts.

MATTHEW: AN UN/EXPECTED JESUS

Author: Tax collector-turned-disciple

Audience: Jews

- Presupposes knowledge of Jewish customs
- Focuses heavily on Jesus' interaction with the Jewish leaders
- Quotes the Old Testament **more than 60 times** to prove that Jesus is the promised Messiah the Jews were waiting for!

Purpose: Demonstrates that although Jesus was not exactly what the Jewish community was expecting, he was every bit the promised Messiah.

MARK: SUPERHERO JESUS

Author: Jewish missionary, traveled extensively with Peter

Audience: Gentile Christians in Rome.

- Explains Jewish practices and customs to an audience that was unfamiliar with them.
- Shows Jesus as courageous and powerful, which was fitting for a Roman culture that valued courage and valor above all else. (Mark includes more miracles than any other gospel writer.)
- Only 1 Old Testament quote

Purpose: Provides a gospel account for the Roman world, also shares Peter's insights

LUKE: GLOBAL JESUS

Author: Missionary and doctor

Audience: A Gentile friend named Theophilus

- The Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts were meant to be one unified work, addressed to Gentiles. Considered together, Luke and Acts tell the story of the gospel's departure from Jerusalem (the center of the Jewish world) to Rome (the center of the Gentile world).

Purpose: Demonstrates that Jesus is a world issue. Luke does this by stressing the universality of the gospel, pointing out Jesus' care for the weak and marginalized, and showing that Jesus' life was a real historic event surrounded by other real historic events.

JOHN: MY GOD AND MY FRIEND, JESUS

Author: Fisherman-turned-disciple

Audience: Christians in a growing church (c. 90 A.D.) who are struggling with misunderstandings and false teachings about Jesus. One particularly dangerous false teaching at this time stated that Jesus was not true God, but only a man.

Purpose: Proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus was indeed the Son of God, and also show Jesus' love for his disciples and for all Christians, whom he calls his "friends" (John 15:14)

TAKING IT DEEPER...

OPTIONAL: Discuss “When Was the New Testament Recognized by the Church” - Appendix, p. 87-88

The life of Christ is tremendously important because of *what it means for us*. Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection are not just facts of history - they have a real, vital connection to our life, and our eternal future.

This is God’s truth: His Son came to earth to wash away your sins and guarantee you eternal life in heaven.

How does that truth affect each of the following areas of your life?

- Home/Family

- Work

- Church

- Attitude

HOMEWORK: Choose one of the gospels and read through it this month.

Some suggestions:

Keep a notebook diary as you read, asking questions of the text:

- 1) what sins does this lead me to confess?
- 2) How does this show me Jesus actively obeying the law for me?
- 3) How does this show me Jesus paying the ransom price to set me free from sin?
- 4) How does this section bring me comfort or strengthen me?
- 5) How does this section encourage me to godly living for Jesus?
- 6) What is something new I learned today?
- 7) What in this section gives me reason to give thanks to God?

If you read one chapter a day, you’ll get through the book in a month. If you read two chapters a day, you can read the book twice in a month and really know that book.

Suggested Bibles:

- a) Concordia Self-Study Bible
- b) The Lutheran Study Bible
- c) Today’s Light Bible (ed. Jane Fryer)
- d) The Daily Bible (F. LaGard Smith)
- e) The People’s Bible series from Northwestern Publishing House (www.nph.net)