

# A Holy Man of God

by Fred Tomilson

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*This sermon delves into the story of Mary's encounter with the angel Gabriel and her willingness to bear the Son of God, emphasizing the profound impact of Christ being formed within us. It challenges listeners to consider the cost of true discipleship, where surrendering everything to God is essential. The core message revolves around the transformative power of Christ dwelling in believers, leading to a life marked by holy conduct and godliness.*

**Scripture:** Luke 1:35, Galatians 4:19, Philippians 2:5, John 1:14, 1 Peter 1:15, Matthew 10:22, Matthew 10:34, Luke 9:23, 2 Corinthians 6:16

**Topics:** "Willingness to Surrender", "Transformative Power of Christ"

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## Description

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## Transcript

My voice is not very strong this morning for some reason, which is never very strong, so you can guess what the reason is. I'd like you to turn with me, please, to 2nd Kings, 2nd book of Kings, and chapter 4, 2nd Kings chapter 4. Appreciate it, Mary's playing this morning, thank you, thank you. All right, I'm in chapter 4, and looking down to verse 8. Now there came a day when Elisha passed over Shunam, where there was a prominent woman, and she persuaded him to eat food.

And so it was, as often as he passed by, he turned in there to eat food. She said to her husband, Behold now, I perceived that this is a holy man of God passing by us continually. Please let us make a little walled upper chamber, and let us set a bed for him there, and a table, and a chair, and a lampstand, and it shall be when he comes to us that he can turn in there.

And the story continues, but I will not continue to read. Let's just leave it there for now. I think what I want to say, more than anything else, is our exposure and our interaction with others inevitably deposits an impression upon them for better or for worse, and that's how it is, isn't it, in life.

I suppose common features that we could think of are, well, perhaps our dress, the way we present ourselves, the manner of our speech will make its own unique impression. Perhaps the topics that we

commonly choose to discuss will also make an impression. Some people will leave the impression that they're a very humble person or individual.

There will be others who will give the impression that they're anxious to impress one way or another. I think there will be yet others who will be discerned to be insecure, maybe even spiritually unclean. Maybe from time to time we will sense that there's some demonic darkness involved in the life.

So there's a whole variety of ways in which impressions are made that are unavoidable. For the most part, they're not being made deliberately. They're just the impressions of who we are and how we present ourselves and how we interact with other people.

We're reading here about this woman, and she has a husband, and, of course, Elisha is the prophet of God in the story. The woman didn't see an Elisha, I'm sure of this, she didn't see a cross hanging around his neck. Well, of course, she wouldn't.

Anyway, that particular stage in history. She wasn't looking at a T-shirt with some religious slogan or statement or even scripture on it. And I'm equally certain that she didn't pick up on the bumper sticker he had on his car.

But she picked up this, that he was a man of God. That's the first thing. And I've asked myself, you know, perhaps, and I have to use my imagination, what was it about him that created that impression? I can't be sure that I'm accurate about this, but perhaps it was the cloak that he was wearing and the ritual fringes around the cloak, which are prescribed in the book of Leviticus, the fringes which would remind the wearer of the commandments of God.

That would be, I think, a giveaway. But more than that, it says here in the scripture that she said to her husband, I perceive that this is a holy man of God that passes by us continually. There was more to it.

There was, once again, no one can be dogmatic about, well, it was this or it was that in particular that impressed her. But clearly there was an observation that she made of this man that led us to this conclusion. There's no record given to us of the first event that they met.

He passed by regularly. Some of you will have heard me say this before, commenting on this text, that a memory I have was when I was still yet a policeman and I was invited, I was part of something called the Christian Police Association and I was invited to speak to a group of professing Christian policemen and I chose this as my text. I perceive that this is a holy man of God that passes by us continually.

Clearly there was, as I say, we don't know what happened on the first meeting, but at some stage they decided, she and her husband, to invite him in for a meal as he traveled past and were led to believe that that happened on a number of occasions. So this would give opportunity, sitting around a table, there would be conversation and interaction with him and clearly there was something more than just his clothing that was impressing her about him and led her to this conclusion that this man is not merely a man of God in a sort of a broad generic sense of that term, but she said this is a holy man of God, something deeper. She had a sense that there was a depth about this man spiritually that she was picking up on and that was impressing her and so on.

Before going any further, I want to ask you to just use your own, perhaps it's going to be your imagination, because you will not be the best judge of this, but I'm wondering how you may sense that people discern you as you interact with them, the people that you meet. What impression do you make? I've been talking

to some of you for a long time, so one or two of the things that I use to illustrate particular points will be repeated. But when I was reading through the scripture and thinking about this particular feature in it, I thought about something that took place in 1966 when my brother had climbed over the Brethren Wall and gone to a meeting on the outside of our group of assemblies, which was not common in those days and we didn't have exposure to other denominations at all, so we were pretty exclusive.

And my brother came home seven years younger than me, he was 17 at the time, and he was trying to convince me that I needed to go to one of these meetings and meet some of these people and I was resisting it because we were brethren and we don't do those kinds of things and so on. But on one occasion I remember he said to me, he said, Fred, he said, the man who was preaching had white hair. Don't forget, he was 17.

He said, the man who was preaching had white hair, but as I looked at him and as I listened to him, more than anything else in the world, I wanted to be like that man. That's quite something. And I'm speaking to quite a few people here who have grey hair or no hair maybe, one or two of us, or very little.

But the point is, isn't that something? And I'm asking you the question, how do people perceive you? What is it they detect about your life that distinguishes you in a particular way? Could it be that a teenager meeting you for a little while would go home and say to his older brother, I've just met a man of God, a holy man of God, and more than anything else in the world, I found I wanted to be like that man. That's an amazing statement. And he said it with full sincerity.

There was nothing trite about it at all. So this is a really important question. What is the manner and conduct of my life and my interaction, my conversation? Is it holy, my conversation? Peter uses that word in the Old King James.

Other translations have it, your manner of life. But it's to be godly, holy and godly. Could it be an accurate description of your life, do you think? And again, we can have sort of our own ideas about it and using our imagination, perhaps we could be foolish and imagine, well, it probably is the way people see us.

But the real test, of course, is how the people out there, whoever they are, and in whatever context, whether they're members of your own family or whether they're people that you meet in the place where you work or in the neighborhood or wherever it is. I'm certain of this one thing for each and every one of us here, that that would be the desire, a deep burning desire of your heart, that that would be true. We all recognize immediately that that is how it ought to be.

That is how we ought to be living in such a manner and be so Christ-like that people actually sense something of the aroma of Christ or the presence of Christ or the Word of God in the context of our speaking or whatever. And that's the real question that occurs to me as I read this passage. Let's just sort of pivot away from this for just a moment or two.

When we find ourselves confronted with the word holy, what really crosses our mind, and I don't want to spend a long time, we're not doing a big word search in scripture to sort of get an answer to this, but how do we understand the concept of holy? When I said a holy man of God, something resonates within us. What is it? How could we describe that, do you think? I know that God said concerning himself, two very specific occasions I find in scripture where we read God speaking. He said, I am holy, and there are other variations on that, but two of those very clear statements, I am holy, we know that God is a holy God.

The psalmist certainly was very clear on that with a number of his own statements and so on. We keep in mind as we step into this area of questioning that the holiness of God is something that is utterly unknown in this world. If I can use the word carefully, it's alien to this world.

It's something else. Frankly, I feel, and I just did this down as a note of my own, when I think of the topic of the holiness of God, I think rather than being able to define it specifically, because I don't believe that any of us are capable of doing that, because it's something outside of this world. It's outside the framework of anything that we can comprehend and understand.

We can come up with a few neat little definitions that are temporally satisfying in a very limited way, but the thought that comes to my mind is it's like a signpost that's pointing into a thick mist. In my early growing up days, living near to the Irish Sea, and also taking into account that we had a serious problem with smog, as we called it. Fog, you know, London fog.

Well, I came from Liverpool. But fog was common in those days. Almost everyone burned coal for their heating, and the smoke would go up with whatever pollutants.

And, of course, with all the heavy mist being near to the water and so on, it would hang there. And you've all heard the term P super. Well, that's because very often it was like a green mist.

And there's more to be said about that. Sometimes we'd be told at work that all the transportation was being canceled, and so we could go home early. If you were sensible, you brought a flashlight with you to work to help you find your way home.

But anyway, I know what a fog is. This is not a green smog that I'm thinking about. I think this is a mist that is more defined as the glory of God.

It's the mystery of the true identity of God that is beyond us. And so we have words of Scripture and statements, which are like signposts. They point us in that direction, that God is holy or the holiness of God.

And we say, yes, I believe that. And we try our best to say, well, I understand it. But really we don't because it's too great for us.

Because what we quickly pick up from our reading is that really holiness identifies who he is. He is holy. I am holy, says the Scripture.

And so really we've got a term here in our language that is given to us biblically or in the words of Scripture to identify something of the very essence of who God is. It's not a reference to what he does. It's a reference to who he is.

Our God is holy with whatever that means and includes, which is beyond my comprehension. That's God. There comes a time as we read through the Scriptures where we turn that last page of the book of Malachi and we move on into the New Testament.

It starts out the book of the generation of Jesus Christ. And we've moved at that point, although it's not yet been inaugurated and certainly not explained yet, but we've moved at that point out from under the old covenant and we're moving step by step into the new covenant that God would make through the purchase of the shed blood of Christ as we've been thinking as we've broken bread this morning and so

on. And so what I'm saying here is that with this mystery concerning the identity of God which has persisted before us as we've read through the Old Testament Scriptures, we finally turn to the New Testament and the person, Jesus Christ, steps onto the stage of history and he's put before us.

And we know how that there are a variety of statements that we find then in the New Testament that speak of him in particular ways. Not least of those would be the statement that the word was made or the word became flesh and dwelt among us. The word of God, the logos of God, the one who created all things and without him nothing was created.

This eternal being stepped onto the stage of history and lived among us. The apostle John said we beheld his glory. Again, he makes a variety of statements where he speaks about we not only saw him but we gazed upon him, he says in his first epistle.

He says our hands have handled the word of life and the writer to the Hebrews says concerning him that he was the radiance of his father's glory, the exact representation of his nature. And the hymn writer says, God in man, the oneless blending. The person of Jesus Christ or in the person of Jesus Christ, heaven came down to us.

God came down and chose to reveal himself in human form. This was entirely new. We know that he came at that stage in order to die and in order to give his life.

He did live but he didn't come into this world just to live as we came into this world. He came into this world to die. He came so that he could as a man, as a pure man, a sinless man, present his life as an offering for us all.

We understand that. But the fact is during this period which is recorded through the Gospels, God was manifested in a manner that was formerly unknown to men and women in the entirety of history. God was revealed in human flesh.

And John, as I've been quoting him, he would speak in these terms of astonishment and amazement, of being transfixed, of not just looking and glancing and seeing but gazing upon him is the one word that he uses in particular in his first chapter of 1 John. He says, we've gazed upon him, suggesting that we've gazed with wonder and amazement at this mystery, the mystery that the God of creation, the God of eternity, would come among us and that we could be so honored, so privileged as to be chosen to walk with him and be fellowshiping with him, to hear his word, to be exposed to his life and more yet than that. Glory to God.

And as he lived out his life, he lived out his life as the ultimate Jewish man. That is, he kept and fulfilled all of the various rituals and the commandments of God as was required of the Jewish people. At that time, of course, no one fulfilled them as he did.

He fulfilled everything perfectly. Every jot and tittle, he fulfilled it perfectly. Not all the whims of the Pharisees, but that which had been the word of God.

He kept that in every detail. And he walked in absolute obedience to his Father through the entirety of the journey of those years that he lived on this earth. He was undoubtedly the first and the ultimate and most holy man to walk upon the face of this earth.

He was impeccable. He was flawless. He walked perfectly before his Father.

He honored his Father in everything. And what we're looking at here and trying to consider is God incarnate, God incarnated. Wesley said God contracted to a span, incomprehensibly made man.

That this could be is an amazing concept, certainly. That he could walk among us as a man and yet never cease to be God. He took this step himself.

He made himself. Paul tells us that, Philippians chapter 2. And he was everything and did everything that makes a man human except sin. He was not of the seed of the first Adam.

Had he been that, had Mary made a contribution to him, he would not have qualified to become our Savior. He had to be completely man, but he had to be pure and spotless and sinless in order for his shed blood to be a satisfactory offering to his Father. And we know that he willingly surrendered himself.

This awesome God. He willingly surrendered himself to human limitations. God in Christ became tired.

He became hungry. He thirst. He wept.

He had faith. He felt pain. And ultimately he died.

That dense fog that I referred to, that heavy mist that I find in the Old Testament that surrounds the being of God and the holiness of God was somehow lifting during the period of the life and ministry of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. As he walked upon this earth. And man was able to gain a grasp of the holiness of God to a higher level than was possible in the past because they saw God in human terms.

Yes, he was restricted. He was contracted, etc. But the fact is his life was distinctive.

This was the mystery. He was one of us and yet he was not one of us. He was altogether separate from us and yet in a sense he came in the form that we could relate to and understand as we watch the behavior of his life and so on.

And man in studying these things begins in some small degree to comprehend the incomprehensible, the identity of our God. We could look at some of the things that he said but I'm wanting to focus for a minute here on one of his statements which I think of as it's like a verbal explosion to us. When he said, you'll remember the statement immediately, he said, I am with you but I shall be in you.

I don't know a better way to describe that statement as being explosive. This very God, this almighty, this I'm describing or attempted to describe him as this spaceless, beginningless God who spoke and creation sprang into being and becoming a man walking about in the area of Israel and Galilee and talking to ordinary people and holding their babies and blessing them and so on and so on. But then as we begin to gain some sense and understanding, albeit very small, of the fact that this man is the Messiah, he is the God, he's the almighty God somehow here in flesh and we struggle to get hold of it but then I hear him say, I am with you but I shall be in you.

Really, I sensed as I'm speaking to you that it would be most appropriate for us all to fall on our faces at the very thought of such a thing. I believe that this statement lies right at the central core of the Christian Gospel and frankly, I believe it is a great truth that is commonly missed. I think in our sincere efforts to make the Gospel known to the multitudes, there's been such an emphasis on trying to somehow make it all simple and understandable and so we have phrases like seeker-friendly and so on.

But what we've been doing, notwithstanding a degree of sincerity, but we've reduced the irreducible truth to some kind of lowest common denominator. We've discounted the mysteries and the challenges and the costs and all those things and we've brought it right down so it's a most attractive simple thing and we say with sincerity, I'm not being foolish. We say if you just follow this prayer now that I'm going to pray, follow my words and pray this prayer which we've chosen to call the sinner's prayer and accept Christ as your Saviour even though we don't find scriptures like this anywhere in the Bible.

Accept Jesus into your heart and so on. But we've made it sort of neat and tidy and albeit attractive, we've surrounded it by all kinds of glittery packaging. Do you understand me? So that the whole thing of Christianity has become such an attractive appealing thing and this very simple thing, sign here and you've got your ticket to heaven when you die and so on.

And again, I'm not being facetious or silly. But the fact is we're told then what you need to do, do read your Bible, do attend the church and try, I'm not saying it would always be put in these terms, try to live your life as much as you can in the way that Jesus lived his life and so on. And we present that as the gospel and we've lost the miracle of it.

We've lost the miracle. I am with you, I shall be in you. We need now to say, well, how? How does this happen? How can that happen in my life, someone would be saying.

I believe that this miracle, which again is at the very core, the center of the Christian gospel, can be illustrated and is illustrated graphically and powerfully in the interaction between a young Jewish virgin and the angel Gabriel. You'll remember the occasion. And I believe that this great truth, this core truth of the gospel is woven into that interaction that took place there.

I understand that what was happening in and of itself, discounting for this moment the fact that it's going to have a benefit for us as we try to understand salvation, but we understand that what was happening had to happen the way it did in order to make salvation a possibility. But then as we watch and listen to the interaction between the angel and Mary, something resonates in our hearts as being true also of the response which is appropriate so far as grasping and experiencing the richness of the gospel. In other words, I read in Luke chapter 1, it says the angel spoke to Mary and he said, and she was shocked, it was an angel speaking to her, of course.

But then the angel spoke to her and he said that you are going to conceive a son in your womb and he shall be called the son of God. You know, that's precisely what we're talking about this morning. That's exactly what must happen in your life and mine.

In fact, I'll go so far as to say if that doesn't happen, we don't qualify to be called Christian. We're talking about a core issue here, that we're sort of stepping into this holy ground as we try to comprehend this even more fully. You'll remember how the apostle Paul is writing to the Galatians and there's some background that goes with this, but then we hear him saying to them, he said, I'm labouring.

In fact, one translation puts it this way, it's as though I am in labour until Christ be formed in you. He saw this, again, he didn't use the word core, but he saw this truth as the core issue at the centre of the Christian gospel. There's all of the truth that surrounds it, all that had to be accomplished by Christ himself at Calvary and the Pentecostal imparting of the Holy Spirit and so on, and doctrine that we have spelled out for us and stretched before us in the New Testament and in the epistles.

But the bottom line is, here, we're talking about this God of eternity that we saw demonstrated, we saw him expressed in the person of Christ as we look through the story. He who was the express image or the exact image of his Heavenly Father, his Holy Father, the Holy Spirit, now is bringing the holy life of Jesus to conceive it in the womb of a human heart is a staggering concept. But Paul said, that's what I'm praying for, and it's as though I'm in labour.

He was in agony about it, he said, because this has got to happen in your life, and I'm going to keep on in this labouring posture. It's painful, but I'm going to keep on until Christ is formed in you. It must happen in your life, it must happen in my life.

Mary is staggered. I hope you feel that also. We must, we must.

We're staggered. What is this? She says, how can this be? She was saying, I'm a virgin, I'm unmarried, I don't know a man. How can this be? And it was the response of the angel that's so helpful to us.

He said, the Holy Ghost or the Holy Spirit will come upon you. And there was a holy thing that was going to occur and come into existence in her womb, it says here. That's the only way it can happen in our life.

It's not merely a matter of just identifying with certain truths. It's not sufficient to say, well, I believe all that. This must happen in our lives.

A Christian is one who is, where there is Christ in a man. A Christian is Christ in a man. This is the miracle, this is the wonder.

It's not cheap, it was not purchased cheaply. It's not something that we casually enter into. It's something that needs to be presented as the authentic biblical gospel.

This is what lies at the core of it. And then we come back to Mary again. And there's no record given here to help us out.

But we can't help but find ourselves imagining in those fleeting moments having heard what the angel has pronounced and stated to her and how it was going to happen. All of it was total mystery, totally beyond her. There was no way that she could cause this to happen alone.

This had to be outside of herself and no man could do it. It had to be God. It has to be God who forms Christ in you and in me.

It has to be Him. But in that moment, and I think there must have been a moment of silence, I don't know how long it lasted, but Mary would think, this is going to impact my whole life. She had a man out there whose name was Joseph and she loved him and he loved her.

They were engaged together to be married. They were like any good human couple who reach this stage and they're anticipating a lifetime of being together and sharing together and having their children together and growing old together. This would change everything.

In that moment, she would be bound to come to the conclusion Joseph will never believe what I'm going to tell him. Of course, we know that God had all that looked after and He arranged for the angels to go and have a chat with Joseph. But this was Mary in the presence of this divine being, this heavenly being, and He's making these staggering statements to her.



And she realized that to give any kind of nod of approval or acceptance of what was being put before her would change her life forever. The cost was inestimable. At the very least, it would be to lose Joseph.

And that would be the end of the world for her, I should think, emotionally, she would think. It would be scandalous to conceive and bear a child outside of wedlock in the small community in which she lived. She wouldn't blend into some big mega city, but her family would know, her neighbors would know.

It was a scandalous thing that was being put before her. Apart from being beyond her ability to measure or understand in any degree at all. In a heartbeat, she said, yes, that's the thing.

In a heartbeat, she said, be it unto me according to your word. That's amazing. And I'm reminding you this morning, this is the truth that lies at the core of the Christian gospel.

In that moment, I believe that holy, holy, holy life of God took up residence in her human body, in her womb. Mary did make no contribution to this. It was God, as someone once put it, it was God burrowing her womb.

But nevertheless, she agreed to it. And she knew what it would look like to others. But the fact is, that is exactly what must happen to every person who is responding to the Christian gospel.

And like Mary, it will cost you everything. No exceptions. This is not just a ticket to put in your back pocket or put in a safe place which is going to supposedly get you through when you reach the pearly gate situation.

No, no, not at all. This is a different issue. It's going to cost you everything.

And frankly, I think, you be the judge of this, I think there are few people in our culture, in our Christian culture as we call it, who are really genuinely understanding this and who are genuinely prepared to pay the price that's involved. And so what do we do? We listen to something like this and we retreat back into something that someone has called Christian light, which makes no demands on us. But we don't reap any of the benefits either.

By the same token, we just have pious words and ideas that we believe certain things, but we've never really had this encounter with the Spirit of God and we've never recognized the challenge, the demands of God upon us. The issue is not just me accepting Christ. We've made it cheap by those very words.

But it's me now, illuminated by the Spirit of God, yielding myself and giving myself to God. Be it unto me according to your word, Lord. Whatever it's going to cost.

Jesus didn't sugarcoat the truth in any way. We've looked at this before. He didn't hide the fact that if you make this kind of choice or this response to God, better put, you're going to be persecuted.

He was right out front. He said, they persecuted me, they will persecute you. If you've got his life in you and it's being lived out through you as God intends it to be, you will be persecuted too.

You won't be the famous man of the moment, or woman of the moment, and so on. He didn't say, by the way. He said, if you're thinking that I've come to bring peace, he said, I've not come to bring peace.

I've come to bring a sword. This is going to upset family people. He didn't say just make a mess of your family for the sake.

He wasn't saying that, but he's saying, in order to follow me and be obedient to me in every single thing, there are going to be people in your family that are going to be offended by it and they won't want to be around you anymore, and there's a cost involved in all of that. That's what Jesus is talking about. He was so honest and right up front with these things.

The question, I suppose, is I'll draw to a close here. In the light of all this, what will your answer be? Will we say, as we understand the truth coming freshly to us, be it unto me according to your word. How does a hymn writer put it? He says, cast out my sin and enter in.

Be born in me today. There'll be a lot of people singing those lines, but do we really know? The Apostle Peter said this in his epistle. He said, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness? Charles Wesley says, O glorious sound of gospel grace, Christ shall in me appear.

There's more to that that's wonderful. I think only on the basis of this kind of response to this great core truth of the gospel will there be any hope that the people you and I interact with daily will be inclined to say this is a holy man of God, a holy woman of God that passes by us continually. Let's pray.

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