

Psalm 19:14 Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.

1 Timothy 1:2 ...Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

My sermon today is based on Judges 13:1-25

“Samson and Jesus”

Introduction: Hercules and Samson

Young boys are always impressed by strong men. Hercules is a perennial favorite strong man. Every generation seems to have its version of these Greek tales. Back in the 90's Kevin Sorbo (who is from Minnesota) played an updated version of Hercules that eventually spun off Xena: Princess Warrior.

Throughout the ages, the same could be said for Samson. Almost every generation retells the Samson story but it has been awhile since there has been a popular show or movie based on his life. With the recent resurgence of Biblically themed movies, I am sure some Hollywood mogul will decide to re-do Samson and make a lot of money off it.

We don't normally associate Samson with Christmas. I can't think of hearing a sermon that compares Samson's birth to Jesus' birth but there are some similarities. In fact, there may be more in common than we would think.

The Life of Samson

Pastor Last read the account of the birth of Samson already.

In case you forgot the rest of the story, Samson goes on to be the strong man of Israel. He kills a thousand men fighting with a donkey's jawbone as a club. He ties torches to the tails of foxes and lets them loose in the grain of the Philistines to burn up their crops. He falls in love with

Delilah who betrays the secret of his strength: his long hair. Finally, God restores his strength and Samson uses it to destroy a Philistine temple and all the people in it. So he kills more Philistines in his death than while he was living.

The Barren Conceive

But this sermon is not about the *life* of Samson. I want to focus on his birth.

We all know that there is a long tradition of God helping barren women conceive. God helped Sarah conceive when she was 90 years old. He helped Leah conceive because Jacob loved Rachel more than her. He helped Rachel conceive after Leah had given birth to many children.

In today's reading, Manoah's wife is sterile but God gives her the ability to conceive Samson. In the New Testament, God helps Elizabeth conceive John the Baptist after she was advanced in years.

All this points us toward Mary. The Bible doesn't say Mary was barren but she was even less likely to give birth than a barren woman because she was a virgin. Yet God intervenes by giving her a child who will be the savior of the world.

Feats of Strength and Salvation

Another similarity between the birth of Samson and the birth of Jesus is a theme that I call, "feats of strength that lead to salvation". Samson would use his feats of strength to save the Israelites from the oppression of the Philistines. He would smash down their idols and point to the one true God.

We don't usually think of Jesus as a strong man but he did his feats of strength too. Anyone who saw "The Passion of the Christ" knows what I am talking about. Jesus had to be incredibly strong to withstand the

beating the Romans gave him and still bear his cross. He suffered physically as well as spiritually to save humanity from sin. Samson's feats of strength point us to the greatest feat of strength of all time, Christ's passion on the cross. There his strength lifted the oppression of sin from our shoulders.

The Angel of the Lord

So far we have discussed the unusual circumstances of Jesus and Samson's conceptions and their feats of strength but there is an even greater similarity between these two births. This may be the most controversial part of this sermon and it may be a bit confusing if this is a new topic to you. This topic concerns the identity of the Angel of the Lord.

We all are used to hearing about angels appearing to shepherds at Jesus' birth so when we read the "Angel of the Lord" it's easy to pass quickly over the phrase and think it's just another angel. But if we take a closer look at the text, we'll see that this is no ordinary angel.

The Angel of the Lord is not specifically identified but there are clues as to his identity. First, he speaks with God's authority. He tells Manoah, "Your wife must do all that I have told her." He doesn't seem to bring a message from God, he seems to be speaking as God.

Second, the Angel of the Lord has a strange name. When Manoah asks what it is, he says, "Why do you ask me my name? It is beyond understanding." We know God has a name that is beyond human understanding so this is another clue as to who this mysterious figure is.

Third, the Angel of the Lord ascends to heaven in flame and Manoah and his wife fall on the ground in worship. Pious Israelites like Manoah and his wife would not knowingly worship a false god.

Fourth, after the Angel of the Lord leaves, Manoah says, “We have seen God!” At very least, Manoah believed that this is God appearing in human form.

There are so many examples of the Angel of the Lord appearing in the Old Testament that I can’t mention them all in this sermon. Suffice it to say that He seems to be distinct from other angels. He definitely is an appearance of God – either God the Father or God the Son. Many Christians throughout the ages have believed that the Angel of the Lord is Jesus appearing on earth before his birth to give us a hint about what would come on Christmas.

Conclusion

This Christmas, we will celebrate the birth of Christ. We celebrate the definitive coming of Christ to earth, the time when he put on human flesh that he will never remove.

But that doesn’t mean that Christmas is the first time Jesus visited this planet. In fact, we know it wasn’t because John tells us he was here since its very creation:

NIV John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

Jesus created this planet along with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. We don’t know how many times he has appeared to humans in human form but we know that some day soon he will show himself again and so we say with all Christians around the world, “Come, Lord Jesus.”

*May that peace which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.
Amen.*