

# J E S U S

*the One and Only*



B E T H  
M O O R E

WITH DALE McCLESKEY



Nashville, Tennessee

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# INTRODUCTION



My romance with Jesus Christ began in a tiny circle of baby-bear chairs in a Sunday school class of a small town church. My teachers were not biblical scholars. They were moms and homemakers. I'm not sure they ever delved into the depths of Scripture or researched a single Greek word. They simply taught what they knew. I don't know any other way to explain what happened next: I believed.

I remember thinking how handsome Jesus was in those watercolor pictures and how I had never seen a man with long hair before. I wondered if my daddy, the Army major, would approve. My favorite picture was the familiar one with the children climbing all over Jesus' lap. As I recall, it was the only one I ever saw that captured Him smiling. I determined quickly that big people bored and upset Him and little people made Him quite happy.

As I recount this simple, unexciting testimony to you, a lump wells in my throat and tears burn in my eyes. Jesus is the most wonderful, most graceful, most exciting, most redemptive thing that has ever happened to me. He is my life. I cannot express on paper my love for Him. It is a love that has grown in incongruous bits and pieces, baby steps, leaps, bounds, tumbles, and falls, . . . decade after decade.

A romance with Christ differs so dramatically from a romance between mortals. I do not wish any other woman to love my husband, Keith, the way I do. How different my romance with Christ! I want all of you to love Him . . . at least as much as I do. I'm jealous for us to want Him more than we want blessing, health, or even breath. I want to know Him so well that my undivided heart can explain, "Because

Your love is better than life, my lips will glorify You” (Ps. 63.3). Better than life! God invites mortal creatures—you and me—into a love relationship with the Son of glory. That, my friend, is the meaning of life. Let’s partake. Fully. Completely.

We will never spend our time more valuably than in the pursuit of knowing Jesus Christ. My deepest prayer is that this offering would take you another step closer in the noblest pursuit of life. I have very little doubt that I will leave more lacking in this particular book than any God has entrusted to me simply because there is no end to what could be said. And, indeed, must be said. If not by mortal creatures, then by those invisible to our eyes, encircling the throne and in a loud voice, singing, “Worthy is the Lamb!”

He is Jesus.  
 The One and Only.  
 Transcendent over all else.  
 To know Him is to love Him.  
 To love Him is to long for Him.  
 To long for Him is to finally reach  
 soul hands into the One true thing  
 we need never get enough of.  
 Jesus.  
 Take all you want.  
 Take all you need.  
 Till soul is fed.  
 And spirit freed.  
 Till dust is dust.  
 And Face you see.  
 Jesus Christ.  
 He’s all you need.

PART I

# THE WORD MADE FLESH

I am so glad to have you along on this ride, dear one! I would willingly take this particular journey all by myself, but you make it far more wonderful. We have several hundred miles ahead of us, so grab your Bible, a jug full of Living Water, and a durable pair of sandals. Our journey will take us all over Galilee, Jerusalem, Judea, and even across the lake to the “other side.” Our goal is simply to walk with Jesus wherever He goes through the pages of Scripture. You and I will drop in on His journey just a few months before His earthly arrival. Interestingly, His trek toward earth began much sooner—“In the beginning,” in fact. God’s perfect plan of redemption through the “Word made flesh” was already in motion before He breathed the first soul into man. May God astound you with a fresh glimpse of the greatest story ever told.

Commit, dear student of God’s Word! Let’s see this journey to the very last page! Let’s welcome God to completely transform our image of His Son. Let’s fall in love with Jesus all over again.

Author's Note: Throughout this book many Hebrew and Greek words are defined to clarify the meaning of certain Scripture references. Unless otherwise noted, these definitions are taken from *The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Spiros Zodhiates, et al., eds., (Chattanooga, Tenn.: AMG Publishers, 1994) and *The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament*, Spiros Zodhiates, et al., eds., (Chattanooga, Tenn.: AMG Publishers, 1992).

# UNEXPECTED COMPANY

LUKE 1:1–25

*“Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard.” (Luke 1:13)*



Our study will focus on the Gospel of Luke. In his first verses the “beloved physician” wrote that while many others had also written about Christ, Luke “carefully investigated everything from the beginning.” His resulting “orderly account” began in the time of Herod, king of Judea. A priest named Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth were godly people, but they had no children. Elizabeth was barren; and they were both well along in years (Luke 1:6–7). Zechariah’s time came to serve as priest, and while he was serving in the temple: “an angel of the Lord appeared to him” (Luke 1:11).

Picture that morning with me. Zechariah rose from his bed in a small room outside the temple, amazed at the once-in-a-lifetime priestly privilege he feared would never come; after all, he was no spring chicken.

Zechariah’s mind surely detoured to his wife of many years. Unlike most of the other priests, he had no children. When his temple service took him from home, Elizabeth was all alone. She handled her empty home with grace, but he knew her childlessness still stung terribly. Jewish homes were meant for children.

Zechariah took extra care to smooth out the white linen fabric and carefully tie the sash of his priestly garments. Not all the priests took their responsibilities so soberly, but Zechariah was a righteous man. He

walked through the temple gate with all senses magnified and beheld a sight to take your breath away—the cream-and-gold temple bathing in the morning sun. A few early risers probably already gathered for worship in the courtyard. Little did Zechariah know that the gentle breeze was blowing in far more than just another morning.

First Chronicles 24 provides the detailed background for the story of the priesthood. Aaron had many descendants. Each of the twenty-four divisions of priests served in the temple for one week twice a year and at major festivals. An individual priest could offer the incense at the daily sacrifice only once in his lifetime. Zechariah's only turn had come. Surely he was overwhelmed.

Luke 1:10 tells us that worshipers assembled outside the temple at the time for the burning of the incense. Their custom was to pray individually and simultaneously in the courtyard as the priest was praying for them corporately inside. After he finished his duties, he would come out to them and give them a blessing.

As Zechariah was praying, the angel Gabriel appeared to him saying: “Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John” (Luke 1:13).

Obviously, the fragrance of the incense wasn't the only thing that ascended to the throne of God that day. Don't miss the significance of the statement “*your* prayer has been heard.” The responsibility of the priest on duty was to offer the incense and to pray for the nation of Israel. His purpose was to offer a corporate prayer. Furthermore, the priest's intercession for the nation undoubtedly included a petition for the Messiah, Israel's promised Deliverer and King. Zechariah would have petitioned the throne of grace on behalf of the nation of Israel and for God to send its long-awaited Messiah.

The old priest could not have known that God had purposely manipulated his appointment that day for a revolutionary reason. Later



we will see that many of those who served in the priesthood were not like Zechariah. Many priests could have offered the incense that day with little respect and voiced a repetitious prayer void of anxious expectation. Luke 1:6 tells us that Zechariah and Elizabeth were “upright in the sight of God.” The Creator and Sustainer of the universe was ready to answer a prayer that had been prayed for hundreds of years, but He purposely chose a man who could pray an old prayer with a fresh heart.

I don't believe Zechariah's prayers that day were limited to corporate petitions. Whether or not he planned to make a personal request, I believe he did. I think he poured the perfectly mixed ingredients on the fire, inhaled the aroma of incense rising toward heaven, asked God's blessing over the nation of Israel, passionately pleaded for the coming of the Messiah, then, before he turned and walked away, voiced an age-old request from the hearth of his own home.

I will never forget the first time I had an opportunity to go into the “old city” in Jerusalem. As much as I had enjoyed the trip, it would have been terribly incomplete without going to the Wailing Wall. I knew from my studies that the Wailing Wall is considered to be virtually the most sacred place on earth to an orthodox Jew. As a portion of the sacred temple structure, it signifies the place of most intimate physical closeness to God. Drove of people pray at the Wailing Wall. Many write their requests on small pieces of paper and literally wedge the notes in the wall's crevices. I rose early that morning and had a lengthy time of preparation in prayer. I knew I would have only a few minutes at the wall, and I gave serious thought to the petitions I would make there.

After deep consideration, I recorded the most important requests I could possibly make on a small sheet of paper. Later I stood at that wall as overcome in prayer as I have ever been. After I voiced my petitions through sobs, I wedged my requests in a crack in the wall and left them there. Why did I take it so seriously when I can boldly approach the throne of grace twenty-four hours a day? Because in a common, godless

world, I was standing at an uncommon, sacred place. A place where more collective petitions have been poured out to the one true God than any other in the world . . . and I had one chance.

I believe that's why Zechariah may have grasped the most sacred moment of his life to let his personal prayer ascend like incense to the throne of grace. The prayer at that exact moment may not have been for a son. At their ages, perhaps Zechariah and Elizabeth had given up. Or perhaps he remembered Abraham and Sarah, and he knew God could do the impossible. Either way, I believe Zechariah voiced something about the void in their lives and the hurt or disappointment of their own hearts. What the old priest could not possibly have known was how intimately connected would be his corporate prayer for the Messiah and his personal prayer for a son.

Have you almost given up on God answering an earnest, long-term prayer of your heart? Not becoming hopeless over a repetitious request can be terribly challenging. God never missed a single petition from the children of Israel to send their Messiah; nor did He miss a solitary plea from the aching hearts of a childless couple. God does not have some limited supply of power, requiring that we carefully select a few choice things to pray about. God's power is infinite. God's grace and mercy are drawn deeply from the bottomless well of His heart.

When Zechariah stood at the altar of incense that day and lifted the needs of the nation to the throne, an ample supply of supernatural power and tenderhearted compassion remained in the heart of God to provide not just his needs, but the desire of his heart. God was simply waiting for the perfect time.

Do you have a long-standing prayer concern? If you have received a definitive no from God, pray to accept it and trust that He knows what He's doing. If you haven't, don't grow weary or mechanical. Like Zechariah and Elizabeth, continue to walk faithfully with God even though you are disappointed. Walking with

God in the day-in/day-out course of life swells your assurance that God is faithful and enjoyable even when a request goes unmet. Recognizing all the other works God is doing in your life will prevent discouragement as you await your answer. Zechariah waited a long time for God's answer, but when it came, it exceeded everything the priest could have thought or asked.

God gave Zechariah some assurances about this promised son. He said, "He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. . . . And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:14–15, 17).

How would you have responded to the words of the angelic messenger? I somehow think I might have been just like Zechariah. The message was just too much for the old priest. He asked for a sign.

Apparently Gabriel was in no mood for Zechariah's doubt. Those were the last words out of the priest's mouth for a while. Zechariah's transgression wasn't terminal. The promise was still intact, and the old man would still be a father. He just wouldn't have much to say until his faith became sight.

Luke's account of Zechariah's news concludes with his return home and the record of Elizabeth's pregnancy. The woman in me fusses over the lack of details. How did Zechariah tell her the news? What did she say? Did she laugh? Did she squeal? Did she cry? If age had already closed her womb, what was her first sign of pregnancy? Why did she remain in seclusion for five months? Lastly, I wonder if Zechariah somehow shared with Elizabeth every last detail of the prophecy concerning their son. Can you even imagine being told in advance of your child's conception that he or she would bring joy and delight to you and be great in the sight of the Lord? We breathe a huge sigh of relief over a

sonogram showing all the right appendages. What we'd give for a few guarantees about their character!

Without a doubt, Zechariah and Elizabeth would think this answer was worth waiting for. God is so faithful. One reason He may have given them such assurances about their son's future greatness is because they would probably not live to see all the prophecy come to fruition. Like few of the rest of us, this set of parents would not die hoping. They would die knowing.