

7 The Son

This is the seventh talk outline in The God Story Sermon Series. The related chapters in The God Story book are *The Interlude* and Chapter 7, *The Son*. The books in the Bible this chapter corresponds with are Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Teaching Outline

Key aims

To explore the birth of Jesus, the context He was born into and the purpose of the first 30 years of Jesus' life sealed by his baptism in belovedness.

The God Story storytelling method

The God Story Storyteller understands that to teach The God Story effectively a dual teaching method is required. This is the art of teaching in a way that both **unfolds the eternal purposes of God through history and also releases them into personal encounter**. Practically this will mean prayerfully considering in each talk outline what parts you want to 'go deeper' in and what parts you want to mention at a headline level. We trust the Spirit will inspire and guide you to find the right cadence as you aim to give a passionate sweep of the unfolding narrative while also narrowing the focus in certain places to emphasise personal application and encounter.

Key Bible passages

You may want to read a short passage of scripture before you begin your talk. The passages below are the ones we believe are most relevant to this particular talk.

We recommend you choose one of these:

Matthew 1-3

Mark 1:1-12

Luke 1-3

John 1:1-33

Teaching notes

The notes provided will equip you to understand more of the context and more of the story as you prepare your talk. Generally speaking the talk outline follows the structure of the corresponding chapter in The God Story book. We feel the key sections in the Talk Outline below relate to the main flow of the unfolding scriptural narrative and so we have included key Biblical passages and quotes from The God Story to assist you in this. We recommend using these sections to shape your talk but please choose the parts which you feel are most helpful for your context.

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Introduction

Recap of previous session(s)

The story the Old Testament has told is of a Creator God who loves his creation, a heavenly Father who loves his children. Influenced by the devil, humankind has chosen to write their own self-centred scripts fracturing their perfect belonging in God's love. Nevertheless, God cannot stand the distance and pursues his lost sons and daughters, planting a seed of promised blessing in the heart of a man whose descendants, God's special people Israel, will carry forward the eternal purposes of God. At certain moments, when the Children of Israel are aligned with God's purposes for their lives, they are given a taste of the fruit of divine favour they were always supposed to know, but for the most part God's special people will reject him and The God Story plot unravels in tragic ways God had not intended it to. Even then God will not forget his covenant with his people, but it has become clear Israel can not save themselves. Something will need to be done. But first, silence.

Talk overview

400 years of silence in The God Story were broken by the cry of a baby boy. While all sorts of noise was being made on the world-stage as empires clashed with one another, The God Story narrative seemed to grind to a halt. However, 'in the fullness of time' this silence is broken and God entrusted the greatest miracle in history to the care of a teenage girl whose heart was wholly surrendered to Him. The Word through which the whole world had been created had truly become flesh. Mary and Joseph would call their new baby son Jesus, because as the angels had directed them, 'he would save his people from their sins.' After the birth narratives, The Gospel accounts tell us little about the first 30 years of Jesus' life. We are left to imagine Jesus rejoicing in his Father's good creation, sanctifying the 'ordinary' things of life as he grows and matures in sonship throughout these years.¹ The 30 years culminate in Jesus' baptism, an extraordinary event where all of the Trinity is actively present. Jesus' first 30 years of life are sealed with the adoring words of his Father, *"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."*

1 400 years of silence

- + Briefly overview the bigger geopolitical activity during the 400 years of silence, emphasising how our knowledge of this helps us better understand the world Jesus entered into.
 - “As the nations raged, God was quiet. As empires forcefully exerted their rule, God who rules over all was patiently waiting. As humankind shouted and screamed for power and control, God calmly rested secure in who God is!” ²
 - The Persians had been defeated by Alexander the Great, paving the way for the Greek Empire to massively influence the world.
 - The Greeks were eventually conquered by Egyptians who were then conquered by Syrians.
 - At this point there was a Jewish revolt by Jewish Zealots, led by Judas Maccabeus who defeated the Syrian king, Antiochus Epiphanes. This allowed the Jews to enjoy a period of independence for approximately 100 years.

≡ Key quote

“..while independence initially felt good, doubts surfaced, giving rise to questions. Are we really living as God’s people? Is Judas Maccabeus really the Messiah? Does our reality really line up with the prophecies of Ezekiel, Jeremiah and Isaiah?” ³

- In 68 BC the new world superpower, the Roman Empire captured Jerusalem. Roman rule became the new norm for the Jews. The Herodians, a sect of Hellenistic Jews, were installed by the Roman administration to give a pretence of semi-autonomy for the Jewish people - but in reality the Herodians were puppets on a Roman string.
- **Key point:** Essentially the Jews were exiles in their own land.

- + In light of this describe a typical Jewish First Century Worldview.

≡ Key quote

"A typical first-century Jewish worldview was therefore built on the following thoughts: 1) we are God's chosen people who are living in the holy land but under foreign rule; 2) we are focusing on the temple even though everywhere we look we see shrines, temple-prostitutes and cultic objects of pagan gods; 3) we are subject to the wrong rulers – on one hand we are surrounded by compromised Jews, on the other we have pagan rulers and in the middle we have Herod, a self-serving narcissist who disregards God's law and sacred Jewish customs; 4) we need a deliverer. For the Jews this worldview raised many questions." ⁴

- Explain how all of this resulted in four distinct groups emerging among the Jews (*see The God Story p.113-114 for a description of each*)
 - Essenes
 - Zealots
 - Sadducees
 - Pharisees
- The growing suspense - the tension among these groups was building and God's silence was deafening.

2 Silence broken

≡ Key quote

"Four hundred years of silence were broken by the cry of a baby. The pregnancy of heaven had come full term. Longing love can be restrained no longer." ⁵

- + Emphasise the role of the Gospel accounts at this point, highlighting how the authors have woven together the themes and genealogies of The God Story to date to help their readers know, the baby which has been born to Mary and Joseph is the One the whole world is waiting for.
 - *"The whole plot has reached its climactic moment. God will take on a human face."* ⁶

3 Elizabeth and Zechariah (Luke 1:11-17)

Describe the heightened angelic activity in the days preceding Jesus birth:

- + Explain Gabriel's encounter with Zechariah the priest and the prophetic promise about a son who would be Jesus' forerunner.
 - *"He will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous - to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."* (Luke 1:17)
 - Describe Zechariah's muteness and how Elizabeth conceived soon after.

4 Mary: Jesus' birth foretold

Explain how five months after Elizabeth's conception, Mary receives her own angelic visitation from Gabriel.

- + Read Luke 1:26-38. Emphasise the favour of God towards Mary and the overshadowing power of the Holy Spirit.

≡ Key quote

*"Read that line again. The Holy Spirit will come upon (over-shadow) you. Can you see what is happening? The Spirit is brooding again, only this time not over the watery chaos of creation but over Mary's womb. A seed of new creation is about to be planted by the Holy Spirit into the uterus of a teenage girl. The God who rules over the cosmos is about to take on the form of a single cell, submit himself to the process of cellular division and connect himself to a young virgin's womb via an umbilical cord."*⁷

- + Describe how God entrusts the greatest miracle in human history to the care of a teenage girl.
- + Emphasise Mary's response of faith in line with the heart posture of availability the other great God's story characters embodied, "May your word to me be fulfilled." (v.38)

5 Joseph (Matt 1:18-24)

Describe how troubling the news of Mary's pregnancy would have been for Joseph but emphasise the 'righteous' nature of Joseph's character.

+ Read Matthew 1:20-23.

≡ Key quote

*"God, however, is too committed to Joseph to let this happen. He wants Joseph to be the human dad of God's own Son. The Son of God will be born into a family unit, established on the union of a man and a woman, a reflection of the glory of the Eternal Family."*⁸

+ Take a moment to emphasise how both the angelic visitations to Mary and Joseph instructed their son be called **Jesus** - 'the son of the Most High' and the One who would 'save his people from their sins.'

6 Mary and Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-56)

Briefly highlight Mary's visit to Elizabeth three months into her pregnancy and how Elizabeth's baby leapt in her womb as she was filled with the Holy Spirit.

+ Read Mary's Song (Luke 1:46-56) and reflect on how this foreshadows the faith all who receive Christ will have.

7 The birth (Luke 2:1-20, Matt. 1:18-12)

Reemphasise the real 'flesh in blood' history of the world Jesus was born into.

+ *"The world of Mary and Joseph was one defined by empires, slavery, pagan deities, oppressed people, war, revolutionary zeal and power."*⁹

- Retell the details leading up to Jesus' birth - Caesar's census, Joseph and Mary travelling to Bethlehem (note the link to lineage of David) how labour kicks in but there is no room for them in the inn
- Describe the birth in a manger and take time to imagine the miracle of God in flesh.

≡ Key quote

*"Together they gaze upon their son, Jesus. Two hands. Two feet. A body. Two eyes. Two ears. A mouth and nose. God will have a face like ours. God, fully human in every way. It's impossible to do justice to the mystery and magnitude of Jesus' birth. Yet we can appreciate something of its nature. That's the point, actually. For the God of the universe, the Almighty Creator, has come to us in a body we can see, touch and hear. The unseen ineffable Presence has become tangible, present to us, in our world, on our turf. The second Person of the Trinity has taken on flesh forever. From the moment of his conception Jesus will hold our humanity at the centre of the Eternal Family forever. Let's allow that holy mystery to sink in."*¹⁰

8 Word. Flesh. Dwell.

Take some time to teach further into the stunning nature of the incarnation as described by John in his gospel. Word. Flesh. Dwell.

- + **Key verse:** *"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."* (John 1:14).
- **Word (logos):** Teach how 'logos' to Greeks was the philosophical 'big idea' or ultimate reason behind everything which existed. And 'logos' to Jews represented God's spoken, creative and powerful word which brought everything that was into existence. Explain how John has skilfully pulled both these thoughts together to demonstrate how both have been fulfilled in Jesus.
- **Flesh (sarx)** - Explain how John uses this word to emphatically declare that God has taken on human flesh. The incarnation literally means the 'enfleshment of God'.
- **Dwell (skénoó)** - Explain how this word is a derivative of the same word used for 'tabernacle' or 'tent'. John wants his readers to know, *"the localised 'hot-spot' of God's presence on the earth, fundamental to the plot to date, is no longer to be 'centred' on a tabernacle or a temple but a person: Jesus Christ."*¹¹

9 Angelic flash mob

Explain how God's angels continue to reveal themselves to 'unlikely characters' throughout the birth narrative, declaring the good news which has broken into the word.

- + **Shepherds** (Luke 2:8-20): describe the scene of a multitude of angels appearing before the shepherds and how the substance of their declaration - "*good news of great joy for all people*" - is a reformulation of covenantal language God had promised to Abraham many years before.
- + **Magi from the East** (Matt 2:1-18): a sign that the good news coming into the world is for those outside of Israel.

10 Jesus' birth to age 12

Explain how The Gospels after telling of his birth don't tell us much about the first 30 years of Jesus' life. Briefly highlight the references we do have:

- + Jesus at 8 days old was named and circumcised (Luke 2:21) and then presented at the temple and consecrated to the Lord as Mary and Joseph's firstborn son, in line with Jewish customs (Luke 2:22-24).
 - **Key point:** Point out how Jesus was not going to abandon Israel but fulfil Israel as the true Israelite.
- + Jesus at 12 years old getting left behind at the temple. Touch on the symbolic timing of this 'coming of age' moment in a Jewish boy's life where Jesus would have begun his 'apprenticeship' to his Father.
- + Luke 2:40: A key verse to summarise Jesus' development and formation in these years: "*And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was with him.*"

11 Growing up in Galilee (age 12-30)

- + Encourage people to imagine what Jesus was doing through these years as The Gospel accounts say nothing about this period of Jesus' life.

≡ Key quote

*"What if we are supposed to imagine Jesus simply rejoicing in the sheer delight of his Father, soaking in the 'very good' of creation, unhurried as he revels in the sacredness of his humanity? What if we are supposed to smile at the thought of Jesus laughing heartily with his friends, finding joy in the love of his family, purpose in the work of his hands, gratefulness in the produce of the land and deep contentment in his local community?"*¹²

12 Cousin John, The Baptizer:

- + The Gospel accounts mainly focus on the last three years of Jesus' life. Explain by the time Jesus is 30 years old Joseph had died. Jesus is the oldest of his family and his mum was a widow. Yet Jesus became aware his time as a local carpenter was coming to an end.
- + Emphasise how at this point all four Gospel writers describe something happening in the desert even before Jesus' ministry begins through the life of his crazy cousin John! Focus on how they all understand John as the fulfilment of the ancient prophecies, "the voice of one calling in the wilderness, prepare the way for the Lord"; the new Elijah, the one who had come to turn the "hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents, the forerunner who would set the scene for the main event." (Mark 1:1-8; Matt 3:1-12, Luke 3:1-20, John 1:19-34)
- + Focus on John's core message: 'Repent for the kingdom of God is near' - was a call for Israel to wake up, something new was imminent. Teach how the original meaning of the Greek word for 'repentance' (metanoia) implied an act of turning around, a change of mind, walking in a whole new direction.
- + Highlight John's message of repentance and baptism attracting many followers while at the same time colliding with the Jewish authorities.
 - But emphasise how all of this was a dress rehearsal for the main event which was to come and how John knew this more than anyone. Focus on John the Baptist's radical humility and understanding of his role in relation to Jesus.

≡ Key quote

*"John's deference to the 'main character' of the story is arguably the most incredible example of humility in all of Scripture. John would not be seduced by self-promotion or jealousy even when his own followers thought Jesus was stealing his limelight. He knew the limits of his calling began and ended in the role of 'best man'. He knew he was not the groom. His greatest joy was found in the elevation of his cousin, the One who had become his Lord: 'He must become greater; I must become less.' John will forever be the number one example of how to be number two. His life inspires and informs each of us towards a mature understanding of how we play our part in The God Story. Only as we lay down our own lives (decrease) do we fully embrace our role in the story and experience the deep joy of bringing glory (increase) to the main character."*¹⁴

13 Baptism in beloved (Matt 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-13, Luke 3:21-22)

- + Introduce the scene of Jesus' baptism. See TGS pg 130 for an imaginative reflection of Jesus and John's interaction as John baptises Jesus.

≡ Key quote

*"As Jesus comes up out of the water, divine delight pours forth as the Eternal Family dances over the River Jordan; a stunning expression of their loving union breaking out on the earth. The Spirit descends upon Jesus' drenched head in the form of a dove and the Father speaks the most tender, affectionate and desiring words ever uttered on the earth: 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.' There are so many other words the Father could have said – more instructive words, more pragmatic, more strategic – but he chose these words, words the Father had waited Jesus' whole life to declare over him publicly; I love you and I'm pleased in you."*¹⁵

- + Emphasise how these loving words of the Father were the perfect culmination of what Jesus' 30 years were all about - maturing in sonship. You may also want to reference Isaiah 42:1-9 and how Jesus' baptism echoes this prophecy - the beloved Son is God's servant who will bring forth justice (v.3-4) and be a light to the nations (v.6)

» Application opportunity

Reflect on how Jesus would never forget these words and neither should we.

≡ Key quote

"In one sentence, humanity's two greatest struggles, fear-filled performance and shame-based rejection, are put to rest by the powerful belonging and approval of Abba Father. The eternal longing of his heart is to baptise you in belovedness. Hear his voice echo throughout the caverns of your soul. You are my beloved, I am well pleased in you." ¹⁶

Questions for Reflection or Further Application

Encourage your heart to be still. Sink into God's presence and listen for the whisper of 'You are my beloved' spoken over you. In what parts of your everyday life might Jesus be wanting you to notice his presence?

Three Sacred Themes

The closing page of each chapter in The God Story book includes a summary shaped around three sacred themes which we believe helps knit the overarching storyline together. Feel free to use this as an extra resource to The God Story Sermon Series if you feel this would be helpful to summarise each talk. You will find this for *The Son* on p.134.

End of sermon

- 1 We use this phrase to emphasise the development of Jesus' own understanding of his identity as the beloved of the Father even though he was always and forever the Eternal Son. See also Hebrews 5:8 and Luke 2:52 for an emphasis on how Jesus matured physically, socially and in his understanding of divine favour.
- 2 Alain Emerson and Adam Cox, *The God Story; Encountering unfailing love in the unfolding narrative of scripture*; (London, Form SPCK Group 2024), p.112
- 3 Ibid, p.113
- 4 Ibid, p.114
- 5 Ibid, p.117
- 6 Ibid, p.117
- 7 Ibid, p.119
- 8 Ibid, p.120
- 9 Ibid, p.121
- 10 Ibid, p.122
- 11 Ibid, p.124
- 12 Ibid, p.127-8
- 13 Ibid, p.129
- 14 Ibid, p.129-130
- 15 Ibid, p.131
- 16 Ibid, p.133

*All Bible passages quoted are taken from NIV unless stated.