

*The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 13 December 2020. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.*

## **The Call to Nazareth**

Two thousand years ago, Christ, the eternal Son of God, came down into our world of space, matter, and time, and took on human flesh. Over the next 33 years, Christ made the greatest journey ever made, and accomplished the greatest mission ever endeavoured. And what was His mission? His mission was to die on an old rugged cross, with the sins of the world laid upon Him, so that He might purchase our salvation.

Hour by hour, day by day, for thirty-three years, Christ plodded onward toward the cross; and as He made that journey from the manger to the cross, He did not make one false step. Not once did He swerve aside from His Father's will. In every place Jesus went, He went there in obedience to His Father's call.

First, there was **Bethlehem**. God the Father called His Son to Bethlehem first--and for a number of reasons. First, God had *foretold*, through the prophet Micah, that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Secondly, Bethlehem was the city of David--the town where the Messiah's great ancestor, David, was born. Thirdly, Bethlehem was filled with types and pictures of Christ. For example, Bethlehem was a shepherding town; and Jesus is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. He is also the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for His sheep, and who leads them in the green pasture of God's Word, and who keeps them safely in His fold. Also, "Bethlehem" means "house of bread"; and Jesus is the Bread of Life. Finally, Jesus was born in Bethlehem simply because God loves to use small things for His glory (even small towns, and small people, such as shepherds).

The next stop in Jesus' earthly journey was **Egypt**. When Jesus was about one or two years old, God warned Joseph to take Mary and Jesus down into Egypt in order to protect Jesus from King Herod, who was, at that very moment, dispatching soldiers to Bethlehem to murder all the infants. Now, as we saw last week, there were several reasons why the Father called His Son into Egypt. First, the prophet Hosea had foretold that the Father would call His Son *out of* Egypt--which means that He first had to call Him *into* Egypt. Secondly, Christ's life had to be preserved, so that He could one day save us from our sins! Thirdly, Christ had to follow the same path that Israel had travelled. Just as God called His "son," the nation of Israel, down into Egypt, and brought them *out of* Egypt by a mighty hand, so God called His only begotten Son, Jesus, down into Egypt, so that He might bring Him *out of* Egypt by a mighty hand, and show His redeeming power. Lastly, God called His Son into Egypt so that He might illustrate the path that every sinner must take in order to be saved. Just as the children of Israel had to be willing to leave the "land of idols" (Egypt), and follow Moses to the land of Promise, so sinners must be willing to leave *their* idols, and their sin, and follow Christ to freedom, and victory, and eternal life.

This morning, we will learn about the third stop in Jesus' earthly journey. That stop was **Nazareth**. When Jesus was still a child, God called His Son out of Egypt; and Nazareth was the specific place in Israel where God had Him go. But why? Out of the hundreds of towns in Israel, why Nazareth? That is the question we will answer this morning. The title of this message is ***The Call to Nazareth***.

Why did the Father call His Son to Nazareth? First, God called His Son to Nazareth...

### **I. To fulfil "The Branch" prophecy**

**Matthew 2:19-23**

In **verses 22 and 23**, the Scripture gives us a couple reasons why Jesus went to Nazareth. First, it would have been very dangerous for Jesus' family to go back to Bethlehem. Bethlehem was only five miles from Jerusalem; and in Jerusalem, the family of Herod still ruled. Herod was dead now; but his son, Archelaus, now ruled over Judaea. Now, just to give you an idea of what this happy little family was like, Herod the Great (the original Herod, the one who tried to kill Jesus) murdered his own father and mother; three of his own sons; his second wife, and her brother; his own uncle Joseph; and many other close friends and loyal servants. Three of his sons now ruled over the three provinces of Israel; and they were just like their father. *All* Herod's descendants had the same murderous and shockingly immoral character that their papa had. It was nothing for them to kill even their closest friends and family members, if they felt that they might pose a threat to their power.

And so, in order to protect Jesus' life, Joseph went back up to Galilee, to his original hometown of Nazareth. Of course, even in Nazareth, they were not free from danger. Herod's son, Herod Antipas, now ruled over Galilee; and he was just like his daddy. Herod Antipas was the one who would later behead John the Baptist for daring to condemn his adulterous relationship with his own sister-in-law. He was also the one who would later mock Jesus on the night of His trial. With a man like Herod Antipas on the throne, Galilee wasn't the safest place, either! Nonetheless, Nazareth was far away from the "hot spot" of Bethlehem. God knew that His Son would be safe in the remote, northern town of Nazareth.

Now, we must remember that going to Nazareth was not Joseph's idea. *God Himself* instructed Joseph, in a dream, to take his family into Galilee. *God* had a purpose in bringing Jesus to Nazareth; and His purpose was not merely that Jesus might grow up in a relatively safe place. Once again, there was a **prophecy** that had to be fulfilled. Let's read the Scripture again, and see what that prophecy was. (**Read Matthew 2:22-23 again.**)

Matthew says that God instructed Joseph to go into Galilee, and to the city of Nazareth, so that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, "***He shall be called a Nazarene.***" Now, what prophecy is Matthew talking about? I have read through the Old Testament hundreds of times; but nowhere have I ever read the statement, "***He shall be called a Nazarene.***" This statement is not found in the Old Testament. What prophecy is Matthew talking about, then?

Well, first of all, you'll notice that Matthew did not say that this statement was "*written*" by the prophets: instead, he said that it was "***spoken***" by the prophets. This was an *oral* prophecy. Apparently, God had given this prophecy orally, to at least a couple prophets; and it had been passed down by word of mouth for a good while.

As you read through the Old Testament, you will find that God *often* gave oral prophecies, which were never written down. Sometimes, though, oral prophecies *were* written down years later, by another prophet. For example, in **Ezekiel 38**, God spoke to Magog (Russia), and foretold his future defeat on the mountains of Israel, during the Tribulation period. He said, "***Art thou he of whom I have spoken in old time by my servants the prophets of Israel, which prophesied in those days many years that I would bring thee against them?***" Now, this prophecy had never been written down before. Apparently, it had only been *spoken* by God's prophets. But now, it was *written* down in Scripture, by the prophet Ezekiel.

Another good example is the prophecy of Enoch. About 3,000 years before Christ, Enoch prophesied, "***Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment***

*upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.*” Again, this was an *oral* prophecy. It had been passed down orally for many years; but it wasn’t until about A.D. 66 that God moved Jude to write down this prophecy as Scripture. So it was with this prophecy that the Messiah would be *“called a Nazarene.”* For many years, this prophecy had been *spoken*; but now, in the Gospel of Matthew, it finally was *written down*.

Now, even though this prophecy had been *spoken* for many years, there is a *written* prophecy that does give us a little “hint” that the Messiah would be called a Nazarene. In fact, this *written* prophecy may be the basis for the *oral* prophecy, which God may have given to His prophets sometime later. Let’s take a look at this written prophecy.

### **Isaiah 11:1-2**

In this verse, God is giving us a striking picture. Isaiah prophesied that a *“rod”* (a young, sapling tree) would one day spring forth from out of the *“stem”* of Jesse. The Hebrew word for *“stem”* refers to the “stump” of a tree that has been cut down. The picture that Isaiah is giving us is that of a great tree that has been cut down; and the stump of that tree is now rotting and decaying. Yet, right in the middle of this decaying stump, another little sapling tree has sprung up, and is taking root.

Now, who is this little sapling tree? He is Jesus, the Messiah--the one who is filled with the Spirit of the LORD! And what does the “stump” of the tree represent? It represents the royal house of David. About six hundred years before Jesus was born, the last king of Judah, King Jehoiachin, had been deposed from his throne by the king of Babylon; and ever since then, no one had sat on the throne of David. It was as though the royal line of David had been “cut down,” like a tree. Yet, from out of this decaying, royal house of David, the *true* Son of David, the Messiah, suddenly sprang up, in a little town called Bethlehem! The Messiah is the great Descendant of David. He “sprang up” from David’s line, like a branch from a tree. That is why Isaiah calls Him the *“Branch.”*

Now, this is not the only prophecy where Christ is called *“The Branch.”* In the books of **Isaiah**, **Jeremiah**, and **Zechariah**, Christ is called *“The Branch”* six times. (And this is not counting the times when He is called a “rod,” or a “tender plant,” or a “root.”) He is called “The Branch of the LORD.” He is called “The Branch of David.” He is also called “The righteous BRANCH.” This beautiful name, “The Branch,” reminds us that Christ would have *human* origins **and** *divine* origin. He is the “Branch” (or “Son”) of David; but He is also the “Branch” (or “Son”) of God.

Now, there are two words for “branch” in Hebrew. One of these two words is *tsemach*. In five of the six times when Messiah is called “the Branch,” this word *tsemach* is used. However, in **Isaiah 11:1**, Isaiah uses *another* word for “Branch”; and that word is *netzer*.

Now, does that word *netzer* ring a bell? It sounds a bit like the word “Nazareth,” does it not? That’s because “Nazareth” is based on the word *netzer*! Is that a coincidence? I think not! Every time we say “Jesus of Nazareth,” we are really saying “Jesus the BRANCH”!

It has been two thousand years since Christ came into our world; but He is still called “The Nazarene”--the Branch! To this day, Jewish people (including unbelieving Jews) still call

Him “the Nazarene.” In fact, Jewish people call *Christians* by this name, as well! Christians were already being called “Nazarenes” during the lifetime of the Apostles. For example, in **Acts 24**, Paul’s enemies referred to Paul as a “**ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes**.” To this day, Jewish people still call Jesus *haNotzriy* (the Nazarene), and they refer to Christians as *haNotzrim* (the Nazarenes).

I don’t know about you; but I don’t mind being called by that name! Jesus is the Branch of Jehovah, and the Branch of David; and by faith, I have entered into union with Him. Like the old hymn writer, I can truly say that “I stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene”! Have *you* entered into union with “the BRANCH”? Have you believed on Jesus the Nazarene? If not, I urge you to do so!

Now, why else did the Father call His Son to Nazareth? Jesus was called to Nazareth...

## II. To grow up before the LORD as a tender plant.

### Isaiah 53:1-2

**Isaiah 53** is one of the most beautiful and powerful prophecies of Christ in the Old Testament. Right at the beginning of this chapter, we are told that the Messiah would grow up “**before**” (or, “in the presence of”) the LORD; and as He would grow up, He would be like “**a tender plant**,” and like “**a root out of a dry ground**.” How appropriate that this one who is called “**the Branch**” would grow up in a town whose name means “branch”! Jesus was *born* in Bethlehem; but He *grew up*, like a tender plant, in Nazareth.

By the way, think about that for a moment. The Son of God actually had to *grow up*! As God, He had always been; but as a Man, He had to grow physically, mentally, and emotionally, like any other human being. As God, he was omniscient; but as Man, He had to *learn* to speak, and to walk, and to be potty trained, and to read, and to do chores, and to work the trade of carpentry! The one whose hands had formed the worlds had to be *taught* how to form letters, and how to form boards, and beams, and furniture. The one who is without any sin nonetheless had to subject Himself to the authority of flawed and sinful human parents (as well as flawed and sinful rabbis, and princes, and kings). Though He is God, He willingly waived His rights as God. He “**took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men**.” Though He could have used His divine power to make His life a lot easier, He chose not to use His power for Himself. In fact, He did no miracles at all until He began His ministry at age thirty. When He *did* begin to do miracles, it was always for *others’* benefit, and not His own.

The Bible doesn’t tell us much about Jesus’ growing-up years; but we do have one small glimpse of His character at age 12. Let’s take a look at that.

### Luke 2:41-52

Can you imagine what it would have been like to be one of those rabbis, as this twelve-year-old boy expounded upon the words of Moses and prophets? Little did they realise that they were speaking with the One who had *given* these words to Moses and the prophets! Yet, Jesus was not using His *divine omniscience* as He spoke to the rabbis: He was using the *human knowledge* that He had acquired in his twelve years of life, through fervent study of the Scriptures. Now, He certainly *could have* used His divine knowledge, and blown them all

away; but He didn't. How do I know? Because Luke tells us in **verse 52** that Jesus ***"increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man."*** As He grew, His knowledge increased.

Can we draw a life application from this? We certainly can! The application is that **we need to be serious students of God's Word!** You see, we tend to learn and remember things that are important to us. If we think that it is important to learn and remember all the football stats of all the national and international football teams over the past half-century, then we do it. If we believe that it is important to learn everything that we can learn about a particular skill or field of knowledge, we do it. If we choose to *excel* in a field of knowledge, we do it. But what about the Scriptures? Do we consider it important to learn God's Holy Word to the utmost of our ability? Jesus thought it was! As a twelve-year-old boy, He astounded the most learned rabbis in the land; and He did it *without* using His divine omniscience. Undoubtedly, He brought up the question of why the Messiah is portrayed in the Scriptures as the *conquering King* of Israel, yet, at the same time, as a *suffering and dying Servant*. Undoubtedly, Jesus also astounded the rabbis with His sense of purpose and destiny. Jesus' statement, ***"Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"***, says it all. Jesus wasn't goofing off and fooling around. He wasn't an immature boy who didn't want to grow up. He wanted to do His *Father's* business; and He was using His time wisely to prepare Himself to do His Father's will.

We will probably never fully understand Christ's incarnation. We will probably always have questions about how Jesus' divine and human natures interacted with each other. One thing is for sure, though: Jesus *was* and *is* a true Man; and He *did* grow up like a tender plant, or like a root, or a Branch. As the Branch of the LORD, He grew up in the town that means "Branch."

But why else did the Father call His Son to Nazareth? Jesus was called to Nazareth...

### III. To fulfil "the Light in Galilee" prophecy

#### Matthew 4:12-17

Every Jewish person knew that the Messiah was supposed to be born in Bethlehem of Judaea, in the south of Israel. Yet, it was also prophesied that the Messiah would, in some way or other, arise from Galilee, in the north. Galilee was the region where the tribes of Zebulon and Naphtali had dwelt in ancient times. Galilee was the region by the Sea of Kinnereth, which lay on the border of the Gentile nations of Phoenicia and Syria.

Now, sad to say, this region was looked upon with contempt by the rulers of Israel. They didn't see it as the "happening place." Yet, God said that the people in this region would be the first ones to see the ***"great light"*** of their Messiah. Let's look at the prophecy that Matthew is quoting.

#### Isaiah 9:1-2

We don't have time this morning to read **Isaiah chapter 8**; but I challenge you to take a read of it. As you read through **Isaiah 8**, you will find that it ends on a very dark, gloomy note. In this passage, Isaiah prophesied that as punishment for Israel's sins, she would ***"behold trouble and darkness,"*** and ***"dimness of anguish,"*** and would be ***"driven to darkness."*** God warned Israel that in every way--socially, materially, nationally, and spiritually--they would enter into

a time of great darkness. Because they refused to stop worshipping idols and breaking God's covenant, God would allow the Assyrians to invade the northern part of Israel, and take the people away as captives. Then, He would allow the Babylonians to take away the people of Judah as captives. Even when they finally returned to their land, they would be servants to foreign powers, and would be poor and downtrodden. That was exactly the state of things at the time when Jesus was born. Israel was groaning under the heavy and cruel hand of Rome. Worst of all, most of them did not truly know their God. They knew the Scriptures in their heads; but they had totally missed how to have a personal relationship with God, by simple faith and repentance of heart. They were in spiritual darkness.

Yet, God said that from the midst of this thick spiritual darkness, a great Light would arise. This Light, He said, would arise in the very region where the *"darkness"* of the Assyrian invasion had begun centuries earlier—in the region of Galilee. That is precisely where the Light of the Messiah arose! Now, Jesus' earthly ministry did officially begin in Judaea, when He was baptised by John the Baptist in the River Jordan. He then had a brief meeting with his first five disciples; and then, He fasted for forty days in the wilderness of Judaea. However, in these early days of His ministry, Jesus did not speak publicly. It was not until *after* His baptism and His days of fasting that Jesus began to preach publicly; and when He did begin to preach, it was not in Judaea. Instead, it was in Galilee--the place where He had grown up. In fact, 80% of Jesus' preaching ministry over the next three years was in the region of Galilee. Jesus made His "home base" in Capernaum, by the Sea of Galilee.

Everywhere Jesus went in Galilee (*and* in Judaea), it was as though the light of the mid-day sun had suddenly appeared in its fullness from out of thick darkness. Jesus' words are pure light, because they proceed forth from the mouth of the omniscient, omnipotent, eternal, immutable, holy, just, and gracious God. Jesus *is* God; and as God, there is *"no darkness in him at all."* He is the Light of the World. He is the *"Sun of righteousness"* (Malachi 4:2).

I would ask this morning, "Have you come to the Sun of righteousness, Jesus Christ? Or are you slinking away from the Light of Christ, and remaining in the shadows of darkness, because you are afraid that if you come too near to Him, your deeds will be reprov'd?" If you are hiding from the Light, I can well understand it. *I* once shrank from the Light, too. However, I can testify that when I came to the Christ, and confessed my sins to Him, and believed, in my heart, that He had paid my full sin debt, and asked Him to forgive me, and to be my Lord and Saviour, it was the best day in my life! He saved me, and cleansed me, and set my feet on a rock, and established my goings. Jesus wants to save you, too, my friend. He came into this world to be the Light of the world, so that we would no longer walk in darkness, but have the Light of life! Should you be without Christ in your heart, won't you come to Him today?

Jesus came to Nazareth so that He could fulfil the "Light in Galilee" prophecy. However, this brings us to the last reason why Jesus came to Nazareth. Jesus was called to Nazareth...

#### IV. To be rejected

In **John 1:10**, we are told that Jesus *"came unto his own* [His own people, the Jews]; yet, *"his own received him not."* How sad that the very people who *should* have known their own Messiah would reject Him! Yet, such was the case.

Now, many of the Jews had the false impression that Jesus had been born in Nazareth instead of Bethlehem. Was *this* the reason they rejected Him? Did it all come down to a tragic misunderstanding about where Jesus was actually born? At first glance, one might think so. Yet, that is not the real reason. When Nathaniel first heard that Jesus was from Nazareth, *his* response was, “***Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?***” Yet, when Philip challenged him to come and find out for himself, he took him up on it; and after meeting Jesus for the first time, he was stunned. He knew that Jesus was the Son of God, and the King of Israel. He instantly placed his trust in Jesus as Messiah!

Now, what is the difference? What is the difference between an ordinary Israelite like Nathanael, who believed on Jesus, and the highly educated leaders of Israel, who rejected Him? The leaders of Israel dismissed Jesus by saying, “***Out of Galilee ariseth no prophet.***” Yet, these old rabbis, who knew the Scriptures so well, seem to have forgotten the prophecy of **Isaiah 9:2!** Somehow, they overlooked the fact that the light of the Messiah was to arise in “***Galilee of the nations***”! Why? How could they miss it? It’s simple. They hated the holy Light of Jesus! They felt threatened by His holiness. It made them see their sinfulness; and they didn’t like that!

Sadly, this rejection of Jesus arose at the very beginning of His ministry; and it began with the people who should have been the most likely to receive Him. At the outset of Jesus’ ministry, the *people of Nazareth* officially rejected their Messiah! Let’s take a look at that occasion.

#### **Luke 4:14-30**

Tragically, the people of Nazareth refused to believe that Jesus is the Messiah. When Jesus claimed to be the fulfilment of Isaiah’s prophecy in **Isaiah 61**, they were offended; and when He went on to say that God cares for the Gentiles, just as He does the Jews, and that He wants to save them, they became murderously angry! They tried to kill Him! **Can you see why Jesus didn’t stay around Nazareth?** Jesus never forces Himself on people who don’t want Him. After the people of Nazareth rejected Jesus, He simply left. He moved His home base to Capernaum, on the Sea of Galilee. Now, sad to say, even Capernaum, for the most part, rejected Him! Jesus later had to denounce Capernaum for their unbelief. Nonetheless, Jesus stayed in Capernaum, because Nazareth had vehemently rejected Him.

Yet, Jesus is filled with compassion and longsuffering. Some time later, Jesus went back to Nazareth, and taught in their synagogue for a *second* time! How was He received then? Let’s turn to **Matthew 13** and find out.

#### **Matthew 13:53-58**

For a second time, the people of Nazareth rejected the Light. The people who had watched Jesus’ spotless character for 33 years should have been the first to receive Him; yet, they didn’t. Their hearts were hardened. Jesus wanted to heal them, both physically and spiritually; but He could do only a few miracles there. Why? “***Because of their unbelief.***”

**Conclusion:** My friend, Jesus wants to heal your soul. He wants to dispel the darkness in your heart. He wants to take away the pain and anguish that your sin has caused you. He wants to save you. However, He will not force you to believe on Him; and He will not plead with you forever. If you have never trusted Christ, I urge you to do so today, while He is still calling! As we close this morning, I would also ask Christians, “How much do you love Him?” Is He your joy of living? Is His Word like sweet honey

to your soul? Are you, like the young Jesus, pouring over His Word, and trying to take in everything that you can? If not, *why* not? Ask the Lord to help you to fall deeply in love with Him, and with His Word!