



## Sermon Transcript December 3, 2017

### Advent 2017 Birth Announcements Hope Restored! Hope Secured! Genesis 4:25-26; 21:1-7

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on December 3, 2017 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio version of this sermon may be found on the church website at [www.wethefc.com](http://www.wethefc.com).

## Sermon Text

### Genesis 4:25-26

<sup>25</sup> And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said, "God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him."

<sup>26</sup> To Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. At that time people began to call upon the name of the Lord.

### Genesis 21:1-7

<sup>1</sup> The Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did to Sarah as he had promised.

<sup>2</sup> And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him. <sup>3</sup> Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac. <sup>4</sup> And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. <sup>5</sup> Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. <sup>6</sup> And Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me." <sup>7</sup> And she said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."

## Introduction

Birth Announcements are special and joyful announcements. It's a boy! It's a girl! I saw a birth announcement this week from Brian and Amy O'Leary, who used to be part of our church family before moving to New Hampshire. This joyful announcement contained a picture of the baby and all the vital information: date of birth along with the time of birth down to the minute; 11:10 pm! And of course the weight and height were duly noted. Predictably, this announcement made on social media was flooded with joyful responses of congratulations. And for this little girl born to the O'Leary's, little Emery Grace, she will be celebrating this special day every year for the rest of her life. Birth Announcements are special and joyful announcements.

Surely there never was a birth announcement like the announcement of the birth we celebrate this Advent Season. When we gather here on December 24, we will read the story of the birth of Jesus. It is in this story that we hear the birth announcement the angels made to a group of shepherds the night Jesus was born. Luke tells us that the glory of the Lord lit up the night sky and an angel made the most famous of birth announcements, "*Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*"

The reason this birth announcement is the "granddaddy" of all birth announcements is because of who this child happens to be. Born on "*this day in the city of David*" is the "*Savior.*" The title "*Savior*" implies that we need to be delivered. It is a title that implies we need to be saved from whatever it is that plagues the human race. But it is also a title that tells us that our hope rests in a person, this one whose birth is announced to the shepherds. Tim Keller says of Christianity that "yes, we believe that history is not random and the world is not meaningless, and that there is a purpose and order, behind it all. Yes, too, if you align yourself with that order, you will live well." We all desire "the good life." We all desire to flourish in this life. But then he says, "However, it is not something you can find through philosophical reasoning, because it is not an 'it' at all; it is a *him*. Jesus Christ is the Creator God, come in the flesh."<sup>1</sup> All of our hope is pinned on this one whose birth we celebrate this month, "*a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*"

The phrase that has been running through my mind this week is the phrase "*naked and ashamed.*" This is the phrase that is used to describe how Adam and Eve felt after they turned away from God and sought their own autonomy. D. A. Carson reminds us that the sin of Adam and Eve was not "just breaking a rule" by eating forbidden fruit. He

says, “What is at stake here is something deeper, bigger, sadder, uglier, more heinous. It is a revolution. It makes me god and thus de-gods God.”<sup>2</sup> They wanted to shake themselves free from God. And so, when God came to them, they covered themselves. They hid themselves. They pointed the finger of blame towards the other. As a result, life is filled with pain and it ends in death. Carson says, “this should not surprise us. If God is the Creator and gives life, then if you detach yourself from this God, if you defy this God, what is there but death.”<sup>3</sup> And so they were “*naked and ashamed.*”

As the story in Genesis progresses, things got so bad in this broken world that God started all over again. He cleansed the whole creation with a flood and preserved one man and his family. It says of Noah in Genesis 6:9, “*Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God.*” It is such a hopeful statement. You have to contrast that to God’s assessment of what he saw at that time. In Genesis 6:5, “*The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of his heart was only evil continually.*” So God starts over with this righteous man. But as the story progresses, we end up in the same place. He too is found in a garden, a vineyard. He gets drunk and is found naked in his tent. His one son does something shameful and we are back where we started . . . *naked and ashamed.*”

As I wrote this paragraph to my sermon, I was only a few hours removed from hearing about Matt Lauer. I was deeply saddened for everyone connected to this story, including Matt Lauer. There are two things that are striking to me about the seemingly endless revelations about men abusing their power in high places. First of all, there is a legitimate moral outcry against the way women have been violated by powerful men. But this moral outcry conveys that there is a moral order to the world. There is a right and a wrong and it is not hard to spot. The novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky, once said, “Without God and the future life . . . everything is permitted, one can do anything.”<sup>4</sup> This is not to say that a secularist, who looks within himself to find what is right and wrong can’t live a good moral life. But what he can’t do is obligate someone else to his own moral standard. Without God, there is no moral obligation. Julian Baggini is an atheist and while he argues that an atheist can live a good moral life, and he can be as moral as a good Christian, he writes, “however, for the religious, at least there is some bedrock belief that gives reason to believe that morality is real.”<sup>5</sup> If I can point out a silver lining in all of these recent allegations it would be that the moral outcry speaks to the reality of a moral order. There is a right and there is wrong. This points to God.

But the second thing I notice is the profound sadness over someone who is looked up to, who like Noah, is left “*naked and ashamed.*” In spite of how “good” these people are

perceived to be, and I have every reason to believe that in general, some of these men are good people, but, like you and me, they are broken and fallen people. Understandably, once these ugly truths come to light, those exposed speak of being embarrassed and ashamed. You can hear the anguish of their colleagues as they try to grapple with what this all means. They feel betrayed, sad, confused, angry and uncertain. They are left asking of someone they thought they knew, “Who is this person?” Daniel Migliore captures the dilemma well when he writes, “We human beings are mysterious to ourselves. We are rational and irrational, civilized and savage, capable of deep friendship and murderous hostility, free and in bondage, the pinnacle of creation and its greatest danger.”<sup>6</sup> It leaves us asking, is there anyone we can trust? Is there anyone we can put our hope in and look up to and trust? *“I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”*

Have you ever noticed how many special birth announcements are made throughout the story-line of the Bible? They come at critical points in the story of the Bible and they help us understand the birth announcement we celebrate this Advent Season. In other words, they all point us to Jesus. This Advent Season, we are going to look at some of these birth announcements. This morning we are going to look at the birth of Seth and Isaac and consider how Jesus restores and secures hope for us in this broken world. Next week we will look at the births of Samuel and Solomon and consider how God raises up someone who is able to deliver us from our sin and death. Then we will look at the prophets and the birth of John the Baptist who prepared us for the coming Messiah. And then finally, we will come on Christmas Eve and take a look at the birth of Jesus and the new birth he brings to those who believe.

But as we get started, here is one thing I want you to know about each of these birth announcements, including the birth of Jesus. These announcements are made in the context of trouble and brokenness, where people are found *naked and ashamed*. If we are honest with ourselves, that is where all of us are this morning. Be careful at pointing the finger so vigorously at these reports that seem to be part of our daily routine. Granted, they need to come to light and I am glad they are coming to light. At the same time, “Let him who is without sin to be the first to cast a stone.” And yet, into the *naked and shame* of your life, *is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord*. Jesus has come to clothe your nakedness and remove your shame and reconcile you to God so that you can in turn be free to love the broken and hurting people around you with the love God has given to you in Christ. Through these birth announcements, I want you to see the extent God goes to cover your shame and give you a new life.

## Seth: Hope Restored

The first birth announcement we want to consider this Advent Season is the announcement of the birth of Seth. We read of this announcement in Genesis 4:25. *“And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth.”* If you remove this announcement from its context and have it stand alone, it looks like any other birth announcement. If the verse stands alone, all it says to us is that “it’s a boy!” and his name is Seth. But when you consider this birth announcement in its context, you discover something about God. It is a birth announcement that shows us how God restores hope for a broken family and a broken world. It is a birth announcement that assures us that God has not forgotten his promise.

Genesis 4 begins and ends with a birth announcement. We already saw that the chapter ends with the announcement of the birth of Seth. But the chapter begins with the birth announcement of Adam and Eve’s first son, Cain. We read, *“Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, ‘I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD.’”* If you know anything about Genesis 3, you know that the birth of Cain was an act of God’s grace. The question coming out of Genesis 3 is, “What is God going to do with these humans who have ‘de-god-ed’ God?” Clearly, Genesis 3 indicates that there are severe consequences to our rejection of God, who is life itself. There is now strife and shame between the man and the woman. Life is a painful struggle. God has now become distant to man. And it all ends in death, *“for you are dust, and to dust you will return.”* And so Genesis 3 ends with this somber picture of Adam and Eve being removed from the presence of God.

But then as we come to the “dawn of Genesis 4” we see hope. *“Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, ‘I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD.’”* D. A. Carson wrote a book that tells the unfolding story of the Bible and the book is called *“The God Who Is There.”* The title for the chapter that walks through Genesis 3 is a great title: “The God Who Does Not Wipe Out Rebels.”<sup>7</sup> With the birth of Cain, we begin to see a glimmer of hope. With the birth of new life, we see that God is not going to abandon this broken world. He is going to redeem it and reconcile it to Himself and save it.

There is a great verse in Genesis 3 that helps us understand the significance of the birth announcements of Cain and Seth. It is Genesis 3:15 and the verse has a fancy title: *protevangelium*. Do you know what that word means? The prefix *proto* means “first.” The word *evangelium* refers to “the good news.” It is the word for “gospel.” In other

words, this is the first mention in the Bible of the gospel, the good news of how God promises to save us from our *nakedness and shame*. It is a promise made in the context of pronouncing judgment. Here, God is speaking to the “serpent” who represents Satan, the Tempter. Having tempted Adam and Eve to not trust God and to declare autonomy from God, God turns to Satan and says, “*I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel.*” In this promise, this *protevangelium*, we have the good news that “the offspring of the woman” will someday deliver a final blow to Satan. And you get a little hint here of how this offspring will deliver that final blow. It is a picture of a wounded victor.

My favorite scene in Mel Gibson’s movie *The Passion of the Christ* is when Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane, agonizing over the cross that awaits him. He is praying that God remove this cup from him. While he is praying, you can see the snake slithering towards him, the Tempter has come once again to divert Jesus from making atonement for our sin. And in a final act of resolve, you see Jesus crush the head of the serpent with his foot and he marches to the cross where he dies and atones for our sin. Three days later, when he rises from the dead, he demonstrates that indeed, “it is finished!” Through the blood of the lamb, the cross of Jesus, God restores this broken world. That is what this first promise in Genesis 3 points us to.

So when Adam and Eve give birth to Cain, it is a symbol that God is keeping his promise. Out of God’s grace, new life has been given. But once again, it seems that those hopes are easily dashed. You don’t get very far into Genesis 4 and you discover that out of jealousy over his brother, Cain murders Abel. And not only is this family consumed by the *nakedness and shame* of this broken world but Cain goes on to build a city where violence and oppression reign. From this comes a man by the name of Lamech, who is the first to acquire several wives and he too murders someone and he celebrates it with song. Allen Ross says that this song is a “taunt song . . . a demonstration of strength for the benefit of the women.”<sup>8</sup> Through this story, we discover that the sin of murder is here to stay and though an offspring has come from the woman, we now have a broken family and a broken world. Is there any hope?

It is here where we come to the end of Genesis 4 and we read of the birth of Seth, “*And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said, ‘God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him.’*” When Eve says, “*God has appointed for me another offspring,*” she is alluding back to the promise that God made in Genesis 3:15 that the “offspring of the woman” will deliver a final

crushing blow to the enemy of God. And then Genesis 4 closes with a wonderful statement, *“To Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. At that time people began to call upon the name of the Lord.”* This began a long line of people of faith who rested in the promise of God. It is interesting to read the genealogy of Jesus in Luke 3 and it ends by saying of Jesus, *“the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.”* With the birth announcement of Seth, we are reminded that God keeps his promise to restore this broken world. In the birth of Seth, we see that hope is restored. As people of faith, our hope is found in the promise of God. And so with faith, we wait.

### **Isaac: Hope Secured**

This brings us to a second birth announcement, the birth of Isaac. We read of his birth in Genesis 21:1-3, *“The Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did to Sarah as he had promised. And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him. Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac.”* Like with the birth of Seth, you can’t read this birth announcement without considering what comes before this passage and what comes after this passage. But with Isaac, what we discover is not only does God make promise, but God is the one who sees it through. He secures our hope. He does for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

If you know the story of Abraham, this birth announcement was a long time coming. In Genesis 12 we hear God making promise to bless Abraham, not just with a son, but with many descendants. This nation, which became Israel, would be the vehicle through which God redeems this broken world and brings blessing to the nations of the world. There was only one problem. For the longest time, Abraham and Sarah did not have a son. There are only ten chapters between Genesis 12, when the promise was made, and Genesis 21, when Isaac was finally born. But those ten chapters spanned twenty-five long years. At the age of 75, Abram followed God and left everything. Here he is, standing on the door of turning 100 years old, and his wife was well beyond the years of bearing children; and yet we read in Genesis 21, *“And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him.”*

Through those twenty-five years of waiting, there were times when Abraham doubted God’s promise. He even tried to come up with alternate means by which God could fulfill his promise. He had a son with his wife’s servant, Hagar. He even suggested that one of his servants could be the one through whom God kept his promise. But not so.



In Genesis 15, Abraham was told to do something that would seem rather bizarre to our modern ears, but he knew exactly what it meant. In the ancient world, when a covenant between powerful parties were made they would sacrifice animals, tear them apart and line them up side by side, with a pathway between them. And then the parties who were entering into this agreement would pass between these animal parts as if to say, “may it be done unto us what has been done to these animals if we do not keep our end of the agreement.” In Genesis 15, Abraham is instructed to take a heifer and a goat and a ram and align their parts in such a manner. But in Genesis 15:17, we discover something rather telling. It says, “*When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces.*” These images point to the zeal of God and his unapproachable holiness. But only God passes between these animals, which is to suggest that God is binding himself to accomplish what he promised. He would be zealous to fulfill his promise to Abraham. And so we read, “*Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him.*”

But after Isaac was born, in the very next chapter of Genesis, Genesis 22, the unthinkable happens. God comes to Abraham and says, “*Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering.*” Now this seems unconscionable to us, that God would call upon Abraham to do such a thing. This is especially troubling when we know that this very kind of thing was condemned by God later in Scripture. At the same time, how could God require this of Abraham when Isaac was the son of promise? But that is the point. This was a test of Abraham’s faith. When he went to go up to the mountain, in certain terms, he told his servant that he and the boy would be back. The book of Hebrews tells us that Abraham believed that God would raise him from the dead because he is the son of promise.

But there was a bigger point God was making through offering Isaac as a sacrifice. With confidence, when his son, Isaac, asked him “*where is the lamb for a burnt offering?*”, Abraham responded, “*God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.*” And indeed he did. As Abraham raised his arm to carry out his instructions, God called out, “*Abraham, Abraham . . . Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing that you have not withheld your son, your only son from me.*”

Do you not see Jesus all over this story? The difference between Jesus and Isaac is that when Jesus was on the cross, no one was there to stop him from being sacrificed for our sin. God the Father, took his son, his only begotten son whom he loved with an eternal love, and through his death on the cross our sin was placed on him and our hope is

secured. Now we can say like God said to Abraham, “Now we know that you love us with an everlasting love because you did not withhold your one and only Son from the cross. Carson says it this way, “Just as in Genesis 15, God alone walks down the bloody alleyway and takes the curse of the covenant on himself, so here he provides the sacrifice.”<sup>9</sup> So not only does God restore hope for us through Jesus. But God secures our hope. This is why the angels say to the shepherds, “*I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*”

## Conclusion

As I came to the point of writing my conclusion, I was just a few hours removed from Matt Lauer releasing a statement in light of the recent allegations against him. Like many of the men before him, he confessed to being embarrassed and ashamed and he was quick to acknowledge the hurt he had caused. And then he said this, “repairing the damage will take a lot of time and soul searching and I’m committed to beginning that effort. It is now my fulltime job.”<sup>10</sup> It is not my place to evaluate the sincerity of his regret or his pathway towards finding healing. But it does raise the question: how do you repair the damage? Can you repair the damage? Can anyone repair the damage?

There is always consequence to our actions, and often those consequences linger. But the whole point of the birth of Jesus is that God has stepped into our *nakedness and shame* to repair what is broken in us. It would be good for us to take our eyes off of Matt Lauer and cast them on our own life. How do we repair the damage we have done? The only repair we can make is to repent of our sin and turn in faith to Jesus who has died for our sin, in doing so, we are made new and we become agents of God’s love and grace to this broken world. I love what Paul says in Romans 16:20, “*The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.*” As we come under the gospel and live under the gospel we are destroying the work of the devil, just as was promised in Genesis 3:15.

Through these birth announcements we are reminded of hope restored through the birth of Jesus and hope secured through the death of Jesus. What is left for you to do? Repent and turn in faith to Jesus? What is left for you to do? Be an agent of God’s love and grace and bring healing where there is brokenness. Do not rejoice in these news reports of *nakedness and shame*. Rather, pray that true repair would come to these people and to our culture and that repair is found in the birth announcement we celebrate this month, “*I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.*”

*For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*” Jesus is our hope restored and our hope secured!

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<sup>1</sup>Tim Keller *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Penguin Books, 2015) Kindle Reader Location 1173

<sup>2</sup>D. A. Carson *The God Who is There* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010) 33

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 34

<sup>4</sup>Fyodor Dostoevsky *The Brothers Karamazov* trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1990) 589

<sup>5</sup>Julian Baggini “Yes , Life Without God Can be Bleak. Atheism Is About Facing Up To That” *Guardian*, March 9, 2012

<sup>6</sup>Daniel L. Migliore *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) 139

<sup>7</sup>Carson, 27-42

<sup>8</sup>Allen P. Ross *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baler Books, 1988) 168

<sup>9</sup>Carson, 53

<sup>10</sup>Leora Arnowitz “Matt Lauer on sexual assault allegations: I am truly sorry.” [www.foxnews.com](http://www.foxnews.com) November 30, 2017

