

The First Day of Christmas: Twin Nativities

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[0 : 00] Merry Christmas! Over the course of this Christmas tide I'd like to give a series of reflections upon the narratives of the Gospels concerning the Nativity and the events succeeding that, relating both to Christmas and to the season of Epiphany that follows.

What I'd like to do is to show that within these stories there are a number of symmetries and echoes that relate it to other stories that we find elsewhere in the Old Testament and also further on within the New.

As we look at these symmetries I think we'll see something more of the beauty of the events of the First Nativity and the significance of what these teach us about God's work more generally.

So to start us off for Christmas Day I thought I'd think about the way in which there is a symmetry between the two nativities of the Gospel. And perhaps one detail to reflect upon here is the burial of Christ in relation to the sign of his body given to the shepherds.

So in the first sign his body is wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger. A manger, a feeding trough that would quite likely have been a stone feeding trough that would have been in some ways most similar to a casket or a tomb, a coffin in which a body could be lain.

[1 : 21] And later on in the Gospel we see Christ's body is wrapped in linen garments and laid in a tomb. Now it's not often that you see a body wrapped in garments and laid somewhere.

And so the fact that we find two such events within the same Gospel is significant. It's worth reflecting upon. It's a clue that might help us to recognise some further connections. And these connections I think are seen in the way that Christ's death and resurrection are presented as events of birth pangs and new birth.

This is something that's particularly seen in the Gospel of John where the woman whose hour has come brings a new child into the world and the sorrow and the pain and the pangs are replaced by joy.

But it's beyond that it's also seen in little details that relate these two events together. So for instance in the first nativity there is a Mary and there is a Joseph.

At the end the second nativity the death and resurrection of Christ there are Marys and there is a Joseph. Joseph of Arimathea. There is the laying of the body in a tomb in which no body had previously been lain.

[2 : 37] And this I think connects with the virgin's womb. Now the connection in Scripture between the womb and the tomb is an important one. We see this within biblical poetry.

Naked I came from my mother's womb. Naked I will return there. Or knit together in the lowest parts of the earth in Psalm 139. Within these texts we see that the earth and the womb are very closely related.

And Christ opens up the womb and he opens up the tomb. And these are two birth events that are connected together. Furthermore we see the signs that are given. And we'll get into this in a further event.

The connection between the shepherds of the beginning of the Gospel story in Luke. And then at the end the shepherds who are the disciples and the apostles who will go out and spread that message.

So putting these details together what we see are the two key events of Jesus' life are presented as birth. In birth categories.

[3 : 41] The incarnation and the death and the resurrection are both forms of birth. There's a birth and then there's a rebirth from the dead. Resurrection is characterised as a form of birth.

More generally in scripture we also see key stages of God's work beginning in events of childbirth. Whether that's Amram and Jochebed and the Hebrew midwives.

Or whether it's someone like Hannah in the story of 1 Samuel. The story of the kingdom begins with a woman in birth. The story of the exodus begins with women in birth.

And then the story of the Gospel likewise. With Elizabeth and with Mary. And this birth event is also connected to the event at the end. Where once again women come into the focus.

Whereas the Gospel narrative is mostly a story of Jesus and his male disciples. At these key junctures women come into the centre of the frame.

[4 : 40] And it's not an accident they do so. Nor is it accidental that the birth themes are prominent in both places. We should see this connection. Hear these echoes. And it will help us to understand what's going on a bit more.

It will help us to see some of the connections between the beginning of the Gospel. And the beginning of the great phases of God's history in the Old Testament. And it will also help us to see the symmetry in Christ's own life.

The symmetry between his first birth and then his second birth. His rebirth from the grave. And putting these things together. I think we'll be able to understand a lot more of what's going on.

And it will help us to see something also of the beauty of what God has purposed and done in his son. Happy Christmas. And I hope you have a wonderful day with your families.

Thank you very much for listening. Thank you for everyone who has supported these videos over the last year. It has been a pleasure to make these. And it's a blessing to be able to share these things with you.

[5 : 40] I trust that you have a wonderful season. And that the rest of this year is a blessing to you. And 2019 will bring many joys with it.

Lord willing, I'll be back again tomorrow with some further thoughts. And I hope that you'll join me on this exploration of these texts. There's so much to be explored here. And it's very exciting. God bless. God bless.