



## **The Baby in My Womb Leaped for Joy**

By John Piper January 25, 2009

**T**he aim of this message is to awaken and intensify your joyful, grateful reverence for the gift of human life from conception to eternity. The beginning of human life is a magnificent thing. There is nothing else like it. Only humans come into being day after day, created in the image of God, and live forever—with God or in hell.

There is no compelling evidence in the Bible or anywhere else that any animals come into being with souls, or that they

live after they die. There is no compelling evidence in the Bible or anywhere else that angels are being created today. The only being in all the universe who keeps on originating and then living forever in the image of God is man. **God's Image After the Fall and Flood**

In the beginning, Genesis 1:27 says, "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." Then Genesis 5:5 says, "Adam . . . fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth." This was to show that the image and likeness of God is passed on from generation to generation. It was not just the first pair who were in the image of God.

Then in Genesis 9:6, Noah is warned by God, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image." Even after all the wickedness, which was punished by the flood, the image of God is retained in man. Damaged, distorted, but stupendously real. **God's Image Today**

Then James 3:9-10 says, "With [our tongue] we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so." From the first man and woman to each succeeding man and woman down to our own day, when human life begins the image of God begins. Eternal existence begins. That is why I say that the beginning of human life is a magnificent thing.

"When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little

lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands." (Psalms 8:3-6)

So I pray that this message will awaken and intensify your joyful, grateful reverence for the gift of human life from conception to eternity. The beginning of human life is a magnificent thing—it is the only newly originating life in the universe that is in the image of God. It is the only newly originating life in the universe that lasts forever. O what amazed and happy reverence we should feel for the beginning of every human life!

### **A New President, Trapped and Blinded**

As everyone knows, our new President, over whom we have rejoiced, does not share this reverence for the beginning of human life. He is trapped and blinded by a culture of deceit. On the 36th anniversary of Roe v. Wade, he said, "We are reminded that this decision not only protects women's health and reproductive freedom, but stands for a broader principle: that government should not intrude on our most private family matters."

To which I say . . .

\* No, Mr. President, you are not protecting women's health; you are authorizing the destruction of half a million tiny women every year.

\* No, Mr. President, you are not protecting reproductive freedom; you are authorizing the destruction of freedom for a million helpless people every year.

\* No, Mr. President, killing our children does not cease to be killing our children no matter how many times you call it a private family matter. Call it what you will, they are dead, and we have killed them. And you, Mr. President, would keep the killing legal.

Some of us wept with joy over the inauguration of the first African-American President. We will pray for you. And may God grant that there arises in your heart an amazed and happy reverence for the beginning of every human life. Wonder in the Womb

This is Sanctity of Life Weekend at Bethlehem, and we are talking about the wonder of human beings in the womb, and the moral question of whether it is right to kill them before they are born. Until recently, there never has been any doubt in the mind of the Christian church that such killing is wrong. Among the earliest sources for Christian thinking outside the New Testament (the beginning of the second century), the Didache and the Epistle of Barnabas both forbid abortion.

You shall do no murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not corrupt boys, you shall not commit fornication, you shall not steal, you shall not deal in magic, you shall do no sorcery, you shall not murder a child by abortion nor kill them when born. (Didache 2:2; cf. Epistle of Barnabas 19:5)

Why did the early church, and all succeeding generations of Christians, come to this conclusion—that it is forbidden to take the life of the unborn? We have already seen the root of this conviction: When a human life comes into existence something magnificent has happened—created in the image of God, to live forever.

### **God Gives, God Takes Away (Job 1:21)**

Another pointer for the church was that the Bible says God has sovereign rights over birth and death. When Job's children were killed by a wind that destroyed their house, Job fell on his face and worshipped God and said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). The Lord gave—they were conceived and born by God's act—that's his prerogative. The Lord took—that's his prerogative. Not ours. So the church has always shrunk back from intruding on the rights of God. He gives; he takes. Birth and death are his to grant, not ours. God Forms Persons (Psalm 139:13)

Another pointer was the profound conviction that what is happening in the womb is God's unique and sacred person-forming work. Psalm 139:13 puts this in terms of God's very hands-on work in the womb: "You formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb." This is God's doing. Not ours. It is his to make. And his to end. (See also Job 31:13-15.)

### **A Glimpse into the Womb (Luke 1)**

But the pointer for the church that I wanted to focus on today is a glimpse into the womb that we get at several places in the Bible. Let's look at Luke 1. The situation is that Elizabeth and Mary are both given a child in the womb. Both pregnancies are miraculous. Elizabeth because she is too old, and she had always been barren. She becomes pregnant with John the Baptist. And Mary, because she is a virgin. But the Holy Spirit comes upon her, and she becomes pregnant with Jesus, the Son of God, who would one day die for our sins and rise again.

Verse 24: "After these days [Zechariah's] wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden." Then in verse 26, Luke says, "In the sixth month [that is, the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy] the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin." So when Mary becomes pregnant Elizabeth is about 24 weeks along in her pregnancy.

### **Nothing Impossible with God**

In verses 36-37, the angel says to Mary, to encourage her that her impossible pregnancy really can come true, "And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month

with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." So be encouraged, Mary, nothing is too hard for God. Witness the pregnancy of Elizabeth. O how often in these circumstances of pregnancy and infertility we need to be reminded, "Nothing will be impossible with God." He gives, he takes, he provides in abundance, he sustains in loss.

When the angel had gone, and Mary knew what was happening to her, she made a beeline to Elizabeth. What a consultation this would be: two of the most important and impossible pregnancies in the world. Look at verses 39-44:

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy." (Luke 1:39-45)

Now, of course, none of this is being written with abortion in mind. That's not the point. The point is: How did texts like these shape the way the church thought about the unborn? What were the assumptions here and the implications here?

Notice two things.

### **1. The Word Baby**

First, the word baby in verses 41 and 44. Verse 41: "And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb." Verse 44: "For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy." That word baby is not a specialized word for the unborn. It has no connotations of "embryo" or "fetus." It is the ordinary word for baby (Greek *brefos*). And what makes this crystal clear and significant is the way it's used in Luke 2:16. Here in Luke 1, it refers to John the Baptist in the womb. In Luke 2, it refers to Jesus in the manger. Luke 2:16: "And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby (*brefos*) lying in a manger." This is exactly the same word for baby.

What the Christian church has seen in this is that what the persons Jesus and John were outside the womb they were already inside the womb. Jesus was the God-man in Mary's womb. When the Holy Spirit (according to Luke 1:35) caused Mary to be pregnant, she was not pregnant with anything less than the Son of God. The baby inside was the same as the baby outside.

Today science has only made that easier to believe, not harder. Ultrasound technology has given a stunning window on the womb that shows the unborn

at eight weeks sucking his thumb, recoiling from pricking, responding to sound. All the organs are present, the brain is functioning, the heart is pumping, the liver is making blood cells, the kidneys are cleaning fluids, and there is a fingerprint. Yet virtually all abortions happen later in the pregnancy than this date.

## **2. Treated as a Person**

The second thing to notice here in Luke 1 is the way the baby in Elizabeth's womb responded to Mary who was carrying the Son of God. Verse 41: "When Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb." Then in verse 44, Elizabeth interprets that leap like this: "Behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy." And Luke says that Elizabeth said this because she was filled with the Holy Spirit. Verses 41-42: "Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed . . ." In other words, the Holy Spirit prompted her to say that this leap of the baby in her womb was a leap of joy.

To increase the significance of that leap even more, consider what an angel said to Elizabeth's husband Zechariah before his son was conceived. In Luke 1:14-15, the angel said, "And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb." So that leap is not only a leap of joy but a leap of Holy-Spirit-inspired joy.

### **Only Persons Are Filled with the Spirit**

What shall we make of this? Never in the Bible is any animal said to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Never does the Bible say that a person's arm or leg or kidney or skin is filled with the Spirit. Tissue is not filled with the Holy Spirit. Only persons are filled with the Spirit.

What Luke is doing—and he is doing it as the spokesman of Christ—is treating this child in the womb as a person. He uses the word baby which he later uses for Jesus in the manger. He uses the word joy, which is what persons feel. He uses the phrase "filled with the Spirit" which is what God does to persons. He simply assumes he is dealing with a human person in the womb.

And therefore so should we.

### **Amazed at the Gift of Children**

The beginning of human life is a magnificent thing. It is the work of God. It is the forming of a human person in God's own image who will live forever. Let there be at Bethlehem, and beyond, a joyful, grateful reverence for the gift

of human life from conception to eternity. Never cease to be amazed at the gift of life—the gift of children.

### The Children

Do you hear the children crying?  
I can hear them every day,  
Crying, sighing, dying, flying  
Somewhere safe where they can play.

Somewhere safe from all the dangers,  
Somewhere safe from crack and AIDS,  
Safe from lust and lurking strangers,  
Safe from war and bombing raids.

Somewhere safe from malnutrition,  
Safe from daddy's damning voice,  
Safe from mommy's cool ambition,  
Safe from deadly goddess, Choice.

Do you hear the children crying?  
I can hear them every day,  
Crying, sighing, dying, flying  
Somewhere safe where they can play.

\* \* \* \*

Do you see the children meeting?  
I can see them in the sky,  
Meeting, eating, meeting, greeting  
Jesus with the answer why.

Why the milk no longer nourished,  
Why the water made them sick,  
Why the crops no longer flourished,  
Why the belly got so thick.

Why they never knew the reason  
Friends had vanished out of sight,  
Why some suffered for a season,  
Others never saw the light.

Do you see the children meeting?  
I can see them in the sky,  
Meeting, eating, meeting, greeting  
Jesus with the answer why.

\* \* \* \*

Do you hear the children singing?  
I can hear them high above,  
Singing, springing, ringing, bringing  
Glory to the God of love.

Glory for the gift of living,  
Glory for the end of pain,  
Glory for the gift of giving,  
Glory for eternal gain.

Glory from the ones forsaken,  
Glory from the lost and lone,  
Glory when the infants waken,  
Orphans on the Father's throne

Do you hear the children singing?  
I can hear them high above,  
Singing, springing, ringing, bringing  
Glory to the God of love.

\* \* \* \*

Do you see the children coming?  
I can see them on the clouds,  
Coming, strumming, drumming, humming  
Songs with heaven's happy crowds.

Songs with lots of happy clapping,  
Songs that set the heart on fire,  
Songs that make your foot start tapping,  
Songs that make a merry choir.

Songs so loud the mountains tremble,  
Songs so pure the canyons ring,  
When the children all assemble  
Millions, millions, round the King.

Do you see the children coming?  
I can see them on the clouds,  
Coming, strumming, drumming, humming  
Songs with heaven's happy crowds.

\* \* \* \*

Do you see the children waiting?  
I can see them all aglow  
Waiting, waiting, waiting, waiting,

Who of us will rise and go?

Will we turn and fly to meet them  
Will we venture something new?  
I intend to rise and greet them.  
Come and go with me, would you?

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