

W460B_John_the_Baptist_and_Christ's_Birth_24.mp3

[00:00:02] This is a recording made in the Chapel of the Open Book at the Wednesday dinner hour service. And we have now come over from the Old Testament. To contemplate some of the teaching of the new, as we have said earlier. It is an easy way of saying Old Testament promise, New Testament fulfillment. But we were looking last week at the fact that although fulfillment must be, it doesn't go in a sort of mechanical movement. There's a tremendous sort of underground and zigzag and opposition because when God created man and put him on the earth, man brought with him the little word. If it wasn't spelled if. But it means the same thing. Contingency came in and God said, if you do this, I will do that. And that was true of Adam. It was true under the law of Moses. And so there comes a long period of waiting, but ultimately the Scripture has recorded for our encouragement that then shall the Son be subject unto him, that put all things under him that God may be all in all. And if we don't understand the tortuous way in which things have had to go, even now, we don't need to apologize for God. We say, Well, we don't know everything, even in the Chapel of the Open book. Isn't that marvelous? We don't know everything. But one day he's given us an assurance we shall know, even as we are known.

[00:01:29] And then we shall say, in a sense, we cannot say. Now. He has done all things well. Well, now. The first thing that we meet in the New Testament after the genealogy of Christ is the fact that he had a forerunner, and we were mentioning that last time. The forerunner indicates a person of great consequence. A king was to be born and a for A.S. And then there was that if coming in, if you will receive the King and the kingdom, then this is Elijah that was to come. But inasmuch as you are not receiving it, Elijah is yet to come in the future. We were looking at that last time. Well, I felt that there wouldn't be a very great number possibly here today. And I'll inflict upon you a little bit of an attempt to do a bit of reckoning if you don't think it's very much importance. Well, that's be your decision. But I think there's this about it. We may come to a meeting and have our hearts stirred with some wonderful glimpse of the grace of God. But occasionally it does us good to realize that our faith is resting upon time and place. That if it could be absolutely proved that our Savior was never born in Bethlehem. We have no savior because he must be if he's our savior. And if he could be proved that he didn't come in the fullness of time that God said he did.

[00:02:56] There were still without a savior. So there is some point at occasionally to bring ourselves back from the high glories doubt to solid rock and earth. And I'm going to do that today just in our few minutes. Not far from this chapel, just down by the Bank of England and the Mansion House. There's a big building that was held up for a period while excavations went on and a temple, a mithraic temple was unearthed and taken away and rebuilt. And that has a little connection with the fact that we've had just a remembrance of our Savior's birth in December the 25th, because there is no indication in the Scripture that our Savior was born in December 25th. And even Palestine has such terrible weather at this time of year that shepherds don't keep their flocks. And although the Roman power was a very strong power, they were wise. They didn't stir up trouble if they could help it. And no man in his senses, like Caesar Augustus, would send out a decree that all the world should be taxed in mid-winter. And then there's another thing. If they came to Bethlehem to register, their Bethlehem is spoken of in the Old Testament and in the new has such a little place, though there are little among the thousands of Judah. So how was it? There were such a crowd of people that they couldn't even find one solitary room for a woman who was in the state of Mary.

[00:04:32] Would you say you got the answer? Oh, yes. But it needs a little bit of careful search and building up. So will you be prepared just for that and not feel that you've been wasting your time to get some one more peg down on solid earth so that our faith is resting upon something that is historic and builds up a not a wonderful dream of poetry, which may pass, of course, as all dreams do. Well, now the first thing for us to remember is this, that the forerunner is mentioned in Matthew. And in the third chapter it says, in those days came John the Baptist preaching in the wilderness of Israel. And if you are at all acquainted with rabbinical literature and the methods of the old Jewish writers, they were not too concerned about getting things meticulously right. They didn't they didn't bother about whether they put things in their right order or not. As we should expect, you find a different order in one gospel from another, but that doesn't worry them as long as they get their point in. That's the thing. So Matthew alters the order of the temptation. They get his point in and he puts the temptation of the kingdom last. Whereas Luke, who says I'm writing to put in order everything, he puts it meticulously right, and the temptation of the kingdom is in the middle.

[00:05:56] So you've got to have your mind a little bit open to that sort of thing. So Matthew merely says in those days, so that leaves it. But now look at Luke's Gospel,

Chapter three. This beats 1066 William the Conqueror, because 1066 is a single date. But if I were to give you, say, four dates, April the 25th, March the 7th, August the 10th, December the 11th, and say now between those dates, this particular thing happened. Mara, you've got it, haven't you? It's like it's not merely trigonometry. There's four of them, you see. Well, that's what God has done in the Luke's Gospel. Chapter three Now in the 15th year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar. That's one point. Well, that's good enough. We can go back to that. You see Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea. Was he? He was. Herod being Tetrarch of Galilee. He was and his brother Philip Tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis and Lysanias, the Tetrarch of Abilene. And then adding to that Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests. And there were two of them. Extraordinary faction. The Word of God came unto John, the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. Look at a date. You see, Alex, it opened itself to be exposed as being untrue.

[00:07:15] Isn't it? And every one of them fit. They were all in their place. Well, now, before we deal with the the one that this forerunner came to announce, the king and his work, I just want to establish one more thing. I mentioned just now the Mithraic religion that had left its mark up there near the Bank of England. Well, in the beginning, when the church was standing faithful, they suffered a great deal because they would not conform to the pagan ideas of their neighbors. But as time went on, they gradually lowered their standard. And the fifth century writer tells us that earlier than he, of course, they agreed in order to avoid clashes and misunderstandings and persecutions, that the heyday of the Mithraic religion, which was December the 25th when the sun entered its winter solstice and was called the Nativity. Notice this the Nativity of the Sun. The Nativity of the Sun. They would agree that they would remember the birth of Christ. At the same time their festivities would not jar upon one another and they'd all live happily ever afterwards. You know that idea. So that's the only reason why we do December the 25th. Well, we say, well, we are glad to meet one another and have a happy time. And we're to remember our savior was born at some time or another. But that is not the date that the Scripture justifies in any sense.

[00:08:40] But it might be useful for us to get a little bit nearer to the date, if it's possible. Would you like to try? Just for the next few minutes. Let's try. Shall we? And the way in which we might do it is this. First of all, I go back and I don't ask you to turn to this passage because I'm only going to read a word or two. It says in the first two Chronicles

Chapter 24. And. Now, these are the divisions of the Sons of Aaron. The sons of Aaron were Nadab and Abihu and the Eliezer and Arba and so on. And then it tells you that these were divided up into 24 courses of priests. And in the verse ten of this chapter, the seventh is two acres, and the eighth is two abaijah. They don't sound the J as I have a buyer. Now, we are told in the gospel, according to Luke, if you'll turn to the first chapter that the priest who was ministering in the temple was of the order or the course of a buyer. And look at Luke chapter one, verse five. There was in the days of Herod, the King of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias and the course of Abijah. There we have. And it says in verse eight, and it came to pass that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course, your attention is drawn to it twice.

[00:10:14] Now the course of a buyer comes number eight in the order, and we are indebted to a fairly detailed account by Josephus. That these 24 courses. They went from Sabbath to Sabbath. Each priest ministered that week and the first course started at Passover. But inasmuch as there were multitudes to minister to at Passover and Pentecost and at the Feast of Tabernacles and the Atonement, all the 24 courses were engaged in quite irrespective of their order. Then whoever was in the next order took over. So a week after Passover, the course of a buyer saw this priest in the temple. And then the promise was made of an eighth by an angel to him that he should have a son and called his name John. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, you see. So we've got to start somewhere about, say, second week in April, about the second week in April. This promise was made. Well, then he had to wait a bit. And by the time he got back, it would be getting into the month of May. We had we said when his work was all finished and over, he went back home. And then nine months afterwards, John the Baptist was born. And that brings us up the the the years of the period, you see, and eventually.

[00:11:46] But the time we piece all this together and discover, as you will, by reading the the record that our Savior was six months younger than John the Baptist. You see where we're getting zigzagging about? We go up to we get somewhere in the month of October. We had nine months to that to bring us round and then we take six months off. It's a bit that I shall fall down over with all my reckoning. I know, but you do it on a piece of paper and you get as near to the period when the Feast of Tabernacles take place. Now, the Feast of Tabernacles comes in the seventh month of Israel's year. The last feast of the whole. It's the time when peace will be not on Earth, but it will be visualized.

You see, the Feast of Tabernacles. They all sit under their own vine and under their own fig tree. No one making them afraid. And even in this city or in this town, if you went down the east end of Whitechapel and Aldgate direction, or any place where there's a Jewish colony just about that time of the year in the autumn, you would see them building a little booth in their garden or on the part of the roof of their outhouse, and sitting there just saying to themselves, one day, this is going to be real. Now don't you see? If if you work it like that and you get right back to that period of time, Our Saviour was born when peace on earth and goodwill to men was just a thing being illustrated.

[00:13:22] But of course, it needed more than sitting under a booth to bring it about. As someone has put it, there's something that comes before that word of the angel. Something comes a little before the word peace on Earth, goodwill to men. And that is a saviour, which is Christ the Lord. You will not get peace on earth by getting goodwill among men. Your yours, your speed, all your strength for naught and be disappointed tremendously. But if once men have accepted the Savior who is the prince of peace, then the whole thing comes. Are we going to say automatically? So I felt that I would take this opportunity of suggesting to you that even though we rejoice with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places, wrecking ourselves to be translated out of the darkness into the kingdom of God's light, shine and so on, and all the marvelous blessings that come to us by the Gospel of His grace. Never let us forget that. If it doesn't rest upon fact, it's not anything worth bothering at all. And we are just following a will of the wisp. I'm always so glad. Although we don't recite a creed in this chapel, I'm always so glad that those who framed the Creed were bold enough and true enough to slip into it.

[00:14:43] Suffered under Pontius Pilate. They pledged themselves that it was an historic faith. And if that's so, then of course we can build. So I ask you to accept this as another contribution to our study, a small one, perhaps a peculiar one, and involving a good deal of research to get it all done out. But if you will take the hint. The the 24 courses, of course, duplicated. There were 48 in the year. They had two shifts. Then there was the three great festivals, uh, Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles that accounted for another 2 or 3. And then you remember the Jewish year at 51 days and sometimes 52 because they only had 30 days to a month. No Jew ever had to say did receive 30 days at September, April, June, and no, no, 30 days to a month. And so it slipped through the year until at last they put another month in. That upsets your calculations a wee bit, but I think you'll see near enough the fact that these pieces are

put in the course of a buyer. The fact that it was after he went home, nine months after that, the birth of John the Baptist, Mary went to her cousin's house and stayed there during that period to get a little comfort for herself. She came back six months afterwards.

[00:16:06] Her child was born and you get it there roughly about the day of the tabernacles. Well, that solves a problem. Why it was that? They could be that all the world should be called to be taxed. Well, that's all right. In early autumn, easy travelling. It wasn't an extraordinary thing to go across country. But of course, if the if it coincided, if the Roman taxation coincided with the Feast of Tabernacles, then you get the crowd. You remember it says in the acts of the apostles at Pentecost, there were Jews out of every nation under heaven attending Pentecost, and they had to make preparations for their accommodation. And so instead of it being one of those things that nobody can explain, or perhaps you better not be too particular, it's all too explainable and it all fits. And we have a faith that we have no need to apologize for. But we could present it to people as something solid and basis. And then ultimately there's something better. Whatever the date of the year might be, whatever fast or feast it fulfills. There's another word said in the epistle to the Galatians, which is of extreme importance that in the fullness of time. So that's what they trained in God's calendar. In the fullness of time, God sent forth His son made of a woman at the fourth reading. Genesis 315. Cutting out Adam completely and all the entail that Adam brought into the world, made of a woman made under the law that brings a Jew in who is condemned of the law that we might be given the adoption of sons redeemed from our bondage and set free.

[00:17:48] Well, that's where we started, friends. We have trusted him. We have been set free. And although we are still in this wilderness of a world, we have a blessed hope. And the Scripture says to us that having received this gift of grace, we should live looking for that blessed hope. The Blessed Hope. And the first case was the coming of Christ to the manger. The Blessed Hope before you and me is the coming of Christ in power and great glory. He Kaymer was crowned with thorns, with coming with many dialects. So lift up your hearts. Wait patiently for him. And if you can't explain all the problems, say you're not the only one. There was one wiser than you Jove and another one, Ecclesiastes, who faced them and were baffled in many cases. But you can come out on the top at last with Jove and say, I know that my redeemer lives, and at the last he shall stand upon the earth. And though worms destroy this body yet in my flesh, shall

I see God? If he can say those words, you'll have something to support and sustain you through 1962.