

227 What a strange and amazing story!

One of my lovely friends, Jane, was asked to give a Christmas talk to a group of people from various countries around the world, of various faiths and none. What she shared was, I think, truly inspired, so I asked if I could share her ideas with you.

The thing that struck me most was how weird (in a good way!) the story is; it's totally unlike any other story in any other religious (or non-religious) context that I've ever come across.

She explained that the Bible was the story of God's love for the people of the world. It's **not** a religious rule book; rather, it's a history with two parts: The OT is the history of the creation of humankind and the beginnings of the Jewish nation, and the NT is the history of Jesus – it's **his**-story. The two parts form one continuous love story.

Jane had threaded a red ribbon through her Bible as an illustration of God's love weaving its way through the whole story. She gradually unwound the ribbon, reading various short passages.

(Aside: notice how 'promise', a.k.a. 'covenant' or 'testament', threads through the story!^[225,226])

2000 BC – Genesis 12:1,2 God promised Abraham that he would have descendants, and through that family, God would bring blessing to everyone on the earth. (Jesus was a direct descendant of Abraham.)

1100 BC – 2 Samuel 7:10-16 God promised David (Abraham's descendant) that one of his descendants would be 'king forever'.

700 BC – Isaiah 7:14 – A promise that a virgin would give birth to a son, and call him 'Immanuel', God with us.

Isaiah 9:6-7 – 'Unto us a child is born...' A promise of a son who would be our ruler.

Isaiah 53 – A strange-sounding prediction: a suffering servant (Jesus?) would die for his people.

700 BC – Micah 5:2-5 A new ruler will be born in Bethlehem (not Jerusalem).

600 BC – Jeremiah 33:14-26 A 'branch will sprout' from David's line (a descendant of David) who will save God's people.

(We could perhaps add Jeremiah 31:31-34, God's promise of a new 'covenant'^[225] – God will forgive us and completely forget our sins.)

500 BC – Zechariah 9:9 A king will ride into Jerusalem on a donkey – strange!

0 AD - anno domini (Latin) means 'the year of our Lord'.

Luke 1:30-33 – God promises that a young girl will have a baby by the power of his Holy Spirit, and he will be called Yeshua/Joshua/Jesus – which means 'God saves'.

Matthew 2 – Magi/kings/wisemen arrive at King Herod's palace looking for the 'new king', based on astronomy and Micah's 700-year-old prophecy. The magi find Jesus and give him presents. (God invented Christmas presents!)

You can then choose how to apply any of the aspects of the story as appropriate to your hearers, maybe that the first Christmas present was God's **presence** wrapped up in the form of a human baby called Jesus... Immanuel, which means 'God with us'.

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