

Weekly Encouragement

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Make This Christmas Special - Part 1

By Rev. Peter Eng

Day 1

Barren No More (Luke 1:7)

From: *Announcing the Birth of John the Baptist* ([Luke 1:5-25](#))



And they had no child, because that Elisabeth as barren, and they both were now well stricken in years. (KJV)

But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren; and they were both well along in years. (NIV)

When a couple is unable to conceive, folks say they are childless. The couple in turn feels deprived, and wish upon wish, and prayer upon prayer, that God will give them a child. Less so now, but in days gone by, there can also be a social stigma attached to childlessness. Older Chinese culture (not biblical) makes a woman's childlessness justification for a man to take on a second wife.

Such stigma to childlessness is undeserved. The Bible makes it clear there was no fault in Elisabeth or her husband Zechariah. "They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless" ([1:6](#)).

God opens the womb of some, but to others, he says, Sing, O barren woman, / you who never bore a child; / burst into song, shout for joy, / you who were never in labor; / because more are the children of the desolate woman / than of her who has a husband," / says the Lord" ([Isa 54:1](#); cf [Gal 4:27](#)). This is poetic imagery of Jerusalem that is blessed by God, of a once barren woman finding her house bursting at the seams in God's spiritual kingdom. And to the man, "Let not any eunuch complain, / 'I am only a dry tree.'" ... to them I will give within my temple and its walls / a memorial and a name / better than sons and daughters; / I will give them an everlasting name / that will not be cut off" ([Isa 56:3-5](#)).

We can be childless, or we can be childfree – to live for Christ and to serve him with our time and effort. We are the family of God. The couple without physical children can focus on spiritual children that will continue for all eternity. They can focus on the spiritual birth, and the spiritual nurture of babes in Christ. In this regard, being without child is anything but barren. It is occasion for great spiritual fruitfulness. We can have many children but may remain unproductive. Barrenness may not be a choice, but being childfree is always a choice.

Day 2**Turn to Return (Luke 1:16)**

From: [Announcing the Birth of John the Baptist \(Luke 1:5-25\)](#)



And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. (KJV)

And he will turn many Israelites to the Lord their God. (NLT)

John the Baptist must rank as one of the poorest people. He was clothed in camel skin, ate locust and wild honey for food. He did not have much of any material thing. If we measure people by their net worth, John would be inconsequential because he was poor.

By another measure, he was rich. He would turn many Israelites back to God. But we have the commentary that he would turn many people back to God. Jesus would draw his first disciples from John's converts and over time, more and more of his converts looked to Jesus. He had a fat soul-saving account which Jesus inherited in his earthly ministry.

The measure of John's life was soul-saving. He would gain people who have eternal value at the expense of his own material prosperity. What is our bottom line? Perhaps we may unconsciously price-in the people we meet. The truly sad thing about measuring people by what they possess is that we invariably value ourselves the same way.

The bottom line for John the Baptist was the people he would turn to the Lord. If we use people as our bottom line, I wonder if we are rich or poor.

Some of us have nothing to our bottom line because we have never brought a single soul to Christ. Some of us have single digits to the soul-saving bottom line after decades of being in the faith. I think it is the sad norm for Christians to have a paltry soul-saving account.

We put off bringing people to Christ one year after another. We always have some other thing to do as Christmas draws close. Make this year different. We will not put off reaching out to our friends and relatives. We will take up the same call given to John to turn the hearts of many to God this Christmas. For if we do not, who will invite them to the gospel? If not this Christmas, when?

Day 3**Healing Fractures (Luke 1:17)**

From: *Announcing the Birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1:5-25)*



And he shall ... turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just.... (KJV)

He will ... turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and he will cause those who are rebellious to accept the wisdom of the godly. (NLT)

John would turn people to God. As a follow-up, he would reconcile families. The reconciliation with God will cause fathers to turn their wayward hearts back towards home. There is indeed such a streak in many fathers who desert their families.

Not all children are good. Some fathers desert, some children rebel. The rebellious would naturally not accept the wisdom of the godly. That wisdom may be from a godly father or from anyone who is godly. When the rebellious child receives God's grace of forgiveness, he is also drawn to the wisdom of the godly. A child in

rebellion against God and man will be the cause of fractures, and not the catalyst for healing.

When people turn away from God, they also turn away from each other. When people turn to God, they also turn to each other. The one who is reconciled to God seeks reconciliation with others; the one who remains in rebellion against God has little desire for peace with others.

It doesn't matter if we are looking at family members, people in a church, people in a nation, or among nations in the world. There is one relationship that has to be right before other fractures can heal. It is our relationship with God. We cannot have truce without Christ. But only Jesus, the Prince of Peace can bring healing to fractured relationships.

In Christ, we learn courage and submission, we learn dying to self and living to Christ. To the extent our relation with God is healed and healthy, we desire and are able to heal our interpersonal fractures. Let us now turn to God to make right our relationship with him, and begin a chain response of healing other fractured relations.

Day 4**Do Me No Favor (Luke 1:28)**

From: **Announcing the Birth of Jesus**
([Luke 1:26-38](#))



And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. (KJV)

The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." (NIV)

Imagine yourself a sixteen year old girl suddenly told you will be pregnant. That is hardly good news. Mary was young. Most scholars would say she was at most sixteen. How can news of an unplanned pregnancy while still a virgin be good? Luke tells the story from Mary's point of view.

Mary is planning for her wedding to Joseph. She and Joseph are fully committed to God's word and are keeping themselves chaste. The angel Gabriel tells her she will conceive and bear a child. She doesn't quite understand. Does it mean with Joseph after their wedding? Does it mean she should not marry Joseph but someone

else? She cannot believe her ears when the angel tells her it would be a virgin birth. But she believes.

In the angel's short message, he says "You are highly favored" (1:28) and "You have found favor with God" (1:29). There is no doubt that from God's point of view, she is the most blessed of women even though an unwed pregnancy is ordinarily not good news. She would bear insults; and eventually great suffering when Jesus would die before her eyes. Many would say, I don't need favors like that.

The overwhelming goodness of Mary's role is that she will bear in her womb God's salvation for all humanity. She will be the channel through whom the fallen world will be restored.

This Christmas, if you get to bear God's message to someone who is outside of God's kingdom, you would share in God's favor to Mary. You can busy yourself with your own agenda and have your fun. Or you can pray for, speak to, invite, and in some way be the bearer of Jesus to another person.

Make this Christmas different – by accepting God's favor in bearing Christ to your loved one or friend.

Day 5

Jesus for all the World (Luke 1:28)
 From: *Announcing the Birth of Jesus*
 ([Luke 1:26-38](#))



And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. (KJV)

You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. (NIV)

The angel tells Mary to name the child JESUS. There is nothing remarkable about the name in that it is a common Jewish name. It means "Salvation" or "YHWH is Salvation." It is the name "Joshua" in the OT. But there is also something truly remarkable about the name.

It is ironic that we don't know how Jesus' original Hebrew name is called out. There are several ways of saying or writing out the original version of the Hebrew name. This is a common phenomenon for all names (e.g. Benjamin, Ben, Benji, Benny). In the case of the original Hebrew name of Jesus, the variations are: Yehoshua, Hoshea, Yeshua, Yesu, etc. (most

likely "Yeshua.") It is interesting that there is no variation in the Greek. It is always "Iesous" (pronounced Yeh-sous) = Jesus. The remarkable thing is that the disciples of Jesus did not try to retain the original name. In fact, the loss of the original Hebrew form is probably deliberate.

"Jesus" is the Greek name for the Greek speaking world. It is like when Chinese take on an English (or Western) name when they move into a country that uses English. We are not denying our heritage. We are simply identifying with our new community.

The consistency of the use of JESUS and the disuse of the Hebrew form is a clear message that JESUS is for the world, not just for the Israel. In the name JESUS we have a declaration, perhaps even a demand, that this name must go out into all the world. God sent Yeshua to Israel so his disciples can proclaim Jesus to the world. At his resurrection, all authority in heaven and on earth is given to Jesus.

He is now the glorious hope of all humanity, and of all creation.

He is Jesus.

Go tell it. It's the message of Christmas.

Day 6**Son of the Most High (Luke 1:32)**

From: **Announcing the Birth of Jesus**
([Luke 1:26-38](#))



He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: (KJV)

He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. (NLT)

“The Most High” is more than just another name for God. It is the name used by Jews when they talk about God in relation to other religions. It is also the term other religions use when they refer to the God of the Bible. The Jews do not pronounce God’s name YHWH, and simply use the term “LORD” when they come to God’s name. So how do other people refer to YHWH since the generic “Lord” can mean many things? The term of choice is “Most High God” or “God Most High.”

When the angel tells Mary the son born to her shall be called “the Son of

the Most High” it is a simple assertion that Jesus will be for the world, not just for the Jews. To be sure, he is for the Jews. He will be the fulfilment of God’s promise to King David that the kingdom through David will be an everlasting kingdom.

Jesus will be the everlasting King of the everlasting Kingdom. But that Kingdom is not limited to Israel. It will expand to the whole world. While “the Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David,” it comes after the stupendous proclamation that Jesus will be the Son of the Most High. Jesus will be for the world.

Jesus is God’s gift of salvation to the whole world. We need to tell it. As Gentiles, we have received God’s grace through Jesus. The Jewish people are the channel through which God’s grace flowed to us.

This grace must not stop with us. It must go out to others. Just before Jesus ascended into heaven, he charged his disciples to be his witnesses, “both in Jerusalem and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Jesus is the Son of the Most High. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so. Let every child of God be a channel of blessing to the world.

Day 7**Endless Kingdom (Luke 1:28)**

From: **Announcing the Birth of Jesus**
([Luke 1:26-38](#))



And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. (KJV)

And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!" (NLT)

Daniel had a vision. He saw a great statue made of gold, silver, bronze and iron. Then came a rock not cut with human hands. It smashed the statue and grew into a great mountain that covered the whole earth. ([Dan 2:35](#)). "The God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands" ([Dan 2:44-45](#)).

Jesus is the fulfilment of God's plan to create this everlasting kingdom. Jesus will be the rock that is cut, but it will not be by human hands. He will

smash all the kingdoms that go before, and will create a global kingdom that is everlasting.

When we inherit God's kingdom, it will not be an escape into heaven. It will be "Your kingdom come (to earth), your will be done on earth as it is (already being) done in heaven." Too often, we pray for escape. We think God's salvation in Jesus as some escape pod that lifts us from earth to heaven. It is not.

God's salvation is not an abdication of earth to the devil. It is victory over the devil on earth.

We belong to God's everlasting Kingdom. We battle the kingdom of death brought about by sin. We do this battle by bringing people into God's Kingdom of life by the forgiveness of sin. We destroy death through life. Our calling is a wonderful high calling. It is a calling to win, not a calling to escape, not a calling to just hang in there.

At the nativity of Christ, the King has come to his Kingdom. Let all the earth rejoice that salvation has come. Let the good news ring out. And let me be the bearer of this good news.

Day 8

Virgin with Child (Luke 1:34)

From: [Announcing the Birth of Jesus \(Luke 1:26-38\)](#)



Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?(KJV)

Mary asked the angel, "But how can this happen? I am a virgin."(NLT)

This is no ancient myth. Ancient myths of virgin birth always include something that fertilizes the Virgin. The child born is 50% from the woman and 50% from a savior figure. In our present day, claims of virgin birth still always involve a man. And if by some anomaly the woman develops a child without a man, the child will always be female as there is no male DNA in the woman.

Luke makes it clear that Mary could not understand how she would bear the Messiah since she had not known a man intimately. In short, she was still a virgin.

In a world where women are relegated to a lower class, it is remarkable, and truly of God, that men should be excluded from God's salvation plan in the conception of Jesus. This detail was prophesied when our parents sinned, and God cursed the Serpent saying, "And I will put enmity / Between you and the woman, / And

between your seed and her seed; / He shall bruise you on the head, / And you shall bruise him on the heel." ([Gen 3:15](#) NASB). The Greek text brings out this strangeness vividly. The word for seed is "sperma" from which English derives "sperm." To talk of the seed of a woman is extremely dissonant. But God made no mistake with his words or his plan. He is saying the bearer of salvation will come from a woman, and not a man.

Of course, no one fully understood God's cryptic message until the fulfilment occurred. Mary herself did not immediately make the connection. What the angel said seemed impossible.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ has liberated more women from oppression than any other philosophy, religion, or tradition. Nativity is a time to reach everyone the society thinks unworthy, with the message that in truth, everyone is equally unworthy, but Jesus welcomes us nonetheless.

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Rev. Peter Eng is an ordained minister from the Reformed Tradition, but he is truly global in perspective. He served the Lord in various capacities starting from his teenage years in the 70s. His undergrad studies were done in Singapore, his grad studies in the USA, and post-grad studies in the United Kingdom, with additional post-grad research in Germany.