

# Carol service

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[ 0 : 00 ] How excited do you get about royal babies?

Now, I imagine even in our gathering this evening, there will be a wide spectrum of reactions to the news of a royal arrival, perhaps on one end of the spectrum, glorious indifference, and at the other end of the spectrum, supercharged excitement.

I think the classic response at the less than interested end of the spectrum has got to be Simon McCoy, the BBC newsreader. Now, you may remember the occasion.

This was a year or so ago, and he was handed, he was reading the news, and he was handed a breaking news item, namely that the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge were expecting their third child in April.

So, this was towards the end of last year that the breaking news item emerged, and he was charged with passing on this important news.

[ 1 : 10 ] And as I say, if you remember the occasion, because it was repeated a few times, Mr. McCoy, having given the news item, then added his sarcastic little commentary, and he said something along these lines, not sure how much this is news.

Oh, well, clear your diaries and get the time booked off. That's what I'm doing. Well, for any Republicans amongst us, then you must think he's a legend.

Well, at Christmas, we celebrate another royal arrival, the birth of King Jesus. The King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

His arrival was met by a significant response in the skies above Bethlehem, with a heavenly choir belting out, glory to God in the highest.

But somewhat less interest in the land of his birth, other than some very hostile interest from Herod, as we have read about in the account there in Matthew's Gospel.

[ 2 : 18 ] When a baby is born, I think we can safely say almost when any baby is born, though that's maybe sadly not true, but when most babies are born, there's a level of interest, even feverish interest, among family and friends at the birth of a child.

And I'm sure that was also true with the birth of Jesus. And that interest usually translates into any number of questions that are posed about the new arrival.

You know the scenario you hear about a baby being born, and immediately there's questions about the baby that people want answers to. And I wonder what questions the family and friends of Joseph and Mary might have had about the newborn baby.

Or what about Elizabeth? You remember Elizabeth part in the Christmas story. Elizabeth was a relative of Mary's who had given birth to John the Baptist a few weeks or months before, and we're told in the Bible that she lived in the hill country of Judea with her husband Zechariah.

Now that wouldn't have been, although we don't know the exact location, it wouldn't have been that far from Bethlehem. It was in the same part of the country, but far enough for Elizabeth to be in the dark concerning the events surrounding the birth of Jesus, certainly the immediate events.

[ 3 : 43 ] And so when we speculate on Elizabeth's interest in the newborn baby, maybe indulge me with the possibility that Elizabeth could have texted Mary with questions about the birth of her firstborn son.

And what we'll try and do is listen to the questions that she could have posed and try and answer her questions. And we'll answer the questions with Mary's help from what we know of the account, with the help of Joseph on occasion, and indeed with the help of others in the biblical record.

So a number of questions about the new baby that we want to try and find answers to or give answers to this evening. Well, let's imagine the first question that Elizabeth could have posed to Mary when she heard that the baby had been born.

Given that she wouldn't have been sure of all the circumstances surrounding the birth, she may well have asked, well, when was he born? Your baby, when was the baby born?

Now, in answering that question, we can turn to what we might think an unlikely source. Away from the record of the actual birth, the beginning of the Gospels, we turn to the Apostle Paul and listen to what he says about the timing of the birth of Jesus.

[ 5 : 03 ] The when, if you wish. When Paul writes to the Christians in Galatia, we read in chapter 4 and in verse 4 what he says concerning the timing of the birth of Jesus.

And he says this, But when the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman. When the time had fully come.

And the language that He employs is language that points to the manner in which Jesus was born into the world at precisely the moment that God had determined, at precisely the appointed time. Indeed, all of history had revolved around the prospect of this moment taking place. And it took place at the appointed time, when the time had fully come.

And not only does He tell us that that is when Jesus arrived, He, of course, tells us more in the words of that verse. When the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman.

[ 6 : 09 ] And in a few simple words we have presented to us the wonder of the two natures of Jesus, God's Son, and yet born of a woman. In the words of the Nicene Creed, very God of very God.

And yet, truly and fully human. When was the baby born? Well, when the time had fully come. Well, let's imagine another question that could have been posed by Elizabeth as she wants to know everything about the baby that had been born.

She might have asked the question, Well, where was He born? Where did you end up for the birth? And as we want to answer that question, the angels who appeared to the shepherds can help us with this one.

A few of the characters in the story could help us, but let's turn to what the angel says who appeared to the shepherds. As we find that part of the story recorded in Luke's Gospel in the second chapter, what did the angel say?

Well, the angel said this, Today, in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you. In Bethlehem, the town of David was born David's greater son.

[ 7 : 24 ] How fitting that there should be the birth of Jesus. When was he born? Where was he born? I wonder if Elizabeth is anything like folks nowadays.

She would have wanted to ask, How much did the baby weigh? And maybe how tall was the baby? Now, I've never really got my head around this obsession with how much babies weigh.

And nor do I understand why it's generally considered the bigger the better. But that seems to be the case. Maybe I'm wrong in that, but that's certainly my impression. Well, I'm sorry, I can't help you with that one.

I think some of you were thinking, Oh, how is he going to answer that question? Well, I don't know. We don't know. We don't know how much the baby weighed. We don't know how tall the baby was. So we'll just have to leave that one as an unknown question that cannot be answered.

But let's move on to another question that we can give an answer to, and a much more significant question that Elizabeth or any other interested parties would naturally oppose to a mother who had just given birth.

[ 8 : 33 ] What's his name? This baby that's been born, what is the baby's name? Now, in Matthew's Gospel, we're told that when the baby was born, Joseph gave him the name Jesus.

We just read that a few moments ago. The father, Joseph, gave him the name Jesus. Now, maybe Elizabeth had a follow-up question when she discovered that the name that had been given to the baby was Jesus.

Why Jesus? We sometimes ask that question. Somebody says, Well, this is the name of the baby. And there's maybe that curiosity. Well, why did you choose that name? Maybe it's a family member, or maybe just a favorite name of the parents, some significance perhaps attached to the name. And that would be a reasonable follow-up question. Why Jesus? And at that point, Joseph could well have jumped in to answer that question and explain how an angel of the Lord had come to Joseph and had given him these instructions.

You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins. And so this name was given to the newborn baby because instructions had arrived from heaven through the

mouthpiece of the angel of the Lord.

[ 9 : 55 ] You are to give him the name Jesus. The Hebrew name Yeshua, or in the English or Anglified form Jesus, means Savior, or he saves.

We sometimes ask the question, What's in a name? Well, in this case, just about everything is in the name. Jesus was sent by his Father on a saving mission to save sinners, to save you and me from our sin.

And so even in his name, his mission is eloquently identified. Now, for that saving mission that he had been sent to perform, Jesus would not only have to be born, but he would have to grow up and live a life of perfect obedience before, also in the fullness of time, offering up his perfect life as a suitable and sufficient sacrifice for sin.

Not for his own sin, for he had none, but for the sin of others, for our sin. Now, I wonder if Elizabeth, concerned that Mary was a little isolated there in Bethlehem, might have asked one more question. Let's just think of one more question that she could have posed as she tries to satisfy her understandable and healthy curiosity about all things concerning the birth of the baby. Maybe one other question she could have posed would have been this, Have you had any visitors?

[ 11 : 26 ] She knew that the family had had to travel from where they were living ordinarily, and so she might have been concerned on that front. And, of course, Mary could answer that question about those who had come to visit.

And maybe she would have responded, Well, not many visitors, but a few surprising ones. On the very day of the birth, a few shepherds appeared. And then, a few weeks later, we had some very important visitors from far, far away from the east, who brought expensive gifts.

But the most remarkable part about these visitors is that they bowed down and worshipped Jesus. They bowed down and worshipped the newborn baby.

Now, that is such an integral part of the Christmas story and the account that we're so familiar with. The very familiarity that we have with it can sometimes blind us to how remarkable it is.

Have you ever pondered on how bizarre and, quite frankly, ridiculous it must have appeared for grown men to bow down, prosper, and worship a baby?

[ 12 : 40 ] Certainly, any outside observer who had little notion of what was going on would have found that a quite remarkable and strange, maybe even disturbing scene.

And yet, the startling reality is that the baby was worthy of worship. He was and is a very God of very God. And with this, we can draw the threads of these questions and answers together into a close.

The only fitting response to the one born in Bethlehem is that of worship. Will you trust in Him as your Savior and bow down before Him as your God?

To return to where we began, I don't know how excited you get about royal babies, but I would urge you to get excited about this royal baby, the King of kings and Lord of lords, the only and sufficient Savior of sinners.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank You for Your love for us, that You so loved the world that You sent Your only Son. And we thank You that when the time had fully come, You sent Your Son, born of a woman, born under law, to rescue those of us who found ourselves under the law.

[ 14 : 09 ] Heavenly Father, we do thank You then for the coming of Jesus. We thank You for the name that identifies His saving mission on our behalf. And we pray that we would know what it is with the wise men of old to bow down before Him in worship, that our lives would be lives that are dedicated to the praise and worship of the eternal Son of God.

And we pray these things in His name. Amen.