



The **STORY** of **REDEMPTION**

God Reaching Out to Restore **COMMUNITY**
through the cross of Jesus Christ

**WHAT IF GOD WERE
ONE OF US?**

Part 4: Jesus' Birth, Life, and Ministry

Note: For instructions on how to best use and lead this study, please go to www.StoryofRedemption.com.

- Download free .pdfs of each lesson!
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The STORY of Redemption

Jesus' Birth, Life, & Ministry PART 4: WHAT IF GOD WERE ONE OF US?

*If God had a name, what would it be
And would you call it to His face, If you were faced
with Him in all His glory
What would you ask if you had just one question
Yeah, yeah, God is great, Yeah, yeah, God is good
What if God was one of us, Just a slob like one of us*

Singer Joan Osborne raises an interesting question: *What if God were one of us? What would he look like? Would he be short or tall, thick or thin? What would his name be--Michael? Deion? While there are many questions about God, God has not left us to wonder who he is. We can learn what God is like by looking at Jesus.*



1. JESUS' BIRTH.

Matthew, the first book of the New Testament, begins by tracing Jesus' human ancestry back to Abraham. This is followed by an account of Jesus' birth, a story that shows how God chose to reveal himself to us.

¹⁸ This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

²⁰ But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵ But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus (Mt. 1:18-25).

Despite all of the typical Christmas

There is 1 God Who Is Revealed in 3 "Persons"

- God the Father
- God the Son
- God the Holy Spirit

scenes depicting Jesus' birth, the most important part of the story is often missed: God became one of us. Note this:

- **Jesus is conceived through God's Holy Spirit**—There is one God made up of three persons--the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit--a concept called the "Trinity." Jesus' miraculous "parentage" from the Holy Spirit points to his divine nature.
- **Jesus means "Savior"**—Who is the only one who can save us from our sins? Who can restore the community between God and humanity that was lost in the Garden? Only God himself could be qualified to be our Savior.
- **Jesus' other name is "Immanuel"**—The most significant element of Jesus' birth is summed up in this name, which means "God with us." In Jesus, God really is with us.



Jesus is the God who becomes human. He is Emmanuel--"God with us."

Amazingly, God came down from heaven, took human form, and walked among us. If we want to know who God is, we can see him most clearly in Jesus.

After Jesus was born, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem looking for Jesus, asking, ² "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him" (Mt. 2:2).

Indeed, Jesus is a king and is worthy of "worship," but his kingdom is unlike any other. His kingdom is a spiritual kingdom, utterly unlike the kingdoms of this world. Unfortunately, King Herod, the king of the Jews, did not understand this. He felt threatened by Jesus, and he tried to have Jesus killed. Herod ordered the deaths of all boys in Bethlehem under age two (Mt. 2:16).

But God warned Joseph of Herod's plot in a dream, and Jesus, Joseph, and Mary escaped by fleeing to Egypt for a time. When King Herod died, they returned and settled in Nazareth.

What do you think of a God who becomes human? Why would he do this?

2. JOHN THE BAPTIST & THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.

The arrival of Jesus into the world signaled that a new era was arriving. This new era is dramatic in breaking of the kingdom of God, also referred to in Matthew as the kingdom of heaven, or literally, the kingdom of (the) heaven(s). The kingdom of heaven is all around us, in the heavens, which in Jewish thought would include the air (1st heaven), the celestial heaven (2nd heaven), and the throne of God (3rd heaven). This kingdom is the unseen spiritual world, which surrounds us, in which God's will is done. Thus, **the kingdom of God is God's rule or reign over us and all of creation** - a spiritual kingdom resulting in "righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:16)

Had God been ruling the world prior to Jesus' arrival? Yes, he had. And yet, his rule had not always been easy to see, particularly to the Jewish people.

They had been a conquered people for hundreds of years, being passed from empire to empire. During Jesus' time the Jews were ruled by the Romans, and they looked forward to an end to this rule. They wanted an earthly king (Messiah) to drive out the Romans and establish an earthly kingdom of God.

God had in mind a much different kingdom—a spiritual kingdom that would rule in the hearts of humanity. Jesus ushered in the kingdom of God in a more full and visible way through his life of submission (which showed God ruled his life), his ministries of healing (which demonstrated God's power and rule over creation), and his sending of the Spirit.

To prepare the people for Jesus and this kingdom, God sent John the Baptist.

*¹ In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea ² and saying, "**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.**" ³ This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:*

*"A voice of one calling in the wilderness,
'Prepare the way for the Lord, make
straight paths for him.'"*

⁴ John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵ People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. ⁶ Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River (Mt. 3:1-6).



John the Baptist called the people to repent--change their hearts and minds--to be a part of the kingdom.

John the Baptist, a prophet, tells the people that God's kingdom is near or at hand. To be a part of this kingdom, they needed to:

1. **Repent**—To "repent" literally means to turn around. John calls the people to change their hearts and minds and open themselves up to a new reality, that the kingdom of God is present all around them. This is a call to change our thinking and actions in light of this new reality, and to set aside our individual kingdoms (our will) for God's kingdom (his will).
2. **Confess their sins**—To "confess" sins means to say or admit that we have done wrong in our lives. This sin usually comes from pursuing our own kingdoms. Until we do this, we cannot be a part of God's kingdom.
3. **Be baptized**—To be baptized literally means to be immersed. While the purpose of John's baptism is different in some ways from Christian baptism, it prepared the people for what would come.

Many of the people listen to John's message and are baptized. The Pharisees and Sadducees, however, two of the Jewish religious groups, do not respond or set aside *their* kingdoms. Some refuse to be baptized, and others are apparently insincere in their response. John has tough words for these leaders:

⁷ "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? ⁸ Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. ⁹ And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. ¹⁰ The ax is already at the

root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire” (Mt. 3:7-10).

While we have seen that God is a God of grace, he also cannot let sin go forever unchecked. There is punishment for us if we do not change our lives, and nothing can save us if we ultimately refuse to change. The Pharisees and Sadducees thought that they would escape this punishment because they were “Abraham’s children.” However, John tells them that God will only fully bless those who are Abraham’s *spiritual* descendants—those who, like Abraham, have faith in God and do what he says.

In addition, John tells us that our repentance must show “fruit”—that is, we must not just talk about changing our lives. These changes must be real and visible. Those who do not repent will be “thrown into the fire.” John says,

11 “I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (Mt. 3:11-12).

Who was this “more powerful” person who would come after John? It was Jesus, who would baptize with the “Holy Spirit and with fire.”

- **With the Holy Spirit**—When a person is baptized into Christ, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell inside of him. According to Old Testament prophecy, when the Messiah came he would have the Spirit. Jesus fulfills this prophecy.
- **With fire**—In the context, this seems to refer to the fire of punishment.

John is telling the people they have a choice. When Jesus comes, they can either follow him, submit to God’s kingdom reign, be baptized, and have God’s Holy Spirit live inside them. Or they can refuse to repent, and then they will face the fire of punishment. Each of us faces that same choice today.

What problems can result in our lives and relationships when we seek to follow our own kingdoms (our own will and desires) rather than God’s kingdom/will? What thoughts and actions do we need to repent of/change?

3. JESUS’ BAPTISM - AN EXAMPLE FOR OUR LIVES.

Jesus himself would go to John to be baptized. Though he had no sins to repent of, he did need to submit himself to God and his kingdom rule and take up his role as the suffering servant and our Savior. This would “fulfill all righteousness” (see Isaiah 53). Note what happened at Jesus’ baptism:

16 At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. 17 And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased” (Mt. 3:16b-17).



John’s baptism was for repentance & forgiveness of sins. Christian Baptism also includes the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus was baptized, the Spirit came upon him. He would need the Spirit to empower him in his ministry and help him fulfill his role as a suffering servant. We need the power of the Spirit too.

What does Jesus' willingness to submit his will to the Father's and be baptized teach us?

4. JESUS' TEMPTATIONS AND THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES.

After his baptism,

¹ Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread" (Mt. 4:1-3; see also 4:4-11).

These temptations--to turn stones into bread, to throw himself down from the temple and force God to save him, and to worship Satan in exchange for the kingdoms of the world--were all designed to entice Jesus to put his own will above the Father's will and use his power for himself. He passed this test!



Because he is human, Jesus understands when we are tempted.

In fact, Jesus faced every type of temptation that we will ever have. His ministry put him in contact with prostitutes, ruthless rulers, frustrating people, and corrupt politicians. Though Jesus never sinned, he understands when we do.

Still, some have wondered if Jesus could really have been tempted, since he is God. Paul, an apostle and one of the writers of the New Testament, would write to a group of Christians in the city of Philippi, reminding them how they should act. In this we learn about Jesus' nature.

⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; ⁷ rather, he made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness (Phil. 2:5-8).

When Jesus was in heaven, he did not face temptation. But Jesus did not consider being equal with God something to "be grasped" or held on to. He gave up his power, and he became human. **He had to overcome temptation in the same way that each of us must: through the direct working of the Holy Spirit and through the shaping of our heart/will through spiritual disciplines** such as prayer, fasting, silence and solitude, Bible study, Scripture memorization and meditation, worship, service, and more. Truly he was one of us.

What Spiritual disciplines do you want to grow in?

In the next part of the story, we will look at what it means to be a disciple (follower) of Christ as the *Story of Redemption* continues.



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QUESTIONS:

Matching. Match the following names of Jesus with their meaning or significance. One answer will be used more than once.

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| 1. _____ Son of God | a. Means "God with us" |
| 2. _____ Jesus | b. Means "Anointed One" |
| 3. _____ Immanuel | c. Shows that Jesus submits to the Father |
| 4. _____ Christ | d. Means "Savior" |
| 5. _____ Messiah | |

Multiple Choice.

6. _____ The Kingdom of God is all of the following EXCEPT _____:
- The rule or reign of God.
 - An earthly kingdom.
 - Made more visible in the life and ministry of Jesus.
 - Something that requires repentance in order to become a part of it.

True/False

- _____ John's baptism included the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.
- _____ Jesus received the Holy Spirit at his baptism.
- _____ Though God is made up of three persons, he is still one God.
- _____ To repent literally means "to say I'm sorry."

What Spiritual discipline(s) will you start practicing? _____

Discovery Bible Study - Make three columns on a piece of paper In column 1, write out the following verse. In column 2, write the verse in your own words. In column 3, write out how you will apply/obey this verse this week. Come to the next study prepared to share this.

"In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe (Hebrews 1:1-2).

For Further Study: What do you learn about Jesus from these passages?

John 1:29-42 _____

Romans 1:1-4 _____

Acts 10:36-38 _____

Hebrews 4:14-16 _____

To receive answers to the above questions, learn more about Discovery Bible Study, or receive the next part of the Story, go to www.StoryofRedemption.com or see your study leader.