

Series: **TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE**—December 18, 2011

AN ALIEN INVASION...REALLY?!

Luke 1:26-38; John 1:1-14

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1. How many of you believe in aliens? I do—I am one! And Lori **was** one! Two days after Lori and I married, we had to leave our lovely honeymoon suite in Niagara Falls—you know, the one with the bed with intertwining lavender hearts—and red velvet curtains—and we had to go to the US embassy in Toronto. To live in the US, Lori needed to get her official **alien** card. A year later we moved to Kentucky. It seemed very odd that Lori would be the official alien there with some of the strange people who came to town to get vittles and gunpowder! **Let me tell ya a story about a man named Jed...A poor mountain man, barely kept his family fed...**

-For the next 15 years, Lori had to go to the local US Post Office to register as an **alien!** Then we moved to Markham, and it was **my** turn to be the alien! And it was true. When I told people I had moved from Punxsutawney, they **looked** at me as if I'd come from another planet!

- a. In a world of movies about aliens, let me give you the official definition:
1) a person of another family, race or nation
2) a foreign-born resident who has not be naturalized and is still a subject or citizen of a foreign country.
- b. In our culture, people think of **aliens** as weird looking beings who fly around in UFOs (**pics**)—able to travel at speeds no one can imagine. Some believe in them—some don't. Come to think of it—**Santa and his Elves**—would fit that definition! (**pic**)

2. As I thought about Jesus' coming, I realized that some of the stories of aliens and superheroes resemble the story of Jesus. **Superman [pic]** is the closest connect. An alien baby ends up on earth, and then is adopted and raised as a normal looking, mild-mannered boy—Clark Kent. He lives disguised as a normal person—but uses his super-powers to save the planet from evil.

-You have to admit that some of the details of Jesus' birth would fit the usual outer-space conspiracy theories. Angels--extraterrestrial beings--make contact with humans and tell them that a special baby will be born, called the **Son of God**. When that happens, bright lights in the sky guide stargazers from 600 miles away to the exact location—and hover over the birthplace. And then a whole bunch of bright lights scare shepherds half to death in a nearby field. And this baby grows up to split history in half and change the world. Fascinating story line, isn't it?

-If you run all these details through the UFO conspiracy grid, it **sounds** like a movie directed by Stephen Spielberg. But the real account--corroborated by eyewitnesses—is **way** more profound than that. It's not **scary**—it just sounds **too good to be true!**

- a. What you find is that the Bible had foretold this event in increasing detail for hundreds of years. What appear to be aliens in the story are angels—messengers from God who have always been actively engaged with people. The only reason we would ever see Him and His messengers as aliens—is because **we** have been **alienated** from **Him**.

-When we were created, we were given an amazing—but dangerous gift. It's called **free will**. Choice. Do any of you parents know what the gift of **choice** is? You create children in an act of love—and have this longing for them inside that aches. Literally. You want them to do well, be happy, make a difference, and make **really** wise decisions, right?

- b. But the **real** danger of **choice** is that they can potentially blow you off, make really **bad** decisions, wreck their lives, and be alienated from you and everyone else. God gave **us** the choice to love and follow Him—or **not** love and follow Him. We chose **not** to...and that is at the core of the problems and suffering...and **evil** we see. The Christmas story is the story of how God acted in history—real time and space—to **rescue** us and all that's been lost.

3. Now, when you think about who God is, He could've made a **very** impressive entrance! The mystery—and beauty--of Christmas is how He chose to come. Let's read the story.

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you." Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favour with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end." "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail." "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her. (Luke 1:26-38 NIV)

- a. The angel or messenger, Gabriel—who just shows up to talk to Mary, would **definitely** be considered **extraterrestrial** by our standards, right? Now, Mary doesn't scream and run because she **knows** the history of these powerful spirit messengers sent by God.

-What she **is** troubled by is the **message**. Gabriel connects her with everything the prophets had said would happen. She **knew** the history, that God would

intervene to rescue His people with a great **Saviour**, a descendant of David. That's what you see in the angels words. So far so good, right?

- b. Well, then there's the announcement that Mary, with her current status as an unmarried 14, 15 or 16 year old girl, is going to conceive and give birth to a baby boy. We have reality shows called **16 and Pregnant**. Mary never watched it. To be, say, 15 and pregnant out of wedlock in Palestine 2000 years ago was dangerous—just like it is in some Middle Eastern countries today.

-What happened to Mary without a doubt **alienated** her from just about everyone in her world. The eyewitness account—likely given by Mary herself—tells us that she almost immediately goes to live with Elizabeth--her relative. That says to me that she her family probably didn't believe her story about Gabriel's message!

-Put yourself in her sandals. God has honoured you with the highest honour any human could ever receive. You will be a part of rescuing all of humanity and restoring a broken world! But...**but...**the events themselves bring you shame and judgment in the little town you call home and changes your relationships with everyone you love. The truth about what's actually happening sounds ridiculous. People think you're lying.

- c. When you read on, you find out why God chose Mary for this job. Listen to these incredible words:

“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” (Luke 1:38 NIV)

-You think about it. With those words **everything** in her world changed; her reputation, her relationship with her family, her health, her body, her engagement to Joseph—I mean **everything** was up for grabs! The best word to describe her experience is...**ALIEN-ated**. Elizabeth may have initially been the **only** one who believed her story!

4. When she got back from Elizabeth's she was 3 months along by then—which is when being pregnant starts to become obvious; you don't just **glow**—you **grow!** And Joseph was obviously **devastated** when he became aware of what was going on.

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” (Matthew 1:18-21 NIV)

-And when Joseph obeyed—he was **alienated** along with her. He was a carpenter—or a stone mason. The people of Nazareth were considered red-necks anyway, by

people of that day. Imagine the locker-room talk. “**Hey Joe, you sly dog you! Heh, heh, heh! Now we know your dirty little secret!**” What’s Joseph going to say? “Hey guys, God did this...not me!”

-There are clues in the story that Joseph does **everything** to avoid moving back to Nazareth after the baby’s born. See, he knows that in a small town, the gossip machine **never** stops! Heck, it never stops in **cities!** And scent of scandal never leaves he and Mary’s lives.

5. Now, if I were Joseph or Mary, I’d think, “It’s okay. We can endure the snickers and humiliation for now—but one day when Jesus grows up—as the rightful King and Messiah, **they’ll** know that **God** was behind this whole thing! That never happened—not in Joseph’s lifetime. By the time Joseph died—Jesus, who was perhaps in his 20’s—had just taken on his Dad’s trade and never assumed **any** throne. He got bullied and was forced to pay taxes like everyone else. I sometimes wonder if Joseph died a puzzled—or even disappointed man—asking, “What was all the **angel** stuff about? **Really?!**”

-John’s account of Jesus’ coming reflects the mystery of this whole thing. He writes:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind...He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:1-4, 10-14 NIV)

-Think about this for just a minute. God created **everything**. And His plan was to make all things new and offer a way back. When you think about what He did and all He stood for, it’s clear that He wanted **everyone** to find forgiveness, **everyone** to find hope, **everyone** to find life. You know how people sing about their dreams at Christmas?

**No more lives torn apart
That wars would never start
And time would heal all hearts
That everyone would have a friend
And right would always win
And love would never end
This is my grown up Christmas list.**

- a. Jesus came to do all that—and way, **WAY** more. And that’s the first twist in this story. Jesus came to make this world—and make **us**—all we were originally created to be! This, friends, is an **alien invasion** if there ever was one! God shows up here!

-It would appear that He's **disguised** as a baby, but He's not. He emptied Himself of his authority and rights as God. As a baby, He **really did** need His Mom; He **really did** need to be carried, changed, taught to talk and walk and eat with the proper etiquette. When he was rejected and insulted—it really **hurt**. He went through puberty, had to learn **how** to use tools. When His Dad, Joseph died—He cried.

- b. As He lived her among us—He loved. He gave his life away. In most of the talk and movies about aliens, they almost always want to take something from us, right? They want our planet; they want to do experiments on animals or people. The **second** twist in this story is that Jesus didn't come to **take**, do experiments—or even conquer; He came to **give**—to lay down His life.
- c. Are you ready for the third twist? **He wasn't the alien! WE ARE!** Did you catch how John, this man who spent so much time with Jesus, puts it?

He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. (John 1:10-11 NIV)

-That, friends, is an **astounding** thought! That those who have rebelled, rejected God's authority and ownership, trashed His creation—and flipped off His leadership--**treat Him like He's the alien!** We wrote **REJECT...LOSER** across his life, nailed him to a cross and sneered while He died.

-Instead of retaliation—which movies are good at—God used the murder of his Son as a way of bringing estranged, alienated people back into His love and grace—and heal our hearts. Presents, decorations, Christmas trees and lights, dinners, stars and stories of angels aren't what makes Christmas a magnificent celebration—worthy of the world's attention.

-What makes Christmas so powerful and breathtaking—is that it celebrates an invasion of goodness, love, grace and peace that changed the world forever. An invasion that started with a tiny baby—when God came gently to what He already owned—because, see, He created it! It all seems **too good to be true!** What makes it so immensely good...is that it **IS true!**

6. Now. Do you want to know what sticking point—the **hard** thing is for most people when it comes to the **truth** about Christmas? It's not just a nice story. Every person has to actually make a personal **decision** about Jesus. The truth about Jesus is not like math—or physics.

-It was Jesus' **value** system that made him the alien. In a world of self-interest—He called people to love. In a world of retaliation, He called people to be **peace-makers**. In a world of people who demand to be served, He called people to humble themselves—and serve. *And* in a world where everyone is pretty much out to save their money, save their ego, save their skin—He called people to lay it **all** on the line and **follow** him. And that is **alien** to our world.

-So we sing the carols, put up the tree, and shed a tear over baby Jesus—tiny, little baby Jesus—in that filthy manger. John—who wrote that Jesus came to a world He made and was refused entry—later wrote these words said by Jesus Himself:

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.
(Revelation 3:20 NIV)

-The heart is the core of our lives; it's where we choose our values, make our decisions—and decide what our lives will be about.

-So, we have a choice. We either choose to follow—or not. Either the story of Jesus is all wrong—and **He's** the alien—or we're wrong—the ones who have strayed—and **we're** the aliens. Sometimes **truth** is hard to hear.

-Years ago the band I was traveling with was making plans for when we would leave the next day for another gig. Well, I disagreed with the rest of them—pontificating on why I was right, why I knew that part of the state—blah, blah, blah. Doggonit, I was right!

-The next day I felt somewhat...**alienated**. I eventually asked, "What's going on? We don't feel...**unified!**" All eyes turned toward me—and the next 60 minutes were devastating. I came face to face with my pride, my self-centeredness—and a **whole** bunch of junk that I didn't want to see or own. And then I had a choice. Either **they** could be the problem and **I** would remain **alienated**—or I could own the truth. My heart broke. I asked for and found forgiveness—and grace. I will **never** forget that day!

-Because Jesus came, you and I don't have to stay alienated. We can have life, peace and grace. But we have to give up our need to be right, and **choose** Him—and open the door of our heart—and just invite Him in. See, all the gift-giving of Christmas started with God—He gave His Son. But a gift has to be received to be a gift, right?

-And I want to invite you to choose today. God has made it simple. It means humbling ourselves—saying, "God, doing life my way is **not** working—I am **not** becoming the person you created me to be. Today, I want to confess my waywardness—my tendency to call **you** the alien. **I'm** the alien! And I want to follow your Son, Jesus. Would you come now—and take full possession of my heart—forgive me for my sin—and restore me to yourself. Please!" And He's promised that He will!