

Christmas Sermons-Lowell Johnson

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Related Resource:

- [Ray Pritchard - 50 Christmas Sermons - excellent messages!](#) - here is one I highly recommend - [Four Women in Jesus' Family Tree](#) - not your typical Christmas message but such a good word! Like they say "This one will preach!"
- [Steven Cole - Christmas Sermons](#)
- [Great Sermons on the Birth of Christ by Celebrated Preachers Compiled by Wilbur M. Smith](#) - 15 messages

JOSEPH: I'M DREAMING OF A WHITE CHRISTMAS Matthew 1-2

In 1941, Bing Crosby recorded the biggest selling record ever entitled [I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas](#)." Some years after Crosby recorded "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas," someone took that title and added, "But all it did was rain."

Life is often like that. We dream of a white Christmas, but all it does is rain. We may plan and dream, but often things don't work out the way we plan or dream they will. That's true of our ambitions or the mate we planned to marry or maybe our children don't turn out the way we hoped they would or dreamed they would. We planned and dreamed for things to turn out right and bright and white, and all it did was rain!

In the Old Testament there was a man named Joseph who was a dreamer. When he dreamed, he saw only good things happening to himself. He saw himself as a leader with even his brothers and his father bowing before him. All that did happen, but he didn't see all the rain that would come with the good things he dreamed about. He must have thought during the time of being falsely accused and falsely imprisoned, "That's not what I dreamed for myself at all! Why all the rain?"

This Joseph, who would be the step-father of our Lord, was a dreamer too. Four times in Matthew one and two, we are told that Joseph dreamed a dream, but there were nightmares mingled with his dreams.

Joseph met the girl of his dreams. Mary was probably no more than 14 or 15 when he pledged himself to her. How he must have dreamed of the day that this beautiful, pure girl would become his wife.

Then one day Mary came to him and with a sense of fear, not knowing how Joseph would react, she told him that she was going to

have a baby. Joseph knew that the baby was not his. Who knows what must have gone through Joseph's mind or what questions he must have asked her.

When she told him that an Angel had appeared to her and told her that she had been chosen to be the mother of God's Son, and that she had consented for the Holy Spirit to overshadow her and the child in her was of the Holy Spirit, Joseph didn't believe her and sought to put her away secretly. His dream had turned into a nightmare.

Then, Joseph had a dream. Matthew 1:19-21

In this dream an angel of the Lord appeared to him and told him that Mary was telling him the truth about the baby. The baby was God's Son. Now Joseph's dream was that he could help raise the Son of God.

Then the rain or the nightmare came. Again, things didn't turn out as he had planned. The wise men told Herod of the birth of a child who would become the King of the Jews, and Herod had it in his mind to kill Jesus.

Joseph dreams another dream. Matthew 2:13-14

He thought he was safe again when he was told to flee to Egypt. Then another nightmare. He is safe, but hundreds of babies were butchered in Bethlehem by Herod's soldiers because they were looking for Jesus.

Joseph has another dream . Matthew 2:19-21

Finally, Joseph and Mary and Jesus are going back home to the land of Israel because Herod is dead. Things are bright again! But another nightmare is coming.

Joseph dreams another dream. Matthew 2:22

Because Herod's son, Archelaus, came to the throne, the family had to go to Galilee, a nice beautiful place to live, but he was told to settle in Nazareth, which was so small, it is mentioned only in the Bible because Jesus lived there. It was so small that it would make Plantersville look like the Big Apple. We are told that during our Lord's time, there were less than 20 families living there, somewhere about 30 people. It was an unimportant, crude kind of place. That's why Nathanael said, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

We dream and dream and dream, but our dreams are often like Joseph's. They are kind of ebb and flow. It often rains on our dreams.

But I want you to look closely. The reason for the RAINS is the REIGNS. The reason for the ebb and flow is because GOD REIGNS! Jeremiah 29:11

Notice Matthew 1:22-23.

Notice the phrase, "that it might be fulfilled." Mary being found with child happened because God reigns. Something bigger than you think is happening. That's why all this is happening.

Notice verse 23. When it seems your dreams are not being FILLED, they are being FULFILLED. God's part is taking place. God's script and plan are overshadowing you plans.

Sometimes we say, "Things are just not working out." Are you sure? God is working His script.

Joseph is better known than Tiger Woods and a lot better man. Millions of Joseph's are in the Nativity scenes.

God may be saying to you, "You think what's going on in your life is a nightmare, but it's God's script for you."

Let me tell you about Joseph. Notice Matthew 1:19-20. We are told THREE things about Joseph:

- 1. He was a *JUST man*.
 - That means that he was justified before God by faith. That means God took away his Past, Present, and Future sins. He was Justified; just as if I had never sinned.
- 2. He was a *Gentle man*. He was willing to put Mary away secretly before he knew the thing was of God. He wanted to do what was right.
- 3. He was a *Thoughtful man*.

May I tell you, when God disrupts your dreams, He does so to give you something better. Yield to His script.

MARY: HOW TO HAVE A MERRY CHRISTMAS

“MARY EVERYDAY”

Luke 1:46-55

These verses are Mary's Song. It is called Mary's Magnificat because Mary exalts the Lord for His magnificent works and His Magnificent Being. This song is sung somewhere every night by Catholic nuns.

Look back at Luke 1:46:

- “My soul magnifies the Lord.” “My soul declares the greatness of the Lord.” The soul is made up of the mind, the will, and the emotions. It is something she chooses to do. She chooses to magnify the Lord with her soul.
- “And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.” This is something she did in the past, when the angel first told her that she was chosen of God to bear His Son. My spirit rejoiced in the past at the announcement. Now I choose to magnify the Lord with my soul.

Keep in mind that Mary is a young girl about 14 or 15. She was about the age of a freshman in high school. Yet, she said “yes” to the Lord.

She had to wonder, “What’s this going to do to me and my reputation? I’m engaged. What will Joseph do to me? Will he believe the truth?”

Three things Mary did:

I. She Turned Her Worry into Worship

Two things about Mary's worship:

A. Her Worship Was Biblical

Someone said that worry is like a rocking chair: It will give you something to do but it won't get you anywhere. Actually, that is not true. Worry will get you what you don't want. Worry will get you despair, depression, and despondency.

Mary chose rather to worship.

This song of worship is Biblical. There are at least 16 Old Testament allusions and quotations in the song. That means Mary's heart and mind were saturated with the Word of God.

Few, if any, girls in that day attended school and they could not read, so how did she know that much scripture? The only way was that she went to the synagogue and listened and soaked in the Scriptures.

That is how the Scriptures work. When you're in tough times, the Holy Spirit brings to your mind the Scripture truths you need. But He brings to your mind only what has been put into your mind. She was blessed because she knew the Scriptures.

A word to young people: It's important that you study the Scriptures, but it is also important that you listen to the preaching and teaching of the Scriptures when you come to church. Don't waste your opportunities to learn the Scriptures when you are in church. If you are day dreaming or talking or passing notes in church, you miss the opportunity of learning the Scriptures that you will need later.

B. Her Worship Was Balanced.

She knew both God's Tenderness and His Toughness. His tenderness is found in verse 50; His toughness is found in verses 51-52.

II. She Turns “How” Into “Who” Luke 1:34-35, 38

The angel didn't tell Mary “how.” He gave no details. He just said that it was a God thing. If we look just at the “how,” that means we're trying to figure it out ourselves and we leave God out.

Learn that when God is involved you can't predict or plan the things that will happen. God does things and works in ways that you and I would never predict.

In 2 Kings 7, we are told of four leprous men who were shut outside the walls of Samaria. People of the city

would throw garbage with food in it over the wall and that's what they would eat.

The Syrian army was planning to attack Samaria so those inside the gate fled and hid. That meant no more food would be coming over the wall for the lepers to eat. They were about to starve when they decided to go to the Syrian camp and surrender. They thought, if they take our surrender, maybe they'll feed us. If they kill us, well, we're going to die anyway.

When the four men got to the outskirts of Syria, instead of the Syrian army hearing four men coming, the Lord caused the Syrian army to hear the noise of chariots and horses and a might army and they fled. They left the stew in the pots, the bread on the fire, the gold in their tents and the four lepers ate until they could eat no more and took all the gold and silver and clothing they could carry back home and told their friends at home they could go get all they wanted.

If you've walked with the Lord very long, you can testify that you can never predict what God is going to do or how He's going to do it.

This is a true story. A little girl asked her mother if she could have a kitten. Her mother said, "No." Over and over the little girl made the same request. Over and over the mother said, "No." Finally, the girl said, "If I pray and ask God for a kitten and He gives me one, can I keep it?" The mother smiled and said, "Well, if God drips one from the sky in our backyard, you can keep it."

The little girl went to her bedroom and started praying. A couple of days later, the mother and the little girl were in the back yard and a small brown kitten dropped in their back yard. Later, that week the mother learned what happened. Some stray cats were in their neighbor's yard. He tried to run them off when one kitten climbed a tree. The man couldn't reach the kitten, so he thought he would tie a rope to the tree and tie the other end to his riding mower and pull the tree down far enough to reach the kitten, but the rope broke and sent the kitten flying into his neighbor's back yard.

God's ways are not our ways! Psalm 84:11b

III. She Turned Her Pouting Into Praise Luke 1:46-47

She could have pouted and said, "Why me and why not someone else?" She chose not to pout, but to praise God for the good things He had done for others.

How often when God does good things for others, we become jealous or envious. We say things like, "Well, if I had the pull he has or if I had the opportunities she had, then I could ..."

You know that God restored to Job twice as much than was taken away. But do you remember how it came about? In Job 42:10, God told Job to pray for those who treated him so badly and it was after he prayed for them that God restored to him twice as much as he had before.

How do you have a Mary Everyday? Turn your Worry into Worship. Turn the "How" into "Who." Turn your Pouting into Praising.

A HEAVENLY BIRTH ANNOUNCEMENT

Luke 2:8-20

I have an announcement to make.

It's A Boy!

And I'm glad to tell you that both mother and Child are in stable condition!

The time of His birth was when the fullness of time had come.

Birth announcements are exciting times in the physical realm if the birth you're announcing is your baby girl or boy. The new parents send birth cards or E-mails to everyone they know with all the information about the new baby. Sometimes pink or blue signs are made and planted in the front yard; or balloons are tied to the mailbox or front door.

In Israel, the birth of a child was an occasion of great joy. When the mother went into labor, friends and local musicians would gather near the house. When the birth was announced, if it was a boy, the musicians would break into music and song. The crowd would celebrate with congratulations and rejoicing. If the baby was a girl, the musicians would leave silently.

When God's Son was born incarnate, His heart was filled with delight, joy, and anticipation. When God's Son was born and took on human flesh, God would announce the birth of His Son AND God did it up right!

(Read the passage.)

God announced the birth of His Son in two magnificent ways: with angels and a star in the sky.

The wise men saw His star in the sky and began making their way to Bethlehem. They were a great distance from Bethlehem.

This is the third time angels have been involved in the incarnation.

- The angel Gabriel visited Mary and later visited Joseph.
- Now one angel announces the Savior's birth to shepherds. After the announcement by the one angel, a multitude of the heavenly Host joined them in praise and celebration (Luke 2:9-10,13.).

Don't miss the splendor of it all! Remember that all of this took place at night. Even if the stars were shining and there was a full moon, this was a Great Sight.

Luke 2:9 – Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and “came upon them” (KJV) or “stood by them.”

The presence of the angel must have been a glorious sight, but wait!

“The glory of the Lord shone round about them.” You need to remember that the glory of the Lord had not appeared on earth for centuries. This was the Shekinah glory, the visible presence of God!

The presence of angels was glorious, but the glory of the Lord out-shown the angels!

“Suddenly a multitude of the heavenly host” appeared before them. The word “multitude” means “fullness.” The area around the shepherds was full of angels. May I tell you, every angel in glory wanted to be there to praise God.

What kind of angels were they? It may surprise some to know that these were not special choir angels, but God's military angels. The word “host” is a military term for a band of soldiers.

The multitude of angels came and stood before the shepherds. It is very possible they stood in rank on the hill of the fields.

When folks think of the angels attending the birth of Christ, they usually think of the angels hovering in the sky above the shepherds. The reason they think this way is that most Christmas pictures with angels in them have the angels hovering in the sky, but the word means “to stand before.”

What a wonderful way for God to announce the birth of His Son!

Luke gives us three things relating to the heavenly birth announcement.

I. The Shepherds Who Heard the Announcement

It is significant that God's birth announcement would come to shepherds. Do you know what shepherds do? They care for sheep! Those who have trusted Jesus as Lord and Savior and belong to Him, He calls His sheep.

Jesus called himself a Shepherd.

- John 10:11 “I am the Good Shepherd.”
- Hebrews 13:20 Jesus is called “the Great Shepherd.”
- I Peter 5:4 Jesus is called “the Chief Shepherd.”
- Psalm 23:1 “The Lord is my Shepherd.”

These shepherds near Bethlehem raised flocks that were used to furnish the sacrificial lambs for sacrifice at the Temple. How fitting to have the announcement of the birth of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, made to shepherds who were caring for sheep that were headed for sacrifice at the Temple.

II. The Statements in the Announcement

A. Fear not Luke 2:10

Fear would be the normal response and an appropriate response when someone is confronted by a divine

visitation of God. What comfort to be told not to fear.

B. The Message

1. It was a GOOD Message.

"I bring you good tidings." It was not a message of judgment or condemnation. It was good tidings. "I bring you" means "evangelize."

2. It was a GLAD Message

It is a message that will bring Joy.

3. It was a GLOBAL Message.

"Which shall be to ALL people." It is not limited to the Jews, but it is for the whole world.

"For unto you is born THIS day in the City of David (Bethlehem) a Savior who is Christ THE LORD."

C. The Significant

"You will find Him wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."

The shepherds knew what to look for. How many babies do you think were ever born in a manger? How many new born babies were wrapped in swaddling cloths? Swaddling cloths were strips of cloth similar to those used in the embalming process. In other words, swaddling clothes were essentially grave clothes. This is fitting because Jesus came to die.

III. The Song With the Announcement Luke 2:13-14

The angels, and I think the shepherds, too, began to sing, but I think every angel in glory broke forth in praise, too.

The response of the shepherds was that they went with haste to find the Babe. This was the first Christmas rush!

Luke 2:15-16. As soon as the angels left them, they left to find the Babe. And they FOUND the child. The word "found" is "Eureka!" We have found it! What we have been looking for and longing for and hoping for; we found it!

Luke 2:20. Once you see Emmanuel, God with us, who came to die so our sins can be forgiven, you can't help but do what those shepherds did. They worshiped and then they witnessed!

This birth announcement was made on earth to man. If we repent of our sins and call upon Him in believing faith, there will be a spiritual birth announcement in Heaven and your name will be written in God's register, the Lamb's Book of Life.

A WISE MEN-TALITY

Matthew 2:1-12

Many think the wise men and the shepherds came to see the Christ Child at almost the same time. Not so.

The shepherds may have come to see the Christ Child the very night of His birth. The wise men, on the other hand, came a long distance from the East, hundreds of miles away. They most likely came from, what is now Iraq and Iran. It took them months, maybe years, to reach the Christ Child.

Joseph, Mary and Jesus were no longer at the manger, for Matthew 2:11 says they found the young child in "the house." He may have been two years old. You will remember that when Herod realized that the wise men deceived him by not returning to him to tell him where Jesus was, that he gave a command that all the babies two years and younger be put to death.

What did those wise men see when they saw the star in the East?

There are several explanations for the star. The most notable is that there was an alignment of the planets Venus and Jupiter. It is historically true that around the time when Christ would have been born, there was an alignment of the two planets and it would have caused a huge bright light that would have been noted by the entire world. Those wise men may have seen that.

It could be so. God has ways of working supernaturally, naturally.

But I'm not too sure about that, because when the star appeared in the East, the wise men followed the star to Jerusalem, and then the star disappeared. When the wise men asked where the Messiah was to be born, the scribes quoted Micah 5:2, telling them the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. As they turned toward Bethlehem, the star reappeared and lead them to where the child was.

What made these wise men take such a long and costly and risky journey?

They had heard of the prophecy of the coming Messiah, for a wise prophet who had lived in their country had made a prophecy of the very time that the Messiah would come.

Daniel 9:24-27. The decree to rebuild Jerusalem came from the Persian King Artaxerxes during the time of Nehemiah in 445 BC. Daniel said that Messiah's Kingdom would come in exactly 483 years and the Triumphal Entry of Christ came at that exact time and Messiah was cut off or put on the cross to die.

Daniel studied the prophecy of Isaiah who prophesied some 100 years before him. See Isaiah 60:1-3,6 [drom-e-daries are one hump camels].

Then a strange little prophet named Balaam prophesied of the Messiah's coming – Numbers 24:17.

Numbers 24:17: "I shall see him, but not now. I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a

Star out of Jacob, and a Scepter shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth."

Why did these wise men follow the star? Because something tugged on their hearts to do so.

As we come to the final days of this year and begin another year, I want to have a wise mentality.

I. Respond to the Spirit

I want to be responsible to the Spirit to a greater degree this next year. I want to respond to those Impressions; those Tugs and those Pulls. I don't want to explain them away or deny that they come.

You see, that's what New Testament Christianity is all about. It's called the New Covenant. It is given in Hebrews 8:7-13.

Hebrews 8:7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second.

Hebrews 8:8 For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah:

Hebrews 8:9 Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord.

Hebrews 8:10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:

Hebrews 8:11 And they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.

Hebrews 8:12 For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.

Hebrews 8:13 In that he saith, A new covenant he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.

These verses are the key to the time we are in. The writer of Hebrews is quoting Jeremiah 31:31. The New Covenant is this: "You are all going to know what to do because I'm not giving you tablets of stone with the Ten Commandments carved in stone; rather, the New Covenant means that 'I am living in your heart and I'll give you a New Heart.'" The New Covenant is not rules and regulations, but moment by moment, "I will write my will upon your heart. My will will no longer be written on tablets of stone, but upon your hearts."

These wise men had something pulling on their hearts and they followed the star where it lead them.

People think of the New Testament as Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Romans, and on through to Revelation. These are New

Testament books, but they are not the New Testament Covenant.

Unlike the Old Testament that was written in stone, the New Testament is written in our hearts. It is God putting His will on our hearts; all the time.

The early church, we are told, turned the world upside down for the Lord; yet, they didn't have Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. What they did have was the New Covenant. They were obeying the prompting that was in their heart. They believed the Lord was alive and lived in them and led them by His Spirit. So, they stepped out in obedience to the prompting of the Spirit; to His impressions and leadings, and they turned the world upside down.

Later on the New Testament books were written to do two things: To confirm they were being led by the Lord or to correct them.

1. The New Testament books were written to confirm what they were already doing as they followed the prompting of the Spirit. For example, they were already loving one another, but Paul would write, "Love one another and so fulfill the Law of Christ." They knew then that their prompting was of the Lord.
2. But also to correct them. Suppose they thought they needed to help the poor, but they decided to rob a bank in order to help them. Paul would write, "Let him who stole steal no more, but work with his hands that he might have to provide for others."

The problem is this: Too many have made the New Testament books the New Law. They are not listening to the Lord or responding to the Lord.

They are studying the books like the Law was studied previously and they are just replacing one book of the Law for another book of the Law and, again, they are under the Law. There is not a vibrant, exciting relationship. It's a matter of academics and theology and studying endlessly, but there's no passion or purpose or power that the New Covenant was intended to bring. The New Testament both confirms and corrects.

These wise men were different than the scribes when they got to Jerusalem. The scribes knew the Scriptures, even Micah 5:2, but they didn't go. They were the theologians and they studied constantly and instructed and argued the fine points of theology, but they didn't go.

The wise men traveled hundreds of miles over many months. The scribes wouldn't go ten miles to see what might happen. They are like too many of us today who study the Scripture, but don't respond to the prompting of the Spirit. My resolution is to respond more to the Spirit's prompting and leading in my life.

In the Garden of Eden were two trees: The Tree of the Knowledge of good and evil and the Tree of Life. God said that Adam and Eve could eat of every tree except the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If they did, it would be because they wanted to be independent from God or "break-up" with God. God gave them a choice because love demands a choice. You cannot love without choice. You can't force someone to love you.

Why did God call the tree the Tree of Knowledge? Because knowledge puffs up. Once Adam ate of the Tree, he hid himself from God. God called, "Adam, where are you?" Adam told God that he was naked. God said, "Adam, before you ate of the Tree, you didn't have knowledge like that. " Before they ate of the Tree, they walked and talked with God. Now, Adam knew he was naked.

Knowledge, even Bible knowledge, can be dangerous, because we'll think we don't have to pray because we know what the Bible says. I don't have to ask the Lord about it or talk to him about it because I have my theology.

You see, you can become students of the Bible and be distant from the Lord. Why? Because you are no longer New Covenant Christians when you refuse to respond to His Spirit or talk to him or follow His leading because now you have knowledge, knowledge, knowledge. Their knowledge may be correct, but there is no fresh insights from God or intimate relationship.

You can be straight as a gun barrel spiritually and just as empty.

II. Reacquaint With the Scriptures

When the wise men got to Jerusalem, they didn't know where to go because the star disappeared. They were in the dark. Then they went to the scribes and the Word of God was opened to them and they heard the Word of the Lord. They received instructions from the Lord and the star reappeared.

That's how the New Covenant works. We Respond to the Spirit and Reacquaint ourselves with the Scriptures.

Joshua 1:8: "The book of the Law is not to depart from your mouth." That means we are to Eat God's word; Chew on it, Devour it.

Do you want to have a prosperous New Year? Then meditate on God's Word day and night. The word "meditate" means "to chew the cud." It means "to extract what has already been taken in."

You may have studied biblical subjects or Bible books before and think, "I don't have to study that again." God encourages us: "Meditate on it day and night."

MARY: BELIEVING THE IMPOSSIBLE

Luke 1:26-38

There are two versions of the Christmas story in the New Testament. Matthew tells Joseph's story and Luke tells Mary's story. Matthew tells the story like a man would tell it. Luke emphasizes the things a woman would consider important.

In Luke 1 we find the record of two impossible pregnancies. One woman, Elizabeth, was old and beyond her years of child bearing she thought. Yet, the Lord gave her a child.

The other woman, Mary, was a virgin who would be given a child by God Himself. The daddy would be God and her baby would be the Son of God, the Messiah. Her baby would be the solution to the problems of mankind. Her baby would grow to be a Man that would do the impossible. He would live a sinless, perfect life. He would bridge the gap between sinful man and a holy God by being the Mediator between the two.

Jesus would be the God-man that would be the only One who could represent both parties. The Son of God would be the solution to mankind's sin problem by paying the price for man's sins on the cross so that sinners could have eternal life by their faith in Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus would do the impossible again, by rising from the dead three days later, taking the sting out of death, and proving that He could save us from our sins and give us eternal life if we would trust Him.

Three things I want to share with you from this passage:

I. The Appearance of the Angel Luke 1:26-27

No Gospel writer mentions angels in Scripture more than Luke. He mentions angels some 23 times in his Gospel.

We are given the names of only two angels in Scripture, Gabriel and Michael, other than another mighty angel who fell because he rebelled against God. His name is Lucifer.

Gabriel and Michael are fellow-angels. Gabriel is the angel who stands in the presence of God. He never leaves the presence of God except when God gives him an assignment to deliver a word from God. He delivered a message to Daniel and to Zacharias; and now, he come to deliver a message to Mary.

The two angels, Gabriel and Michael, have contrasting ministries. Gabriel is chiefly one who announces whereas Michael is chiefly one who acts. Gabriel declares; Michael defends. Gabriel informs; Michael inflicts. Gabriel explains the plans of God; Michael executes the plans of God. Both ministries are needed. We need announcements, but we also need action.

Gabriel was sent to Nazareth, a wicked and corrupt town of about 20,000 in that day. He was sent to that city to make an announcement to one young lady, a virgin named Mary.

The name "Mary" is the same as the Old Testament name of "Miriam" who was Moses' sister.

We are told twice in this passage that Mary was a virgin and that she was espoused or betrothed or engaged to Joseph. In Judaism, virgins were young maidens, usually about 14 to 18 years old. Mary lived in a polluted city, but she was a pure young lady. Mary lived a holy life in the midst of unholy lives. She was morally upright, sexually pure, godly and chaste young woman.

Young ladies, keep yourself sexually pure. If you are saved, you owe it to God, for you belong to Him. You also owe it to yourself. Don't cheat yourself. Don't compromise yourself to some boy's lust. You also owe your purity to the young man you are going to marry.

And young men, I would say the same to you. Keep yourself sexually pure. You are responsible to the young girls you date to see to it that they remain pure. Don't defile them. Respect them.

How do you stay sexually pure? Someone nailed it when they said that on a date, don't unzip anything; don't unbutton anything; don't pull anything up; and don't pull anything down. If you'll heed that, you'll stay sexually pure!

Mary was "espoused" or "pledged" to Joseph. That meant that she had formally agreed to marry him, but the wedding had not taken place. Between the pledge and the wedding feast was a period usually lasting six months to a year. This was actually a marriage contract and they were legally married, even though the marriage ceremony was a much as a year later. It was a period of probation and testing of fidelity. They didn't live together, nor did they consummate their marriage physically.

II. The Announcement of the Angel Luke 1:27-39a

Notice Luke 1:28. We don't know where Mary was when Gabriel found her, but we're told that the angel went in unto her and stated his announcement to her.

The word "Hail" is a form of greeting. It means "good will" to her or "to rejoice."

"Thou that are highly favored." "Mary, you are surrounded with favor or grace. You have been given much grace from God!" It demonstrates the truth that the Lord had His eye on her; He was watching over her, as He does all of us. Her character, she learned, had been under heaven's scrutiny.

Ever since Eve, God had been looking for a woman upon whom He could bestow His favor of becoming the virgin mother of God's incarnate Son. God was looking for someone pure enough, sweet enough, strong enough, and spiritual enough to give birth to the Christ. The search was over! The woman had been found!

Mary would give birth to a Child, even though she was a virgin. Her Child would be from God! The virgin birth should not have surprised those Jews who knew and believed the Old Testament. Isaiah 7:14 says, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel."

No human father would be involved in the birth. Jesus had to have one human parent or He could not have been human, and thereby a partaker of our flesh. He also had to have divine parentage or He could not have made a sinless and perfect sacrifice on our behalf.

One important reason for the virgin birth was the blood. If the conception was to be guiltless, the blood could not be corrupt. If blood is corrupt, then man is corrupt, because the life of the flesh is in the blood. If Jesus was to be our Savior, His blood could not be corrupted by the sinfulness of men, and it wasn't. It is for this reason He was able to redeem us and cleanse us (1 Peter 1:18-19).

The reason the blood of Jesus was pure is because of His virgin birth. From conception to birth, not one drop of blood passed from Mary to Jesus. The mother contributes no blood at all to her baby. When God created woman out of man, He made her so that no blood would be able to pass from her to her baby. The blood type is from the father. Since Adam was the head of the human race, it is his blood which transmits Adam's sin.

In order to produce a sinless man, who would yet be the Son of Adam, God had to provide a way whereby that Man would have a human body derived from Adam, but not have a drop of Adam's sinful blood. God's answer to the dilemma was that Jesus was created by God the Father in the womb of Mary. No human male sperm could be involved in His birth, and it was not at all.

Scripture says that Mary was "troubled (frightened, disturbed, puzzled) at his saying." I guess so! That's why the angel said, "Fear not, Mary: for you have found favor (grace) with God."

"Congratulations, Mary! You are going to carry God's Son within you!"

How did it happen? Luke 1:34-38a

This is the only explanation of the virgin birth in all the Bible. What exactly took place when the Holy Spirit conceived the human life of Jesus Christ within Mary's womb?

The most honest answer is this: We don't know, because what happened was a miracle of the highest order and could be compared with God saying, "Let there be light," and light appeared out of the darkness. The conception of Jesus in the womb of a virgin was a direct creative miracle of God and a mystery we will never fully understand. It was the result of the direct intervention of God. The Holy Spirit is the agent of the Virgin Birth.

Luke 1:35 offers a hint of what happened when the angel says that the power of the Most High would "overshadow" Mary. That same verb is used when we are told "the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle"

(Exodus 40:35).

God “overshadowed” Mary with His personal, intimate presence and protected her from all harm. So, Mary was a virgin before her conception and after her conception. Only God could have done this.

Gabriel told Mary that it would be a miracle of God (Luke 1:37).

Gabriel offered proof that nothing was impossible with God (Luke 1:36). If God could make a dead womb spring to life, He could certainly make a virgin's womb spring to life. What God asked Mary to

do would change her life forever, but Mary said, “Yes.” “Yes” to God, “Yes” to the impossible, “Yes” to the plan of God.

Don't underestimate what it cost Mary to say “Yes” to God. She would face the skepticism of her friends, the gossip of relatives, the whispers of the town's people. There would be rumors of promiscuity and public shame. Her pure reputation would be doubted. She would even risk losing Joseph, and she almost did. Only an angel's intervention kept that from happening.

Notice Mary's response – Luke 1:38. Mary presented her body as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God.

III. The Absence of the Angel Luke 1:38c

Gabriel's job was completed. Mary had said “Yes” to the Lord's will. Now he could return to glory.

Mary is a model for those who experience the birth of the Savior in their lives.

She heard the message, the Good News from heaven. She knew what it would require from her. God wanted to overshadow her with His grace, but she must submit herself to God and say “Yes” to His invitation. And, she did. Will you?

THE SONGS OF TWO MOTHERS

Luke 1:39-56

Gabriel has delivered his message from God to Mary. He has told her that she is going to be the mother of the Most High God, the Messiah, and that she is to give him the Name, Jesus.

Then, suddenly Mary was alone. The house must have been strangely still. Outside, the world went on with its customary sounds – a mule driver urging on his stubborn means of transport, a boy arguing with his friend, some women laughing on their way to the well.

Mary would have to rejoin that everyday world. What should she do? Should she hide her condition or make it known?

Mary would act on the angel's hint; she would go see Elizabeth and Zacharias. Soon, her condition would be common gossip. She needed a sympathetic ear.

Mary knew no one would understand her unusual situation. Would she be accused of breaking God's moral law? The offender of such a thing could be stoned to death.

Zacharias was an ordained priest. That's about the last place she would have gone if she had wanted to hide. But in a unique way the angel encouraged Mary to go to the home of Elizabeth and see for herself what the power of God can do.

We are not told that Mary went to her own house and talked to her parents, but we are told that Mary traveled some 85 miles to see Elizabeth, for they had something in common.

I. The Departure of Mary Luke 1:39-40

Notice the word “haste.” The word indicates not only her speed, but her attitude. Mary meant business when she headed to Elizabeth's house. She was determined to see Elizabeth.

Have you ever found out something wonderful or fearful, and felt, “I've got to tell somebody,” or “I've got to check this story out.”?

This is what Mary does. After hearing the message of Gabriel, the angel, she departs immediately to see her Cousin Elizabeth. She has got to talk to her.

I believe she wanted to talk to her about what God had shown her and had done for her. I believe she wanted to see with her own eyes the miracle of Elizabeth's pregnancy.

There is a great lesson hidden in these verses. Are you excited and determined to share with other people what the Lord Jesus has done for you? When it comes to serving Christ and telling others about the Lord, do we mean business?

II. The Delight of Elizabeth and Mary Luke 1:41-49

When Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb. There was the thrill of joy that stirred Elizabeth's soul when she learned that the Messiah had been miraculously conceived in Mary. Baby John and his mother broke forth in praise.

I love to hear good, Gospel singing. Singing is a vital part of the Christian's life. I feel sorry for folks who don't know the virtue and thrill and joy of singing the Lord's song.

Our song is about Jesus. We sing about Jesus. I don't think songs that don't exalt Jesus have any place in worship.

Sometimes folks say, "I don't sing because I can't sing." Listen, you don't sing to the Lord because you can sing, you sing because you have a song that Jesus gave you!

Singing expresses different things in our heart.

1. Singing is an expression of Praise to God.

What's why we sing. The Bible says, "Come before His presence with singing."

Did you know that God loves to hear you sing? He doesn't care if you're an alto, a soprano, a bass, or a tenor, or if you're not close to any of those, God just loves to hear you sing as an expression of praise – Psalm 40:1-3a.

2. Singing is an expression of Testimony (Praise).

When they brought back the ark from captivity, they sang praises because God had done something for them.

3. Singing is an expression of Encouragement.

Singing makes folks feel better. When king Saul was depressed, David came in and played and sang before him and the heaviness was removed.

4. Singing can also be an expression of Sorrow.

The entire book of Lamentations is a song of sorrow.

When many of the slaves came to America, heard the Gospel, and were saved, slaves sung songs like, "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen, nobody knows but Jesus."

5. Singing is oftentimes an expression of Joy.

Here are two women. One is an elderly lady, beyond the ability to bear children, but she is six months pregnant and she's excited about it. God performed a miracle in her life. God also performed a miracle in Mary's life!

A. Elizabeth sings, not for her own child, but Mary's child.

Luke 1:42 It is a song of blessing and honor. Notice that she did not say Mary was blessed

ABOVE women, but AMONG women.

Luke 1:43-44 She sings because she feels privileged to have the mother of the Messiah and her Lord come to see her.

Luke 1:45 She rejoices in Mary's faith in becoming God's means of bringing His Son into the world.

B. Mary sings.

Mary's song is steeped in the Old Testament. As you read it, it sounds like one of the Psalms of

David. It has a strong resemblance to the song of Hannah in I Samuel 2.

This may be called the first Christmas carol.

Mary's song – the Magnificat – is easily divided into two stanzas.

- Stanza one – verses 46-50 – reflects on what it means to Mary to be chosen to bear the Messiah.
- Stanza two – verses 51-55 – praises God for the effects the coming of Christ will have on the world.

1. Stanza One Verses 46-50

- a. Luke 1:46-47 Mary glorifies the Lord for her salvation. She recognized her own need for a Savior and she knew the true God as her Savior.
- b. Luke 1:48 Mary acknowledges humility before God.

The word “humble” state refers to her age, her background, her economic condition, her lack of social standing. Mary is astonished that God would choose her of all people to bear the Messiah. In spite of the great honor God has bestowed upon her, she does not become proud, but continues to walk in humility.

It is a statement about the sovereign grace of God. Mary is saying, “Lord, there is no reason for You to choose me.” Nothing about Mary recommended her to God. The choice was made in pure grace.

- c. Luke 1:49-50 Mary declares God to be the Powerful God, the Holy God, and the God of Mercy.

2. Stanza Two Verses 51-56

- a. Luke 1:51 His birth will bring about a Moral Revolution.

Proverbs 14:9: “Fools make a mock at sin.” God will bring judgment upon evil. The mighty will be brought down by the strong arm of the Lord.

- b. Luke 1:52 His birth will bring about a Social Revolution.

The coming of Christ brings a great reversal of fortune in society. The proud are brought low and the humble are lifted up.

- c. Luke 1:53 The birth of Christ brings an Economic Revolution.

God is going to set things right. The hungry are fed and the rich go away empty. There is an equality for all men in Christ.

MIRACLES AT BETHLEHEM

Luke 2:1-7

The six-year-old kids in their Sunday School Class were re-enacting the story of the birth of Jesus. The teacher wanted them to stage it themselves based on their own made-up script, so it was certainly interesting. They had three Marys, two Josephs, six shepherds, two wise guys, and one boy who played the cow. Another boy decided he would be the doctor who would deliver the baby. The teacher consented, so the little doctor went back behind the manger and picked up the doll and carefully wrapped him in a blanket. Then with a big smile on his face, he turned to the Marys and the Josephs and said, “Congratulations, it’s God!”

The greatest birth in the history of man was the birth of Jesus Christ some two thousand years ago. Every birth of a living child is a marvelous event. It brings into being a soul that will never die. But never since the world began was a birth so marvelous as the birth of Christ.

It’s obvious Luke conducted a personal interview with Mary many years later, or how else would he have been able to write what he did in verse 19? It says, “Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.” Mary experienced so many miracles that night that she had to store them in her heart as precious treasures.

The word “pondered” means “to constantly rethink and evaluate even the tiniest details of an experience.” What were “these things” that she pondered?

I. The Decree for a Census Luke 2:1-2

The word “decree” means “an edict, an order, a prepared publication.” The publication was that all males must go to their native city or the place of their birth to be “registered.”

The KJV says “to be taxed.” Nearly every other translation says “to be “registered.” The ultimate purpose of this order was that

everyone be registered in order that a proper accounting of its citizens of the empire could be made, and so that taxes could then be levied.

Each man would register a public record of his name, his property, and his income. Such a census was taken every fourteen years and used for taxing purpose.

The decree was made by Caesar Augustus. "Augustus" was not part of his real name. It was a title that he had, the Roman Senate bestow upon him. In his arrogance he wanted people to call him "Augustus" which means "exalted one, celebrated one, holy one, or sacred one."

The month of August is named after him, just as the month July is named after his uncle, Julius Caesar. Augustus was in his early fifties during the time of Christ's birth.

II. The Departure from the City Luke 2:3-5

Let me pause here and point out that while Augustus thought he was in control of things, he was unaware that God was actually in control and He was using Augustus to fulfill Scripture.

After 1,000 years, Bethlehem was still known as the city where Israel's greatly loved king David was born. It was known as the City of David. Bethlehem was built on the site where Rachel, Jacob's beloved wife, died.

David and Solomon both had great riches, but the old kingdom of David had been dismembered, conquered, and devastated. The people had been led away into a captivity from which few ever returned. All that the house of David had preserved were its family records.

Both Joseph and Mary were royal descendants of David; yet, Joseph was a simple village carpenter and Mary was a poor maiden.

God made a promise in the Scriptures that He would raise up a King for Himself from Bethlehem. In

1 Samuel 16 God instructed Samuel the prophet to anoint David as king of Israel.

But this promise of a King from Bethlehem extended far beyond just David. God said that the Messiah – the Christ – would be born from David's royal lineage – 2 Samuel 7:12-13.

God even let us know where this promised Messiah would be born – Micah 5:2.

Caesar had his own reasons for issuing his decree. But unknown to him, God had His own, even greater and more astonishing reasons for the decree being issued. God used Caesar Augustus to fulfill Micah 5:2!

III. The Delivery of the Divine Child Luke 2:6-7

The Son of God from heaven came to earth and was born in a stable because there was no room in the

inn. We hear this so often that we take it for granted, but it doesn't seem right. To help us think about this one fact of Jesus' birth, let's think about three questions:

A. What's wrong with this picture?

The answer is simple: Jesus doesn't belong here. He's the Son of God from heaven. He doesn't deserve to be treated like a vagrant or a criminal. He deserves the best the world has to offer – and He ends up in a stable?

From a human standpoint, the circumstances of His birth couldn't have been more inappropriate when you consider who He was – the Son of God, the Savior of men, the Lord of lords and King of kings!

The timing couldn't have been more inconvenient; and the setting couldn't have been more undesirable! Knowing what Joseph and Mary knew about their baby, it would have seemed like everything was going horribly wrong.

I wonder how many times in the nine months Mary was carrying the baby Jesus, she tried to visualize what it would be like when she gave birth to the Messiah – the Christ. I'm sure she planned out everything. She would make the place where she would give birth as warm and as comfortable as possible. Joseph would build a cute bassinet for the baby. She would get the nicest blankets she could afford to wrap the newborn in. Family and friends would be there to give support and there would be a wonderful celebration when He was born.

Think about it for a moment. Suppose you had all power and could choose the time and place and manner of your son's birth. Wouldn't you have chosen a luxurious palace, or a warm and sanitized hospital?

Instead, Mary and Joseph had to travel 85 miles up hill over rough, rocky roads to get to Bethlehem. Joseph walked while Mary, who was nine months pregnant, rode sidesaddle on a donkey, feeling every jolt and rut and rock in the road.

Because there were many travelers who had come to Bethlehem to register, there were no vacancies. Have you ever been on a long trip and you were so tired and sleepy and hungry and every place in town was full and you thought, "Well, it looks like I'm going to have to sleep in the car."

Poor Joseph probably didn't have the money to buy his way up the waiting list for better lodging. There was no choice but to settle in a small cave manger with a small feeding trough. It was a filthy, smelly place with flies and manure droppings on the ground. And on top of that, Joseph had to act as a midwife.

Second Corinthians 8:9.

Jesus deserved better, so why did it happen like this? That leads me to the second question.

B. Why did God allow it?

If we believe in the sovereignty of God, then we must believe that God did not simply "allow" His Son to be born in a stable, He "ordained" it. There was no room in the inn because God wanted it that way. If God had wanted it some other way, then it would have happened that "other way."

"No room" is symbolic of the problem our Lord faced while He was on earth and even today. "No room" for Jesus because man is full of himself. "No room" for Jesus because of our sinfulness. We don't give Him place in our hearts and lives because we don't want to give up our sinful pleasures. We want to live in our sin and He makes us feel uncomfortable and guilty and He convicts us of our sin and we don't like that.

"No room" because it showed His Humiliation – Philippians 2:5-8.

Jesus became the God-man; God wrapped in flesh. There were times when Jesus was on earth that you fully saw His glory, but even when He did not display His glory, it was there. You saw it when He performed miracles and on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Let me demonstrate it like this. Suppose my white shirt represents glory. With my coat off, you can clearly see my white shirt. But if I put my coat on, it conceals my white shirt, but it is still there. It is just covered. It is not displayed. In our Lord's humility, He didn't fully display His glory, but it was always there.

"No room" in order that the humble and poor and common people might feel invited to come to Him.

Turned away from the inn and born in a stable was an invitation to the rejected, the abused, the mistreated, the forgotten, the overlooked, to come to Him for salvation. If Jesus had been born in Paris or in Beverly Hills, only the rich and famous would feel at home with Him. But since He was born in a stable, all the outsiders of the world would instinctively feel a kinship with Jesus.

This past week Aaron was talking about a boy in his class whose family was rich. After a while I said, "I'm rich, I just don't have much money. In fact, I may be richer than the folks who have a lot of money, because I have Jesus living in my heart. Someone with a little money who has Jesus living in their heart is richer than the person who has lots of money, but doesn't have Jesus in their heart."

C. What do we learn from this?

God wants access into our hearts and lives. See Revelation 3:20.

And so, Christ comes to us. We are the innkeeper of our hearts. IS there room for Him?

A little boy was playing the part of the Innkeeper in the annual children's Christmas play at his church. Each time during the rehearsal it came time for him to tell Joseph and Mary that there was no room, he just couldn't say his lines. The director finally asked him why he was having so much trouble. He told him, "I just can't send Jesus away! He can have my room!" There is room in your heart for Jesus if you will make room for Him.

"O Come to my heart, Lord Jesus,
There is room in my heart for you!"

O HOLY NIGHT
Luke 2:8-14

This world has witnessed many nights since it was created by God. Many of those nights passed without anything remarkable taking place. Others saw profound changes in history take place.

The night Jesus was born had all the appearances of being just another common, ordinary night. Yet, that night was unlike all other nights in human history.

In 1846, years before the Civil War, a powerful Christmas carol was written:

[Oh, Holy Night! The stars are brightly shining.](#)

It is the night of the dear Savior's birth.
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
Till He appeared and the soul felt its worth.

A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.
Fall on your knees! Oh, hear the angel voices!
Oh night divine, Oh night when Christ was born;

Oh night, oh night divine, Oh night divine.

Christmas! How should we celebrate this great day? The first and most obvious answer is, if you are not a Christian, you should celebrate Christmas by becoming a Christian. After all, this is why Jesus came to the earth. He was born to be a Savior. And until you can call Him "My Savior" you will never fully understand what Christmas is all about. Another Christmas carol puts it this way:

Good Christian man, rejoice, with heart and soul and voice.
Now ye need not fear the grave; Jesus Christ was born to save!
Calls you one and calls you all, To gain His everlasting hall.
Christ was born to save! Christ was born to save!

But the Christmas season can be a dangerous time! No, I'm not referring to shopping at Wal-Mart, although you are taking your life into your hands when you go there during this time of year. I'm talking about the Christmas story. There is a danger that we can hear it so often that it becomes too familiar. There is a danger that we will lose the significance of the message because we are too familiar with it.

Every year we tell the same stories in the same ways. We talk about angels, shepherds, wise men, Mary and Joseph, and the Baby Jesus. If we are not careful we just might come to take the story for granted. We know all the details and if we are not careful, our familiarity with the Christmas story can cause us to overlook just how amazing the story really is.

Christmas should be amazing. The eternal, all-powerful Creator has become one of us, and then He died for us. If we really grasp this truth, we can't be ho-hum about Christmas. Our God is wondrous beyond our comprehension.

On this Holy Night there was:

I. The Revelation to the Shepherds Luke 2:8-14

Have you ever tried to recreate that holy night on the Bethlehem hillside? I imagine that the moon shone brightly in the sky, highlighting the field, the flocks, and the faces of the shepherds. A cool breeze blew slightly and there was the warm, red glow of embers from the slowly dying campfire. Nothing was happening and nothing was likely to happen. It was quiet and peaceful. It was hard for the shepherds to keep awake.

Suddenly, without warning, the field around the shepherds lit up – brighter than baseball stadium lights could make it – with the glory of the Lord. A mighty angel suddenly stood before them.

What a shock it must have been to these poor shepherds! The angel saw how terribly frightened the shepherds were. The angel tried to calm their fears.

Then the Good News! "Unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this shall be THE sign (not "a" sign) to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."

Suddenly, thousands of glorious, bright=shining angels began to sing praises to God. Can you imagine how loud and glorious that praise was?!

II. The Response of the Shepherds Luke 2:15-18

As soon as the angels had gone back to heaven and the field was dark and quiet again, I may be wrong, but I imagine that, for several minutes, there wasn't a sound or a movement from the shepherds. Then after a few moments of stillness, one of the shepherds might have quietly said, "Did what just happened ...just happen?"

They eventually said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us" (verse 15).

It's interesting that the angel didn't tell the shepherds what to do about this birth announcement. They didn't need to. Such an announcement was too wonderful not to go and investigate. The angel told them where the Babe was and they ran to find the Child. "They came with haste and found Mary, Joseph, and the Baby lying in a manger" (verse 16) – just as the angel had said.

I would love to have seen the wonder and awe on the faces of the shepherds as they beheld the Son of God as He lay in the manger. I think they told Mary and Joseph what they had seen and heard in the fields that night.

Notice Luke 2:17. They didn't keep this Good News to themselves. They did what we should do with the Gospel – they spread it around.

What did the shepherds bring to that first Christmas? They didn't bring any gifts. Fortunately none were expected, because shepherds were usually poor. They brought their presence. They obeyed the angels and went. They also brought a sense of wonder. They were excited at the angel's words. After seeing the Baby Jesus, they rushed to tell others and those they told were amazed also. Like the disciples in Acts 4:20, they said, "We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."

What the shepherds did changed their lives. They became new creatures in Christ Jesus. What the Gospel did for them, it will do for you!

III. The Reflections of Mary Luke 2:19

No doubt, Luke interviewed Mary years later. How else would he know that Mary pondered all those things in her heart? The word "pondered" means "to reflect, to keep, to mull them over in your mind or to think them through."

Every mother stores up in her heart the significant events of her child's life, but there is something significant in that fact that Mary pondered all those things in her heart.

What things did Mary retain and treasure in her heart?

- She remembered that the angel Gabriel told her how the virgin birth would take place. The birth would be the result of a direct intervention of God.
- She recalled that the same angel explained that Mary had not been unfaithful and that the Child she was carrying was a miracle Child and His Name would be Jesus, for He would save His people from their sin.
- She remembered the experience with the shepherds and the wise men.
- She put the pieces together to know that Jesus was God's Messiah – His Anointed One.

IV. The Return of the Shepherds Luke 2:20

Where did the shepherds return to? They made their way back to their flocks. They were still shepherds. They were still outcast from society. They went back to their work and back to their families, but they would never be the same again. They went back transformed men. They could never forget what they had seen and heard. They became the first evangelist to share the Gospel!

It was not a "Silent Night" once the shepherds visited the manger. They told others what they had seen and experienced in their hearts.

Some children were putting on the Christmas play. To show the radiance of the Newborn Savior, a light bulb was hidden in the manger. All the stage lights were to be turned off so that only the brightness of the manger could be seen, but the boy who controlled the lights got confused and all the lights went out. It was a tense moment, until one of the shepherds said in a loud stage whisper, "Hey!

You switched off Jesus!"

Don't switch off Jesus. He was born so that you can be born again. Will you receive Him as God's Gift for you this Christmas?

WORSHIPING WITH THE WISE MEN

Matthew 2:1-12

(Before reading the Passage.)

Since the Gospel of Matthew is the first book in the New Testament, Matthew assumed the responsibility of introducing the Lord Jesus to the world, especially to the nation of Israel.

If you were going to introduce the Lord Jesus to the world, how would you do it. The Bible tells us exactly how Matthew did it. He did it by giving a list of His names and titles:

1. In Matthew 1:1 he calls Him "Christ."

The word "Christ" is the same word in Greek as the Hebrew word "Messiah," and means "the anointed One." Jesus Christ is the Old Testament prophesied Messiah.

2. In Matthew 1:1 He is called "the Son of David and the Son of Abraham."

This completely identifies Jesus as a Jew and with the nation of Israel.

3. Putting Matthew 1:16 and 1:18 together Jesus is declared to be the Son of the virgin Mary and the Son of God.

4. In Matthew 1:21 Jesus is declared to be the Savior of the world.

5. In Matthew 1:23 Jesus is identified as "Emmanuel, God with us."

6. In Matthew 2:1-2 Jesus is called the King of the Jews."

Matthew puts much emphases on the fact that Jesus is King, and so do other Bible writers. He is King Jesus!!

1. Revelation 15:3 refers to Jesus as King of the Saints.

2. Psalm 24:7 refers to Jesus as the King of Glory.

3. I Timothy 1:17 says He is "the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God."

4. Hebrews 7:2 says He is "the King of righteousness and the King of Peace."

5. Revelation 19:16 says that He is "King of kings and Lord of lords.""

And may I tell you, He's my King.

Listen as Matthew talks about our King – King Jesus!

(Read the Passage.)

There is so much about the Christmas story that we know so little about, even among those of us who are believers. In fact, most Christians know more about the traditions of the Christmas story than they do about the true, Biblical facts of the Christmas story.

Let me quickly mention three facts of the Christmas story that have somehow been overshadowed by tradition:

I. The Wise Men Matthew 2:1

We've had a field day with these wise men, especially in some of our songs.

We sing about those Three Kings of Orient Are, but they were not kings at all. The Bible doesn't portray them as kings and never identifies them as kings.

We think there were three of them. Why do we think that? The Bible doesn't say that. Maybe it's because they brought three gifts, but twenty people could have brought three gifts. More than likely there were more than three.

The words "wise men" come from the word that we get "magi." The magi were an ancient tribe of Medes who became a priestly tribe. You remember the Medes and the Persians. These are the folks that defeated Jerusalem and carried the brightest of the young Jewish men back to Persia with them. One of the young men they carried back with them was Daniel, who became a prophet. These wise Persian men were skilled in medicine, natural science, philosophy, and astrology. Their greatest love was astrology. The wise men's knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures can be traced back to the time of Daniel (Daniel 5:11).

They spent a great deal of time studying the stars. They were star watchers. They were familiar with the big dipper, and the little dipper, and the lion, and the ram, and the other constellations.

They saw a star they had never seen before and they knew that star had biblical importance. In fact, they knew the star was HIS Star. How did they know that? All I know is that somehow God made it known to them and they followed the star to Jerusalem.

Here's the interesting thing: Matthew said, "He is the King of the Jews," but those men were not Jews. They were Gentiles...non-Jews. That tells me that although He was the King of the Jews, He was not King of the Jews only. He was King of all those who would crown Him Lord in their lives.

II. The Star Matthew 2:1-2, 7-10

Let me say three things about that star: It was a Mysterious Star and it was the Messiah's Star and it was a Meaningful Star.

Now let me share something with you that maybe you haven't thought about. Again, tradition pictures a star that is bigger and brighter than any star in the sky.

I want to share with you that I don't believe it was a star at all. "Well, now, Preacher, we suspected you were a liberal in fundamentalist clothing."

I don't believe it was a star. "Well, the Bible says it was a star." You need to understand that in the Word of God the word "star" is often used symbolically.

1. Genesis 37 Joseph had a dream and God spoke to him in a dream. In the dream God pictured Joseph eleven brothers as stars that would one day bow down to him. God told him those eleven stars were not literal stars but symbolic stars that represented his brothers.

2. Job 38 The Bible says that the Morning Star sang as did all the Sons of God. Yet, the Book of Job goes on to explain that these were not literal stars, but spoke of angels that sang forth praises to Almighty God.

3. Revelation 1 Jesus talks about seven stars that He holds in His right hand, but the stars are actually the pastors of the seven churches of Revelation 2 and 3.

4. Revelation 1 even pictures Jesus as the Bright and Morning Star.

Well, if it was not a literal star that the wise men saw, what was it? What was this bright, brilliant, shining appearance?

Exodus 13:17-22 says the Lord went before His people in the wilderness by day in a pillar of cloud and by night in a pillar of fire. It was the Shekinah glory of God.

Exodus 24:15 Moses was on Mount Sinai and the glory cloud covered the mountain for six days and on the seventh day God called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud and the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire and Moses walked right into the midst of the cloud.

Exodus 34:29 We read that when Moses came down from the Mount, unknown to Moses, his face did shine – his skin was shining because he had been near the glory of the Lord.

Luke 2:8 The shepherds were watching their flocks at night when the glory of the Lord surrounded them.

This is the same thing the wise men saw, but they saw it from afar and followed it, but the star came to the shepherds and the glory of the Lord shown round about them.

Acts 9 Saul of Tarsus was breathing out threatenings and slaughters against the disciples of the Lord when a great light blinded him and the Voice of the Lord spoke to him.

Revelation 21:21 Speaks about heaven. The Lord tells John that in the heavenly City of Jerusalem there is no need for the sun and moon to shine, for Jesus in His glory will light the city.

Well, it seems that only the wise men saw the star. Why didn't everyone see it?

Here is one of the most interesting things in the Word of God. God can reveal His glory to some and at the same time hide it from others.

As the people of God were about to leave Egypt, the glory cloud stood between the people of God and the Egyptians. Over the Israelites was light, but over where the Egyptians were was darkness.

Don't forget this was HIS star! Every star belongs to Him, but this one was peculiarly His star.

- Herod could not see the star – the glory – or he would have followed the star to where Jesus was.
- Only those who longed to worship Him saw the star. Not Herod, not the scribes of that day, nor the priest, nor the Pharisees. They were spiritually dull and dead, even though they knew the Scriptures.

III. Their Worship Matthew 2:10-11

What is worship anyway?

There are two kinds of worship: True worship and false worship.

Sometimes what we call worship is an insult to God. Let me read to you a description of God's reaction to a worship service held several years ago. It is recorded in Isaiah 1:10-18 and I want you to hear it from the Living Bible.

Jesus talks to the woman at the well and explains what true worship is – John 4:19-24.

Notice the phrase: "The Father seeks such to worship Him."

The word "worship" comes from an old English word – worth-ship and means "to ascribe worth or value to something or someone."

Note: "Those who worship Him MUST worship Him in spirit and truth."

If God is going to accept our worship, there is a MUST that we must meet. We must worship Him in spirit and truth.

What does that mean?

A. In Spirit

God is a spirit and so are we. We are spirits dwelling in bodies, which in the design of God creates our soul. Our human spirit is designed to communicate and interrelate with the Spirit of God. That's what Jesus means when He says we must worship God "in Spirit."

Scripture refers to our human spirit as the heart. We talk about doing things with our whole heart. That means our spirit is fully engaged. Do it wholeheartedly.

To worship "in spirit" means that our worship must be genuine and heart-felt. We must mean it, and feel it deeply, and be fully committed to what we are doing.

Worship is not to be phony or a put-on. It must not be mechanical. We must not just go through the motions. That kind of worship is not acceptable to God. The one thing God hates above everything else is hypocrisy.

B. In Truth

This refers to our view of God. Is our knowledge of Him in line with who He actually is?

So often we come to church and miss worshipping God by eighteen inches. We've heard enough preaching about God and we've studied enough about God to know who He is. We know Him in our head, but we don't connect with Him in our heart.

Three things need to happen if we are to truly worship God.

1. Connect with God in our hearts – fully engage our hearts toward God. Wholeheartedly interact with Him.
2. Put God in His place. Where does God belong in your life? Nothing else must be before Him.
3. Put ourselves in our place – the place of humility, yieldedness, sensitivity to His leading and commitment to Him.

When we meet these requirements, our worship, our response to Him, becomes the driving force in our lives. It touches everything about us: our attitude and our actions, what we say and what we do, the things we accept and the things we reject.

David expressed that kind of worship in a Psalm found in I Chronicles 16:23-31 (Living Bible).

What a contrast to what we saw in Isaiah 1.

James 1:26-27 – When we worship aright, we will become the people God wants us to be (Living Bible).

Real worship will transform us into His likeness.

THE MESSIAH'S NAME: EMMANUEL

Matthew 1:22-23

(Before reading the Passage.)

Matthew 1 gives us three things:

1. Our Lord's Genealogy – Two genealogies are given:

– In Matthew – who takes our Lord's royal lineage forward from Abraham to Joseph.

Matthew's version represents Joseph.

– In Luke – Who moves backward from Jesus to Adam and represents Mary.

2. The Angelic Announcement to Joseph

The angel Dispels Joseph's Fear – Defends Mary's Honor – Declares the Message from God.

3. The Messiah's Names

Jesus – His names is wonderful ...The sweetest name I know ... a popular name ...a precious name ...a powerful name ...a preeminent name.

Now, Emmanuel: Jesus is His common name; Emmanuel, His uncommon name.

(Read the Passage.)

Emmanuel: God with us.

It is interesting to me that Jesus never used this name to describe Himself. And, no one ever called Him Emmanuel.

Four terms you will find about God in the Scripture: God Against us ...God For us ...God With us ...God In us.

1. God Against Us

What a terrifying thought! If there is anyone I don't want against me, it is God! Yet, there are times that God says that He is against folks:

– 1 Peter 3:12 "The face of the Lord is against them that do evil."

– Psalm 34:16 "The Lord is against them that do evil."

– Romans 1:18 "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteous of men."

– Revelation 2:4 "I have somewhat against thee."

2. God For Us

Romans 8:31 "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

3. God With Us

This is not a new concept:

– Genesis 21:22 God was with Abraham

– Genesis 26:3 God was with Isaac

– Genesis 28:15 God was with Jacob

God was with Joseph

– Exodus 3 To Moses "I will be with thee."

– Joshua 1:5 "As I was with Moses, I will be with thee."

As we come to look at Emmanuel, I would call your attention to three things:

I. His Identification

The name Emmanuel is found only three times in the Bible:

1. Isaiah 7:14

About 735 years before Christ was born, the prophet Isaiah was preaching in the city of Jerusalem. The king of Judah, the Southern Kingdom, at that time was king Ahaz. In those days the entire Middle East was being threatened by the invading forces of the Assyrian Empire, which is modern day Iraq. They were the most powerful forces of that day. King Ahaz had already made an unwise and unholy treaty with Assyria, but that information was top secret.

The two bordering nations with Judah were the Northern Kingdom of Israel or Ephraim and the nation of Syria. Those two nations decided to attack Judah in order to bring an end to the line of David and install a puppet ruler that would allow them to form a three-nation federation to withstand the Assyrian threat.

So with Judah facing the threat of invasion, the Lord said to Isaiah, "King Ahaz is inspecting the city's water supply in anticipation of war. Go down there and give him a message for me. Say to him (verse 4), "Be careful, keep calm, and don't be afraid. Do not lose heart ..."for the invasion won't even take place.

Notice Isaiah 7:10-14 – Ahaz was sarcastic and disinterested.

Notice Isaiah 8:8 – Because of the attitude of Ahaz, the land of Emmanuel will be stripped of its earthly glory and will lie in a devastated condition.

The SIGN will be fulfilled almost 800 years later at our Lord's birth.

Why are we given names?

a. To distinguish us from others and for others.

If we didn't have names, we'd wear out the phrase, "Ha, you!"

Nobody would know when someone was talking to us.

b. To identify us.

Did you know that there are over 360 names and titles for the Lord Jesus in Scripture?

Why so many? Because He is so Infinite, so Vast, so Multifaceted and Multidimensional

that it takes all these names to describe Him!

Two of our Lord's names are here in Matthew 1: Call His name, Jesus – that's His human name ..."they shall call His name, Emmanuel, God with us – that's His heavenly name.

Matthew declares Jesus to be the God-man – born of a virgin, because He had to be to be our Savior. To be our Savior, He had to be like us; yet, different, for he had to be sinless and to be sinless, he had to be born without a sin nature. Paul said, "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men" (Romans 5:12).

The woman does not pass on the sin nature. The man does. That's why Jesus had to be born of a virgin human woman and a Heavenly Father, conceived of the Holy Spirit.

Hebrews 4:15 – He is the God-man.

Someone said it like this: The Son of God became the Son of man so the sons of men could become the sons of God.

As man – with flesh just like our flesh:

- He belonged to a family, grew normally, played with little friends in the streets of Nazareth, went to school and was faithful in worship at the synagogue.
- He attended weddings and funerals. He worked with Joseph in his carpenter's shop where He acquired the skills and used the tools of the trade.
- He knew what it is to feel lonely, sad, afraid, rejected, depressed, pain, suffering, and death.

- By taking human form, God identified with us. He looked out upon our world through human eyes. It's one thing to look at our world from above and outside it. It's another thing to look at it from inside.
- The incarnation allowed God to see our world from the inside.
- God has looked at dawns, sunsets, starry nights, fields, flowers – all through human eyes.
- He has seen its beauty and its ugliness. He has felt its joy and its pain.

But as God:

- He had power over Disease, Disaster, Demons, and Death.
- He was able to read the thoughts of men and knew what was in their hearts.

Jesus was so much like us and yet so unlike us.

There was no room in Him for deceit, falsehood, pretense, hypocrisy, greed, selfishness.

He was gracious, kind, loving, forgiving, merciful, compassionate.

He was and is Perfect Man and Perfect God.

Gold City sings a Gospel song I like:

He was so much man that He slept in a boat, yet, He was so much God that the winds ceased when He spoke.

He was so much man that He wept when Lazarus died and He was so much God Lazarus came forth when He cried.

He was so much man that He thirsted at the well, yet He was so much God that He saved her soul from hell.

He was so much man that He died upon the tree yet He was so much God that He rose in victory.

II. His Exaltation John 1:14

Truth: Jesus embodied truth. He once said, "I am the truth."

The truth Jesus incarnated was much more than intellectual truth. It was moral truth.

His truth was the kind of faithfulness, trust-worthiness, goodness, and love we see in God.

When we come to know Him personally for ourselves, we can see God in Him.

As man He understands all of our human emotions, temptations, and needs and as God He can meet every one of them. He is Christ in us the hope of glory.

Because He is IN us and WITH us, He CARES for us.

1. He is Before us – leading and guiding us.
2. He is Behind us – protecting and watching after us.
3. He is Beside us – comforting and cheering us along.
4. He is Within us – assuring us day by day.
5. He is Above us – Listening to us.
6. He is Around us - Surrounding us so nothing can touch us without His permission.

He is with us in Salvation ...in Suffering ...in Service ...in Sorrow ... in every Situation.

Paul makes it personal in the book of Galatians: Galatians 1:4 for US

Galatians 2:20 for ME

III. His Glorification John 1:14 (Grace)

Grace has two meanings:

1. Completely unmerited favor. We could never earn it, buy it, or prove our self worthy of it.

2. Grace also implies beauty, graciousness and charm.

Notice John 1:14, 16. That phrase in verse 16 means “grace upon grace.”

It is grace heaped upon grace. His grace is inexhaustible. It never runs out because it is fed by unfailing springs of love. It is always replenished.

We come in our moral rags, He treats us as if we were kings, making us the sons of God.

God is a holy God and ought to be against us because we are unholy people.

But if we will open our heart to Him, He will come into our heart, forgive our sins, will be with us and fellowship with us forever.

“Emmanuel, Emmanuel,
God with us,
Revealed in us,
His name shall be called Emmanuel.”

THE MESSIAH'S NAME: JESUS

Matthew 1:21

(Before reading the Passage)

One of the most exciting times in the life of a couple that are about to become parents is naming the baby. Hopefully, the parents spend a lot of time deciding what to name their baby. After all, the child is going to be stuck with that name all their life, unless they go through a lot of red tape to get their name changed.

To tell you the truth, some folks just don't think when they name their children. I think about the governor of Texas several years ago. His name was Jim Hogg. He and his wife had two daughters. He named one Ima and the other Youra – true story!

Sometimes the names parents give their children displays the hopes of their parents. Adam and Eve named their firstborn son Cain. His name means “Acquired,” because she had gotten him from the Lord. The name also means “one who is full of promise,” and, yet, Cain was a bitter disappointment.

The name “Judas” means “a praise unto Jehovah.” Many Jewish parents named their sons Judas until Judas Iscariot betrayed our Lord. Today no one would name their son Judas. Most folks would not even name their dog Judas.

But what do you name the virgin born Son of God? The Creator of the universe. The One who said, “I am not of this world.” The One who was the Promised Messiah.

Well, God took the mystery out of it because He did not allow Joseph or Mary or even an angel to name His Son. God named Him Himself.

(Read the Passage)

Both the Old Testament and the New Testament points to Jesus as the Great Fact of history, the Great Force of History, and the Great Future of history.

The Lord Jesus is the secret of the Bible's unity, strength and beauty. Take the Lord Jesus out of the Bible and you would have no Bible. From Genesis through Revelation the theme of Scripture is the Lord Jesus Christ. All 66 books point to Him in some way or another.

Someone pictured the Lord Jesus in all 66 books like this: (**Play the song that goes through Jesus' Names - [He Is - Aaron Jeffrey](#)**)

1. In *Genesis*, He is the Creator that fashioned the universe with the words of His mouth and the seed of the woman that would bruise the head of Satan.
2. In *Exodus*, He is the manna that satisfies hungry souls, the Great I AM who is all things to all men, the Passover Lamb whose blood redeems man from the destruction of eternal death.
3. In *Leviticus*, He is the Great High Priest and the Sacrifice for sin.
4. In *Numbers*, He is the Pillow of Cloud by day and Pillow of Fire by night that gives direction and protection and the Brazen

- serpent who is lifted up and saves those who look to and trusts in Him.
5. In *Deuteronomy*, He is the Faithful Prophet.
 6. In *Joshua*, He is the Captain of the Lord's Host and Captain of our Salvation.
 7. In *Judges*, He is the Delivering Judge.
 8. In *Ruth*, He is the Kinsman-Redeemer.
 9. In the books of *Samuel*, He is the Trusted Prophet.
 10. In the books of *Kings* and *Chronicles*, He is the promised King of kings.
 11. In *Esther*, He is our Advocate and Deliverer.
 12. In *Nehemiah*, He is the Restorer of the Jews.
 13. In *Ezra*, He is the Faithful Scribe.
 14. In *Job*, He is the Living Redeemer and our Hedge of Protection.
 15. In *Psalms*, He is the Lord our Shepherd.
 16. In *Proverbs*, He is my Wisdom, the Lover of souls, and the Friend that sticketh closer than a brother.
 17. In *Ecclesiastes*, He is the sum Total of Life.
 18. In *Song of Solomon*, He is the Rose of Sharon, the Lily of the Valley, and the altogether Lovely One brings fragrance and beauty into our lives, our Lover and coming Bridegroom.
 19. In *Isaiah*, He is the Holy One of Israel.
 20. In *Jeremiah*, He is the Lord our Righteousness, The Balm of Gilead that heals the wounds of sin, the Weeping Prophet who is burdened for the sinner.
 21. In *Lamentations*, He is the Fountain of Tears.
 22. In *Ezekiel*, He is the Wheel within the Wheel.
 23. In *Daniel*, He is the Angel of the Lord in the Fiery Furnace who is always with us.
 24. In *Hosea*, He is the Loving Husband, the Healer of the Backslider and Restorer of the Ruined.
 25. In *Joel*, He is the Spirit upon all Flesh and Hope.
 26. In *Amos*, He is the Burden Barrier.
 27. In *Obadiah*, He is the Judge of the Proud.
 28. In *Jonah*, He is the God of the Second Chance.
 29. In *Micah*, He is the Everlasting God of Bethlehem.
 30. In *Nahum*, He is the Stronghold on the Day of Trouble.
 31. In *Habakkuk*, He is the Lord in His Holy Temple, the Anchor of our Faith.
 32. In *Zephaniah*, He is the Restorer of God's Lost Heritage.
 33. In *Haggai*, He is the Desire of all Nations.
 34. In *Zechariah*, He is the Lord Reigning in Jerusalem.
 35. In *Malachi*, He is the Sun of Righteousness with Healing in His wings.
 36. In *Matthew*, He is the Promised Messiah.
 37. In *Mark*, He is the Servant of God.
 38. In *Luke*, He is the Son of Man.
 39. In *John*, He is the John of God.
 40. In *the Gospels*, He is Christ coming to seek and save.
 41. In *Acts*, He is the Ascended Lord who sends the Holy Spirit.
 42. In *the Epistles*, He is Christ at the Father's Right Hand.
 43. In *Romans*, He is the Righteousness of God.
 44. In *I and II Corinthians*, He is the One who gives gifts to the Believers.
 45. In *Galatians*, He is the One who set us free.
 46. In *Ephesians*, He is Head of the Church.
 47. In *Philippians*, He is my Joy and Strength, and the Supplier of our every need.
 48. In *Colossians*, He is the Fullness of the Godhead Bodily.
 49. In *I and II Thessalonians*, He is Lord Who descends from Heaven.
 50. In *I and II Timothy*, He is the Godly Pastor, our Mediator and Example.
 51. In *Titus*, He is Faithful Pastor and our Pattern.
 52. In *Philemon*, He is the One Who sticks closer than a brother.
 53. In *Hebrews*, He is the High Priest and Living Sacrifice and our Intercessor.
 54. In *James*, He is the Wisdom from above.
 55. In *I and II Peter*, He is the Chief Shepherd and the Precious Cornerstone.
 56. In *I, II, III John*, He is the Love of God.
 57. In *Jude*, He is the Lord Coming down with Ten Thousand of His Saints.
 58. In *Revelation*, He is Christ Returning and Reigning as King of kings and Lord of lords.

I. Jesus was a Popular Name

The Name of Jesus was a very human name. It wasn't a Divine name. Not only was it a human name, it was a very common, popular name.

Some names are not very common: Sylvester, Petunia, Zerubbabel, Lowell!! These are earthly names but they are not common names. Those who study names tell us that the most common name for males today is John. Some folks have John as their first name or middle name.

Would it surprise you to know that when Jesus was born into this world that there were thousands and thousands of little Jewish boys named Jesus? It was the most common name for Jewish boys in that day.

Wouldn't you think that if God the Father was going to name His only begotten, virgin born Son who came from another world and existed in eternity past – wouldn't you think God the Father would be more creative in naming His Son?

What's the significance of it? Jesus came into the world, not to be set apart from man, but to be identified with man. That's why Jesus came. He came because there are drunks in the gutter and prostitutes in the streets and folks who lie and steal and kill. He came to identify Himself with sinful man.

Do you know where the name Jesus first came from? It was a name that was invented by Moses. Jesus is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name Joshua. Same thing.

Someone says, "I'd never think of naming my son Jesus." Then they turn around and name their little boy, Joshua. Same thing! Joshua is Hebrew. Jesus is Greek. Same thing.

Moses invented the word Joshua.

Note Numbers 13:1-2, 8. (Oshea is the same as Hosea which means salvation.) Now look at verse 16.

This is the first time in all of recorded Jewish history that the name ever appears. The name Jehoshua is really two names put together: Hosea, which means "salvation" and the word Jehovah, which is God's name. It was later combined to Joshua.

How do you know that? Look down at Numbers 13:16 again. Now turn to Joshua 1:1. Same guy!

Who was Joshua? Not a prophet like Elijah. Not a king like David. But a man of war, a soldier with blood on his hands, a man of great determination. God only said one thing to him, "Be strong and of good courage."

He was the Roy Rogers and John Wayne of his day. He was a role model for little boys and people by the thousands named their little boys Joshua, Jesus after him.

II. Jesus Is a Precious Name | Peter 2:7; Song of Solomon 1:3b

Mention the Name of Jesus and you'll get a reaction. For some the Name of Jesus is Hated ...for others the Name of Jesus is Honored because it is Holy.

To the dedicated Christian the Name of Jesus is honey to his mouth, music to his ears, and gladness to his heart. But to the defiant sinner, the cult member, the Moslems, the Name of Jesus pricks and stings.

Mention Mohammed or Buddha in public and no one blinks an eye, but mention the Name of Jesus and folks get upset, the ACLU will try to haul you into court.

But to the child of God the name of Jesus is precious because He is altogether lovely and He is all that we need Him to be to us.

Jesus – The mere mention of His Name

Jesus – the mere mention of His Name can calm the storm, heal the broken, raise the dead.

At the Name of Jesus, I've seen sin-hardened men melted, derelicts transformed, the lights of hope put back into the eyes of a hopeless child.

At the Name of Jesus, hatred and bitterness turn to love and forgiveness, segments cease.

I've heard a mother softly breath His name at the bedside of a child delirious from fever, and I've watched that little body grow quiet and the fevered brow cool.

I've sat beside a dying saint, her body racked with pain. Who in those final fleeting seconds summoned her last ounce of ebbing strength to whisper earth's sweetest name – Jesus, Jesus.

Emperors have tried to destroy it; Philosophers have tried to stomp it out.

Tyrants have tried to wash it from the face of the earth with the very blood of those who claimed it. Yet, still it stands.

And there shall be that final day when every voice of Adam's race shall raise in one great mighty chorus to proclaim the name of Jesus – for in that day every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

1. **Artist** – He is altogether lovely
2. **Architect** – Chief corner stone
3. **Baker** – Living bread
4. **Banker** – Hidden Treasure
5. **Biologist** – I am the Life
6. **Builder** – Sure foundation
7. **Doctor** – Great Physician
8. **Educator** – Great Teacher
9. **Farmer** – Lord of the Harvest
10. **Florist** – Rose of Sharon
11. **Geologist** – Rock of Ages
12. **Jurist** – Righteous Judge
13. **Jeweler** – Pearl of Great Price
14. **Lawyer** – Advocate
15. **Publisher** – Good Tidings of Great Joy
16. **Philosopher** – The Wisdom of God
17. **Preacher** – Word of God
18. **Scripture** – Living Stone
19. **Statesman** – Ensign to all nations
20. **Theologian** – Author and finisher of faith
21. **Traveler** – New and living way
22. **Sinner** – Lamb of God that takes away sin of the World

III. Jesus is a Powerful Name

- Sin can be repented of in His Name.
- Miracles are done in His name.
- Prayers are answered in His Name.
- Sinners can be saved only in His Name – Acts 4:12.

Did you know that Jesus is the only Person who asked to be born? Ever heard someone say, "I didn't ask to be born." None of us did. Only Jesus did and that was for us, so that we could be saved!

- He saves us from the guilt of sin by washing them in His Atoning Blood.
- He saves us from the Domination of sin by putting in our heart the sanctifying Spirit.
- He saves us from the Presence of sin when He takes us out of this world to rest with Him.
- He will save us from all the consequences of sin when He gives us a glorious body like unto His Body at that last day.

He doesn't save us from sorrows or conflicts or trials or even temptations, but He saves us from sin ever more. He gives us what money cannot buy – Inner Peace!

That's why I love Him. That's why I try to live a holy and pure life for Him. That's why I serve Him ...He's my Savior ...He's my Lord ...He's my King!

An old black preacher, S.M. (Shadrach Meshach) Lockridge put it better than I ever could.

The Bible says my King is a seven-way king ...He's the King of the Jews; that's a racial king ...He's the King of Israel; that's a national King ...He's the King of Righteousness ...He's the King of the Ages ...He's the King of Heaven ...He's the King of Glory ...He's the King of kings, and He's the Lord of lords. That's my King. Well ...I wonder, do you know Him? David said, "The Heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows His handiwork. My King is a sovereign King. No means of measure can define His limitless love. No far seeing telescope can bring into visibility the coastline of His shoreless supply. No barrier can hinder Him from pouring out His blessings. He's enduringly strong ...He's entirely sincere ...He's eternally steadfast ...He's immortally gracefulHe's imperially powerfulHe's impartially merciful ...Do you know Him?

He's the greatest phenomenon that ever crossed the horizon of this world. He's God's Son . He's a sinner's Savior . He's the centerpiece of civilization. He stands in the solitude of Himself. He's august. He's unique. He's unparalleled. He's unprecedented. He's the loftiest idea in literature ...He's the highest personality in philosophy. He's the supreme problem in higher criticism. He's the fundamental doctrine of true theology. He's the cardinal necessity for spiritual religion. He's the miracle of the age. He's the superlative of everything good that you choose to call Him. He's the only one qualified to be an all sufficient Savior. I wonder if you now Him today?

He supplies strength for the weak. He's available for the tempted and the tried. He sympathizes and He saves. He strengthens and sustains. He guards and He guides. He heals the sick ...He cleanses lepers. He forgives sinners. He discharges debtors. He delivers captives. He defends the feeble. He blesses the young. He serves the unfortunate. He regards the aged. He rewards the diligent ...and He beautifies the meek. I wonder if you know Him?

Well, my King ...is THE King. He's the key to knowledge. He's the wellspring to wisdom. He's the doorway of deliverance . He's the pathway of peace. He's the roadway of righteousness. He's the highway of holiness. He's the gateway of glory. Do you know Him?

Well ...His office is manifold. His promise is sure. His light is matchless. His goodness is limitless. His mercy is everlasting. His love never changes. His Word is enough. His grace is sufficient. His reign is righteous. and His yoke is easy, and his burden is light. I wish I could describe Him to you, but He's indescribable ...He's incomprehensible ...He's invincible ...He's irresistible.

You can't get Him out of your mind. You can't get Him off of your hand. You can't out live Him, and you can't live without Him. The Pharisees couldn't stand Him, but they found out they couldn't stop Him. Pilate couldn't find any fault in Him. The witnesses couldn't get their testimonies to agree. Herod couldn't kill Him. Death couldn't handle Him, and the grace couldn't hold Him. Yea!!!, that's my King, that's my King.

Father ..."Thine is the Kingdom ...and the Power ...and the Glory ...Forever"...and ever, and ever, and ever, and ever. How long is that? And ever ...and ever ...and when you get through with all the forevers, then ...AMEN! ...AMEN!

IV. Jesus is a Preeminent Name Philippians 2:9-10

"Every knee will bow ...Every knee will bow ...Every knee will bow ...Every knee will bow."

The Atheist will bow. Madelyn O'Hara's knee will bow. The Child Pornographer will bow ...Hitler and Castro will bow. Charles Manson's knee will bow. Every vile, wicked tongue that uses God's Name in vain will bow. Every unbeliever will bow.

How much better it would be to bow before Him now.

"Whosoever shall call upon the Name of the Lord shall be saved."

BACKWARDS CHRISTMAS

Luke 2:8-20

(Before reading the Passage)

I heard about a red-neck town that had a live nativity scene right in the middle of their town. Everything looked fine except that the

wise men had on fireman's helmets. A visitor asked why the wise men were wearing fireman's hats. One of them said that it was because it was in the Bible. The Bible said that the wise men had just come from putting out a fire. It says that "they came from a far."

"Christmas really is an unusual holiday. We sit beside a dead tree, next to a fire, eating candy out of a sock."

Well, I want us to look at that first Christmas.

(Read the Passage.)

When God's Son was born, God did it up right! He announced the birth of His Son with angels and a star in the sky!!

There were some shepherds close to Bethlehem and God announced the Savior's birth through angels. This is the third time angels had been involved in the incarnation.

- Gabriel visited Mary ...and later visited Joseph.
- Now, ONE angel announces the birth to the shepherds.

After the announcement by the one angel, a multitude of the heavenly host joined them in praise and celebration.

Note Luke 2:9-10, 13.

Don't miss the splendor of it all. Remember that all of this took place at night. Even if the stars were shining and there were a full moon, this was a great sight.

An angel appeared ...:"Came upon them." The presence of the angel must have been glorious ...but wait! Verse 9: "The glory of the Lord shone round about them." The Shekinah glory, the visible presence of God. The presence of the angels was glorious, but the glory of the Lord out-shone the angels!

"A multitude of the heavenly host." What sort of angels were they? It may surprise some to know that they were not special choir angels, but were a military group. The word "host" is a military term for a band of soldiers.

The multitude of angels came and stood before the shepherds. It's very possible they stood in rank on the hills of the fields. In pictures you see angels hovering in the sky above the shepherds, but the word means they stood before the shepherds.

What a wonderful way for God to announce the birth of His Son!

Did you notice that God took the initiative to draw men to His Son?

The symbols of Christmas are much different in the Biblical account than they are in the secular world. In the secular world the symbols of Christmas are Santa Clause, elves, materialism and tinsel. In the Biblical account the symbols of Christmas are shepherds, Sheep, Baby, angels.

But there is a mystery in their Christian account. If you look deeper, you see a backward Christmas.

- The shepherds are really the sheep.
- The Baby is really the shepherd.
- The Sheep are really the angels.

I. The Shepherds are the Sheep Luke 2:8-10

God revealed His Son – not to Herod or the religious leaders – but to shepherds. God knew the overlooked shepherds were second to the lowest people on earth, second only to beggars. They were spiritually unclean; they could not vote, they made the lowest salaries with no promise of promotion.

Yet, God spoke peace to them – Luke 2:10-14.

These shepherds needed a Divine Shepherd because these shepherds were sinners – Isaiah 53:6. The Bible compares us to sheep and that is no compliment. Sheep are:

1. Dumb Stubborn, highhanded. You can't train them – they're dumb.

Sin is dumb. We must always pay for sin and, yet, time and again we go right back to sin.

Hunter took something from his sister, knowing he's going to get into trouble, yet he does it again. I say, "son, you know when you do that you're going to get into trouble. Why do you keep doing it?" Then I ask myself why I keep doing wrong.

2. Directionless A dog can find its way back home – ever tried to take on off?

3. Dirty Sheep can't clean themselves. When wool gets dirty, it gets heavy and the sheep will turn over on its back. Shepherds have to cut the dirty wool off and pick the sheep up.

4. Defenseless a picture of us in our sinful lostness. The wages of sin is death and we have no defense against it.

But notice Luke 2:15. They went to Jesus. You're a sinner. What's your response?

II. The Baby is the Shepherd Luke 2:11

These shepherds met THE Shepherd.

- John 10:11 Good Shepherd
- Hebrews 13:20 Great Shepherd
- I Peter 5:4 Chief Shepherd
- Psalm 23:1 My Shepherd

They were promised Peace and their peace was won at Calvary. Someone said that when they saw Jesus, they found their Christmas present. If there had been a sign around the neck of Jesus, it would have read, "To: The shepherds, From: God."

We want presents at Christmas, but it's not our birthday. It's all about Jesus. But God wants to give us something.

A missionary's son was in the States during Christmas time while his father was over seas. As he held a framed picture of his father he was asked what he wanted for Christmas. "I want my dad to step out of this frame and come to me."

That's what Immanuel did. He's God's Gift to man, but like every gift, He must be received.

III. The Sheep are the Angels Luke 2:17, 20

Not literal angels. The word angel means messenger. They brought the message to others.

God stopped using angels to announce the good news after His Son was born. No more angels or stars – now He uses His sheep.

Verse 20 – they took the message back to their jobs.

A Texan went to a church up North. Everything was dead – the music, the preaching. He was looking for anything with life. Finally, the preacher said something that hit a cord in his heart and he said, "Amen! Now you're preaching."

Someone came to him and said, "We don't do that in this church. Don't do that again." He said, "I can't help it. I found Jesus!" They said, "Well, you didn't find Him here, so be quiet."

I hope that is never said of us. I want you to find Jesus here!

MARY'S LITTLE LAMB Luke 2:7-11

"Mary had a little lamb; its fleece was white as snow ..." we remember that little nursery rhyme from preschool days.

But in Luke the Bible says, "A little Lamb was born in Bethlehem." The Great I AM was born a Lamb!

Micah 5:2 prophesied that God's Lamb would be born in Bethlehem.

It was in Bethlehem that many of the sheep used for sacrifices at the Temple were raised. Bethlehem was only about six miles from Jerusalem.

The Temple sacrifices that took place twice daily would require a good number of sheep as burnt offerings. These lambs, of course, speak of Jesus Christ and His great work on Calvary for our sins.

It was in the area where the shepherds heard the announcement of Christ's birth. The flocks watched by the shepherds were the flocks that furnished the sacrifices at the Temple. And how fitting it was to have the announcement of the birth of Jesus Christ, 'the Lamb of God,' made to the shepherds who were caring for sheep, headed for the sacrifices at the Temple."

I. The Lamb in Prophecy Exodus 12:1-6

1. Here is the background: The Jews have been in bondage for 400 years. But God has a plan to redeem His people and it involved a lamb.
2. The people of God are in bondage and He is going to deliver them ...with what? A defenseless lamb!
3. A lamb has no fangs ...no claws ...it cannot run or fight ...it can frighten nothing!
4. Yet, God is going to deliver His people from Egypt through a lamb.
5. Do you know what the symbol of Egypt was? A serpent! On their scepter and crown was the serpent!
6. There is going to be a battle between a lamb and a serpent!

Four things I want you to see about this lamb:

A. A Special Lamb Exodus 12:5

One blemish would disqualify the lamb. They would examine the mouth, the eyes, the ears, the feet.

B. A Slain Lamb Exodus 12:6 – Kill It

They would keep the lamb up from the 10th to the 14th day. At 3:00 pm they would lift the chin, cut, and catch the blood in a basin.

C. A Saving Lamb Exodus 12:7, 12-13

- Put the blood on the doorpost and lintel.
- If they had put a live lamb outside the door, it would have done no good.
- We are not saved by the life of Christ, but His death. “Without the shedding of blood ...”

D. A Shared Lamb Exodus 12:8

- Roasted ...our Lord endured the fire of God's wrath.
- That night a quarter of a million lambs were slain.
- When those slaves walked out of Egypt, they walked out with a lamb inside of them. It is Christ in you, the hope of glory.
- What a prophecy of Mary's Lamb that we are to feed on Christ day by day.

II. The Lamb in History

A. Jesus was the special Spotless Lamb.

John the Baptist knew that Mary's Lamb was the prophesied lamb – John 1:36.

B. Jesus was the Slain Lamb.

Why do you think the Gospel writers gave so much time to the last week of our Lord's life. About one third of each of the Gospels is devoted to that last week.

At the same time the Lord is descending from the Mount of Olives, the sacrificial sheep are ascending the Temple mount ...(Palm Sunday).

At the same time Jesus is going through the Eastern Gate, the lambs were going through the Sheep Gate.

As the priest were examining the sheep, Pilate said, “I find no fault in Him.”

As the lambs were put to death at 3:00 pm, Jesus breathed His last.

C. Jesus is the Saving Lamb.

Have you been to Jesus for the cleansing power?

Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?

D. Jesus is to be the Shared Lamb.

III. The Lamb in Victory Revelation 5:1-6

The seven sealed book is the title deed to the earth (verse 5). They were looking for a Lion and saw a Lamb (verse 6).

- A Slain Lamb (verse 6)
- A Standing Lamb (verse 5)
- A Strong Lamb (seven horns speak of might)
- A Searching Lamb (seven eyes)
- A Sovereign Lamb (verse 7)

IV. The Lamb in Majesty Revelation 5:8-12

Mary's Little Lamb has come to deliver you from the serpent.

He has come to set you free from the bondage of sin.

BORN IN A MANGER

Luke 2

The Christmas story is a beautiful story, but I don't know if you've seen it all at one setting.

At Christmas time we talk about the manger ...or the shepherds ...or the wise men ...but how does it all fit together?

I. The Couple

Joseph and Mary (about 16 years old) were a young Jewish couple who were engaged to be married.

1. Engagements were much more binding in that day than they are in our day.

The engagement would usually last from one to two years while the groom built a house and furnished it before taking his bride.

If the man of the engaged couple died before the wedding, the woman was considered a widow.

If one of the two became unfaithful, they got a legal divorce.

Verse 30 – Jesus – Old Testament Joshua

Verse 31 – Conceived in womb – Virgin Birth of Christ

Bring forth son – Truth of His humanity

Call name Jesus – He is the Messiah

He shall be great – He is omnipotent

He shall be called Son of Highest – He is God/Deity

2. Luke 1:26-35

The angel Gabriel announced to Mary that the Holy Spirit would come upon her and she would conceive and bare a Son, though a virgin ...and the Child born would be the Son of God.

Right after Gabriel's announcement to Mary, the angel instructed her to go to her cousin's, Elizabeth's house for she was with child six months. Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months until John the Baptist was born.

What a troublesome time that must have been for Mary.

She told Elizabeth about Gabriel's announcement to her ...but how could she tell Joseph? How would he respond?

The Law gave Joseph two options: He could put her away publically ...even have her stoned for unfaithfulness ...or quietly dismiss her.

Matthew 1:18-25. Gabriel appeared to Joseph and told him that this Child was conceived of the Holy Spirit ...Mary had not been unfaithful ...and to take her then to be his wife, which he did.

II. The Birth in Bethlehem Luke 2

Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth ...Bethlehem was at least 85 miles from Nazareth. Furthermore, Bethlehem was some 2300 feet above sea level which meant it would be a rugged “up hill” trip.

Here's the situation: Most godly Jews – which Mary and Joseph were – believed the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.

- Micah 5:2 Foretold it 700 years earlier
- Matthew 2:5-6 The Scribes knew and believed it.
- John 7:42 Even common folks were acquainted with this fact.

Mary was in her ninth month and it took a decree from Caesar Augustus to get them to Bethlehem. Why did they wait so long about going to Bethlehem?

When they got to Bethlehem it had been a hard, tiring trip and the little town of Bethlehem was overflowing with people who had come there to register in the census.

There was no room in the Inn ...Two Greek words for “Inn”:

“Pandocheion” means “hotel” – a place with a host and provisions.

“Kataluma” (used here) means an enclosure where travelers might drive their cattle. There was water, but no food, no host. Most towns would have a “kataluma” which would provide free accommodation to travelers. But every man carried his own food and bedding.

But even the Kataluma was filled. Joseph had to look for another place to dwell. The only place he could find was a lowly stable where animals were sometimes sheltered and fed.

Joseph must have felt very ashamed and discouraged that he could not provide better for Mary.

I think they made the best of the situation ...No complaints.

It was relief just to finally get off that donkey. Mary leans back against the wall, her feet swollen, back aching, contractions growing stronger and closer together.

Joseph didn't have a minute to lose. A feeding trough would do for a crib. Hay would serve as a mattress. His robe for blankets.

Mary screams with pains. Joseph acts as a midwife – the time has come!

One final push! The Messiah has arrived!

For a few cherished moments, Joseph and Mary have the tiny Savior all to themselves as the three of them snuggle together against the cold night.

Mary reaches down and the hands that created the world takes hold of her finger.

They worship together.

On that starlit night in Bethlehem, God came to earth to do the one thing He could not do in Heaven. Die.

III. The Shepherds Come to Worship Him Angels Luke 2:8-20

IV. Mary and Joseph Take Jesus to the Temple on the Eighth Day

To Have Him Circumcised Luke 2:21-38

V. Wise Men Come and Worship/Bring Gifts Star Matthew 2:1-12

God not only Pointed the Way, but also Provided the Way.

VI. Mary-Joseph-Jesus Flee into Egypt

Using the gifts of wise men to pay their way Matthew 2:13-18.

VII. Jesus Returns to Nazareth Matthew 2:19-23

CHRISTMAS IS SPELLED L. O. V. E.

1 Corinthians 13

If you are looking for that special something to give to someone this Christmas, why don't you give what God gave – Love.

I'm talking about a special kind of love – Agape Love. It's what everyone needs. It fits us all. It's something that never needs to be exchanged – always appropriate.

Three things Paul deals with:

I. The Value of Love I Corinthians 13:1-3

Love is indispensable. There is no substitute for love.

A. Love is Greater than Oratory – I Corinthians 13:1

B. Love is Greater than Prophecy – I Corinthians 13:2a

If I were to ask, “Had you rather hear a series of messages on love or on prophecy,” what would you say? Most folks want to know what's going to happen; yet, Paul says love is greater than prophecy.

C. Love is Greater than Knowledge – I Corinthians 13:2b

D. Love is Greater than Faith – I Corinthians 13:2c

What good is it if you can move mountains if you can't remove Malice?

E. Love is Greater than Benevolence – I Corinthians 13:3a

Some had rather give money to the poor than to become personally involved with the poor.

You can give without loving, but you can't love without giving.

F. Love is Greater than Martyrdom – I Corinthians 13:3b

There are folks that will blow themselves up just to blow others up.

That's what happened when the “Cole” ship was blown up.

II. The Virtues of Love I Corinthians 13:4-7

A. Long-Suffering Patience

Ever hear someone say, “I don't have much patience.” They are saying, “I don't have much love.”

B. Kindness Courteous

There is never an excuse for a Christian to be rude – to a salesperson, to a waitress, to an employee or co-worker.

A lady came to receive Christ. The preacher asked, “What impacted your heart to trust Christ?”

She said, “You did.” He said, “I'd be interested to know what I said that touched your heart.” “Oh, it wasn't something you said; it was something you did. I watched as a lady criticized you sharply and unfairly and I watched as you dealt with her in kindness.”

C. Is Not Jealous The green-eyed Monster

D. Humble Not Puffed Up

Is not too filled with pride to say, “I was wrong ...I am sorry ...Will you forgive me?”

E. Not Rude To Behave Unseemly

I said that there is no excuse for a person (Christian) to be rude. And there is no excuse for a Christian to be untactful.

“Well, preacher, I just speak my mind and say what I think.” Well, stop it. That's rude, crude, and socially unacceptable – and un-Christian.

F. Not Selfish Seeks Not Her Own

This Christmas, stop worrying about what you're going to get and think about what you can share.

G. Even Tempered Not Easily Provoked

Doesn't have a hair-trigger temper – have to walk on egg shells around them.

“You never know what a hot-head is going to do; neither does the hot-head.”

H. Not Suspicious I Corinthians 13:7

III. The Victory of Love I Corinthians 13:8

Love never fails – Love Lasts

1. Love is the Greatest Commandment Matthew 22:36-38
2. Love is the Greatest Testimony John 13:35
3. Love is the Greatest Virtue 1 Corinthians 13:13
4. Love is the Greatest Motivation 2 Corinthians 5:14 Love of Christ Constrains us.
5. Love is the Greatest Confirmation 1 John 3:14-15 Know passed from death to life.

City of Chicago – cold winter day – boy selling newspapers – policeman “go to big white house – say John 3:16.” Lady – said “John 3:16.”

Living room in front of fireplace Makes a cold boy warm

Something to eat Makes a hungry boy full

Bathtub in house Makes a dirty boy clean

Feather bed Makes a tired boy rested

Next day at breakfast table – took Bible from mantle. Read John 3:16.

With this he invited Jesus into his heart. John 3:16 – still don't understand it, but it sure makes a lost boy saved.

I'm like that little boy. I don't understand it all, but it sure makes a sinful man like me saved by the grace of God.

MARY: THE MOTHER OF OUR LORD

Luke 1:26-38

Mary has been mistreated by the Church.

A. The Roman Catholic Church has Deified her – making her the Queen of heaven and almost co-equal with Christ. The Catholic Church teaches the perpetual Virginity of Mary – meaning that Jesus was Mary's only son. What about the Bible's account that Jesus had four brothers and at least two sisters? They have produced two theories: First, that these were the children of Joseph by a former marriage and that they have no blood relationship with Mary or Jesus. Second, they were the children of Mary, but not Mary the mother of Jesus, but Mary the wife of Alphaeus, which would make them the cousins of Jesus.

They also teach that one can “go through” Mary to get in touch with Jesus. They have Deified her!

B. Protestants, on the other hand, are guilty of over reacting to this and Demoted her by down playing her character and contribution.

The Bible would bring us to a balance and teach us the truth concerning Mary.

I. Her Selection

What kind of woman would God choose to be the mother of His Son?

It is interesting that we hear nothing of her physical beauty. God was interested in her inner being – her character.

A. She was Saved Luke 1:28

1. The words “Highly favored” means “full of grace” – a term used of all believers in Ephesians 1:6, where it is translated “accepted.”
2. This portrays Mary as a recipient, not a dispenser, of divine grace.
3. Her encounter with God had transformed her life.
4. The angel, Gabriel, God's messenger angel, comes to Mary and says, “You chose God; now, God has chosen you. The Lord is with you; blessed are you among women.”

B. She was Morally Pure

1. That's a big deal with God! Twice we are told that she was a virgin. God puts a premium on purity.
2. In our day if a girl (or boy) admits to being sexually pure, they become the source of ridicule.
3. A morally impure girl was making fun of a girl who committed herself to stay pure. The girl responded, “I can become like you anytime I want to, but you can never again become like me.”

C. She was Trusted

The woman who gave Jesus birth would also be responsible to care for him in infancy, and guide His steps through boyhood years, and surround Him with true motherly attention, and teach Him by example the ways of God and the Word of God (Imagine, being an example to the Son of God!).

II. Her Submission Luke 1:30-34

“How can this be, since I do not know a man?” This was not a question of doubt, but of wonder – awe – amazement.

Gabriel answered (verse 35). This will be a creative act of the Holy Spirit. This will be accomplished by a MIRACLE of God and by the MIGHT of God!

Note Luke 1:38: “Behold your handmaiden. Be it unto me according to your word.”

I think Gabriel went flying back to glory. With excitement he said to the angels, “She accepted!” And to God the Father, “She accepted!” And all of heaven rejoiced!

III. Her Service

I think about those nine months Mary carried Jesus and then after He was born. All the gossip she endured – and how was she to explain it all to Joseph?

But, when Jesus was born...She was the first to kiss the face of God!!

I watch as new mothers care for their new babies and are overcome with the awesome responsibility of caring for a new life. What a sense of responsibility Mary must have felt – caring for the Son of God!

There were some things Mary couldn't give Jesus:

1. She could not surround Him with wealth. When she presented the divine Infant in the Temple all she could offer as a gift was a pair of pigeons – the offering of the very poor. But little is much when God is in it.
2. She could offer Him a Godly home. He would see in her the traits of love ...trust ...humility ...obedience.

III. Her Sorrow

In Luke 2:35 Simeon told her, “a sword will pierce through your own soul.” Mary was to experience DARKNESS, as well as DELIGHT, as her “First-born” went out to fulfill His mission in the world.

She would experience:

1. His Birth

She wrapped Him, not in a blanket, but in “swaddling cloths.” These were only strips of cloth

used to bind the baby. It is the same type of strips of cloth used to bind up a body in death to prepare it for the tomb. This Baby was born to die!!

Then the gifts that were brought by the wise men. One brought myrrh. What if someone brought your baby a

bottle of embalming fluid?

2. At the Temple

Mary said, "Your father and I have sought you..." He said, "I must be about My Father's business."

3. At the Wedding at Cana

Mary knew a new era of ministry had begun.

4. At the Cross

Jesus says to John, "Behold thy mother."

5. At the Upper Room Acts 1:12-14

She is praying, along with the other disciples, awaiting Pentecost.

Mary, like us, wanted to hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

JOSEPH: THE FORGOTTEN MAN OF CHRISTMAS

Matthew 1:18-25

Of all the characters surrounding the Christ Child at Christmas, the one we forget the most is Joseph.

1. The Bible never mentions any animals in the stable. They are the product, says Paul Harvey of legend and logic. Yet, the sheep and cattle get more attention than Joseph.
2. You will search the hymnal almost in vain for any reference to Joseph.

Why is this?

It could be his silence. Not one simple word from him is recorded in the Bible. It could be that he is found in only two Bible chapters, both connected with Jesus' infancy. After this, he passes from view. It could be he is dwarfed by the Roman Catholic emphasis on Mary. It could be because he was not the biological father of Jesus.

Whatever the reason, he should not be forgotten.

He is one of the finest characters of grace in the pages of the Bible. He was a godly man and a good man – hand picked by God to be the foster father of His Son.

Mary's body helped shape the body of Jesus, but Joseph's character helped influence the character of Jesus. No one played a greater part in the development of a Hebrew child than his father. Joseph was Jesus' teacher, preacher, and priest. He taught Him most of life's lessons. He taught Him the trade of carpentry. He taught Him the principles of the Jewish religion.

The Bible sums up the character of Joseph in Matthew 1:19 when it calls him "a righteous man." This word, in the Bible, means more than "just" or "good." It is the dominate New Testament word for saved, for those who live the right kind of lives because they are right with God.

Joseph was saved as all men before and after him are saved and that is by a willingness to turn from sin (repentance) combined with trust and commitment to the God of the Bible.

One note: We often talk about how Mary kept herself pure – so did Joseph. It is just as important for the man to keep himself pure as it is for the woman.

Three things I want you to see:

I. Joseph's Dilemma

The story of Mary and Joseph was a true love story. They had planned and dreamed together of the day they would be married.

Then Mary went to visit her cousin, Elizabeth, who was to be the mother of John the Baptist. When she returned home, three months later, Mary broke the news to Joseph – "I am going to have a baby."

What would you think if you had been Joseph? What would you do? I think Mary told Joseph about the angel and her submission to have the Child. But what would you have thought or done?

Joseph faced some tensions:

The tension between Conviction and Compassion.

- He was a just man. He had some true convictions.
- He must be tough – yet, tender. Strong – yet, sweet. Firm – yet, not fanatical.

The tension between Law and Love.

- His head knew what the Law said, but in his heart he loves Mary.
- He has two options: Public Disgrace ...Private Divorce.

II. Joseph's Dream Matthew 1:20-21

I wonder if Joseph didn't go to the temple and maybe the priest read Isaiah 7:14: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and you shall call his name Immanuel."

Matthew 1:20: "While he thought about these things..."

The angel removed all doubt from Joseph because he whispered two things to his heart:

1. The cause of Mary's conception.

- a. She had not been unfaithful.
- b. Joseph, something divine is going to take place. You are going to witness a miracle.

2. The character of Mary's Child.

Two names were given the Child:

a. Immanuel – God with us

That name was picked from the Old Testament Scripture God with us – speaks of His deity.

He is the cure for our loneliness.

b. Jesus – The humanity of His name

Jesus was a common name in that day, but He raised it to new heights. It is not a common name today.

We talk of John, James, Peter. We don't name our children Jesus. He set that name apart!

The Name Jesus gets to the heart of Christmas.

- Man is a sinner
- We have a Savior
- We may have salvation – came to save us from our sins.

III. Joseph's Decision Matthew 1:24-25

Having heard the dream, Joseph responded in faith and he decided to:

1. Be faithful to the will of God – did as the angel said.

He would endure all the talk – the stares of others.

He would lead the donkey to the city ...find no room. The will of God is not always easy.

2. Be faithful to the Son of God.

He brought Jesus into his home and taught Him his trade.

One day Jesus will say to Joseph, "Well done ...good, faithful servant."

HIS WONDERFUL NAME

Isaiah 9:6

If you were given the great responsibility of naming the Divine Son of God, what would you name Him?

We pick children's names to identify them ...and to give them a sense of identification. But for the Jews of old, names were for more than a means of identification ...spoke of their character – often waiting to age 12 to give them their name.

It is interesting to me that God the Father did not leave the responsibility of naming His Son to man. Instead He told His prophets and the angels what His Son would be named – before He was born.

You see, the Father already knew what the character of His Son was before He was born on earth. After all, He was with His Father in all of eternity past!

- He shall be called Emmanuel, God with us. C. S. Lewis: "For God to become man would be like man becoming a grub worm.
- Jesus – for He shall save His people from their sins – not His sin!!
- Isaiah 9:6 – For unto us ...to us ...for us ...call Him ...

The Father would never give a name to His Son that He didn't deserve:

I. Wonderful: Cares for the Dullness of Life

The word "Beautiful" means "full of beauty." "Wonderful" means "full of wonder!!" There is nothing dull about Him.

The word "wonder" means "Amazement, Awe, Admiration, Uniqueness." He was full of wonder. He is unique in His:

1. Purity He never sinned
2. Perception He knew what was in man
3. Proclamation "Never a man spoke like this Man"
4. Power Over demons ...Disease ...Death
5. Pardon Who, but God, can forgive sin

He came to impart Wonder to us. He takes the ordinary and makes it extraordinary!!

Our God is an Awesome God; He reigns from Heaven above

With Wisdom, pow'r and love;

Our God is an Awesome God! Our God is an Awesome God!!

II. Counselor: Cares for the Decisions of Life

Where people turn for help is some indication of their character and faith:

- Local bar Doctor
- Fortune teller (psychics) Pastor or trained counsel

Jesus is the Supreme Counselor. John 6:68: "To whom shall we go – you have the Words of life."

He understands us and knows what is best for us because He made us!

We were told in counseling class "Don't get personally involved. Don't get emotionally involved." Jesus did! He counsels in Love!

III. The Mighty God: Cares for the Demands of Life

The history of mankind has been the story of discovering and using power. First there was Man power, Horse power, Steam power, Atomic power. But the need is for Spiritual power – Jesus is the source.

There are two pictures in my office my Dad took. One in a picture made in a cemetery of Jesus with the

children – “Suffer the little children.” The other is a picture he made of Lightening. Scripture says, “Power belongs unto the Lord.”

His is a creative power ...conquering power ...cleansing power.

Our God is an Awesome God, He reigns from Heaven above.

With Wisdom, Power and love

Our God is an Awesome God! Our God is an Awesome God!

IV. Everlasting Father: Cares for the Dimensions of Life

We may not always be able to depend on an earthly father; but we have a Heavenly Father we can always depend on.

He is an Everlasting Father – that is, He is the originator or author of Eternity.

Two things are clear: He Invaded His Planet.

He Infuses His People.

V. Prince of Peace: Cares for the Disturbances of Life

A prince is a ruler ...a controller. Jesus is in control of Peace! Peace is at the very heart of the ministry of Jesus. See Isaiah 26:3.

Shalom: more than absence of war and conflict. It has nothing to do with the situation on the outside, but has everything to do with the condition on the inside.

We need peace when we're living and we need peace when we are dying.

There was a soldier dying on a battlefield. The chaplain came upon the young man and asked him, “Young man, is there anything I can do for you?” The soldier replied, “No, Sir, I don't need anything done for me. I need some things undone!”

Only Jesus can give peace. What a Savior!!!

WHAT I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS FOR OUR CHURCH

Philippians 1:9-11

Some of us have a Christmas wish list.

One little boy sang: “All I want for Christmas is my two front teeth.” When we hear this song, we can almost see him standing there – two front teeth out and him trying to whistle.

Well, what's on your Christmas wish list – for our church?

Wouldn't it be wonderful to go with Paul into his prayer closet, hear him praying.

He prayed sensitively – he knew their areas of need and help.

He prayed supernaturally – Remember, he was in prison when he wrote this epistle. He was a thousand miles away, bound to a soldier. But his prayer wasn't bound by distance.

He prayed specifically. Paul prayed for three specific things for the church in Philippi:

I. A Love that Flows Philippians 1:9

Notice the Paul did not pray that they would begin to love each other. They already loved each other, but he prayed that their love will grow.

Love that doesn't grow becomes stagnant. On the other hand, love that always grows is always fresh.

The word “abound” is the verb form of the noun “abundance.” It means to have an abundance of something...to have an exceeding measure, above the ordinary. He wanted their love to overflow.

Why did Paul pray first that their love would flow? Love is:

- “Greatest virtue” 1 Corinthians 13:13 – “Faith, hope, love; “but the greatest of these is love.”
- “Greatest Commandment” Matthew 22:37-40 – “Love God ...love your neighbor.”
- “Greatest Testimony” John 13:35 – “By this shall all men know you are my disciples...”
- “Greatest Confirmation we are saved” I John 3:14-15.

I heard about a woman who was bit by a mad dog. After the test were run, the doctor said, “I hate to have to tell you this, but you have rabies.” She quickly got out her pen and paper. The doctor was surprised and asked, “What are you doing, making out your will?” She said, “No, I'm making a list of the folks I'm going to bite.” This is not the kind of love Paul wanted the Philippian church to have.

It was said of the early church, “see how they love one another.” I heard of a boy who walked seven miles each Sunday to go to D. L. Moody's church. He passed 15 churches to get there. Some people asked him Why he would walk so far instead of stopping at closer churches. He replied, “They know how to love a fellow down there.”

Can folks sense how much we love each other when they walk in our doors?

A bell is not a bell until you ring it,
A song is not a song until you sing it,
Love wasn't put in your heart there to stay,
Love just isn't love until you give it away.

II. A Mind That Knows Philippians 1:9

This is what makes love powerful. Some have love but don't have knowledge and discernment; some have knowledge but no love. Love without knowledge is dangerous – and – knowledge without love is disastrous. Paul says, I want you to abound in love, but I want it to be intelligent love and discerning love.

III. A Character That Shows Philippians 1:10

A. Sincere

The word means “without wax ...to be unmixed... to be tested by the sunshine.”

When the ancients made porcelain vessels, they often broke or cracked. Whenever that happened, they mended them with wax. Sometimes when a person just looked at a vase, he would not know if it was cracked. The only sure way to know whether the object had been patched was to hold it up to the sunlight. The wax would immediately become visible. When the objects were not patched, that is when they were pure and without wax. From that background comes our word, “sincere.” To be sincere means to be pure enough to stand the test of sunlight.

The greatest case for and against Christianity is the life of a Christian.

A bus driver gave a woman too much change on purpose. He watched her in the mirror and saw the expression on her face as she realized she had gotten too much back. She made her way to where the driver was and told him he had given her too much. He said, “I did it on purpose. I've been trying to decide whether or not to become a Christian, but I didn't know if it really made a difference in a person's life.” He said, “Now, I know it's real.”

There are cracks in our character but we admit they are there and we work on them.

B. Without Offense (Blameless)

The word “blameless” means not to stumble or not to cause someone else to stumble. This is not sinlessness or perfection. When we do stumble or when we do set a bad example, we do something about it. We ask the Lord to forgive us and to deliver us from doing it again. We go and apologize to anyone we hurt.

C. H. Spurgeon once said: “Write my life in the sky ...I have nothing to hide.”

IV. Fruit That Grows Philippians 1:11

A list of spiritual fruit is found in Galatians 5:22-23.

Fruit is visible for all to see and Paul prays that they will have a bumper crop.

GOD SPEAKS TO US THROUGH A LITTLE BABY

Hebrews 1:1-3

God speaks to us through a baby. I suppose if the message of Christmas could be summed up in one short statement it would be this – God speaks to us through a baby.

When I see the Lord's relationship with children, it is an interesting study:

“Who is the greatest in the kingdom?” Jesus wanted them to see – not just to hear, but to see – so He picked up a little child and said, “This one is the greatest in the kingdom.”

One day the disciples were arguing among themselves, which one of them was the greatest. Jesus said that it was not them, but a child.

People bring children to Jesus and the disciples pushed them back. But Jesus said, “Suffer the little children to come to me, for of such is the kingdom of Heaven.”

A child has a special place in the heart of the Lord.

God, in past times, spoke through the prophets. Now He speaks through His Son – the Christmas story.

I. A Word of Astonishment Hebrews 1:1-2a

The Jews were not ready to hear from God through a baby – and I'm not sure we are.

In times past God spoke to the Jews through the prophets. There have been some great prophets walk across the pages:

- When God wanted to mold a nation and give them the Law – Moses.
- When He wanted to set His message forth in a beautiful, majestic way – He chose Isaiah.
- When God wanted to speak in condemnation of sin and all its consequences – Jeremiah.
- When God wanted to speak in terms of love and forgiveness – Hosea
- When God wanted to enlarge the missionary effort of His people – Jonah.

But now He speaks through a baby. I don't know if I'm ready for that.

Two preachers were talking about the movie “Oh, God.” John Denver and George Burns who was in his 90's starred in the movie. The preacher was mad. George Burns played God wearing a fishing cap and tennis shoes. How degrading for God to wear such things. His friend said, “Have you ever thought how degrading it would be for God to be born in a barn and put in a feeding trough and be wrapped, not in a warm blanket, but in just strips of linen cloth like the strips of linen cloth used to cover a dead body?”

We can't see God being born in such a place. That's why at Christmas we hang lights, and things that sparkle, and make joyful sounds because a stall is too dull for God!

II. A Word of Announcement Hebrews 1:2

What does God's Son have to say to us? Babies do talk – they do communicate to us.

Any parent can understand the whimpers of a sick, hungry child ...

- or the cries of an angry child
- or angelic face of a happy child.

A child can speak to our heart.

What does God's Son say? Communication can be misunderstood.

I heard about a little lady who was driving down the interstate – speeding. In fact she passed a highway patrolman. He thought he ought to stop her – just give her a warning – and let her go. But when he caught up with her, she was not only speeding, but she was knitting. He couldn't get her attention. He turned on the blue lights and siren, rolled the window down, pointed and said, “Pull over.” She said, “No, it's socks.” Sometime we misunderstand. We don't get the message.

What is the message from Heaven?

A. The message to us is that we can come to God – through His Son.

Without fear – without intimidation you can come to God ...without price or prestige.

I have an idea that the shepherds would have been afraid to go into the presence of a great, mighty, powerful King, for they were just common, lowly men. But they felt at ease going before a Baby. They felt welcome and comfortable to go to a Baby.

B. He wants us to know that He understands you – your need; my need.

He faced what we face – pain, sorrow, rejection, hurt. Hebrews 2:18

You say, He doesn't understand what I've gone through. Where was God when my son was killed? The same place He was when His Son was killed.

He is able to help.

III. A Word of Accomplishment Hebrews 1:3

He purged our sin. He came into the world to forgive us of our sin.

There is only one way for sin to be forgiven.

- What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
- Jesus paid it all.

He sat down on the right hand, but He doesn't just sit there. He makes provisions for us – He's busy on our behalf.

On television a vet told of a cat – his cat now. A cat that had had an accident (I use the word "accident" loosely, for someone had tied fireworks to him). The cat had splotches of fur burned off, down to the skin with both ears burned off. Funny looking cat. Then at the vet's the cat had another "accident." He had to remove one of the cat's legs. Now he was a three-legged cat, burned, disfigured. But the vet said, "She's not much to look at, but she has the best personality."

God comes to us. Some hurt, crippled disfigured by sin and says, "You are special to me – I love you!"

The only thing that would keep you from Him is for you to refuse Him.

RECLAIMING YOUR CHRISTMAS

Luke 2:8-16

As I read this portion of the Christmas story, these shepherds saw something and heard something that became so precious to them – they found the Christ Child!

I don't think that they ever got over that experience – nor should we ever get over the experience of meeting Jesus!

This season ought to be a time of celebration, of praise, of adoration – of spirits that burst forth in rejoicing!

And, yet, over and again I have heard folks say, "I just can't get into the Christmas spirit."

I wonder if over the past few days or weeks if you have lost that Christmas spirit. It is so easy to do.

I wonder where it was lost – who stole our Christmas?

1. The Government: I would remind you that when Jesus came into the world the government was not friendly to Him or to those who believed that the Christ was coming into the world. I don't think the government can steal our Christmas spirit if we don't want them to.

2. The Busyness of the season: One man said, "Isn't it wonderful that Christmas only comes once a year. I couldn't take it more than once a year." But it was a busy time when Jesus was born. Think of the rush and the inconvenience Mary and Joseph experienced when Jesus was born. There was the talk of the town folk about Mary – with child and not married. In spite of Mary being great with child they had to pack up and go back to their home town to register for their tax no matter how hard it was on that

young couple. And then to find no for Mary to give birth to her child – only a stable. That makes our inconvenience seem so small.

3. Commercialism:

4. Despair of life:

5. Our dried-up Spirit: One lady said to her husband, “I hate to rush you, dear, but you only have ten days to get into the Christmas spirit.”

What is it that happens to us when we become adults? Children's lives and spirits are filled with such wonder and joy...and somehow when we grow up we lose that.

How do you reclaim your Christmas spirit?

A. Listen Luke 2:10-12

Reclaiming Christmas will begin when we tune in to what God has to say to our hearts.

Others must have heard what the angels had to say to the shepherds, but it didn't make an impact on their lives.

Wayne Vaughn, who was a school teacher for special children, hired out on Christmas as a department store Santa Claus. One day, in the back of the line, was a crippled girl on crutches, talking to her mother in sign language. To her surprise, when she sat on Santa's lap, he began to sign to her. Santa spoke her language! Christmas is the story that God speaks our language and meets our individual needs.

Maybe God is trying to speak to us, but we do not realize that it is God who is speaking.

A little boy named Tommy went into the hospital. The nurse told him that if he needed anything to just push the nurse's button. When she left the room, Tommy pushed the button. “Can I help you?” Silence. “Do you need anything?” Silence. “Tommy, do you hear me?” “Yes, wall, I hear you.” He didn't know who was speaking to him.

God wants us to hear from Him – not with our physical ears, but with our ears of faith.

B. Look Luke 2:15

Open your eyes of faith and see.

Two people can look at the same thing (event) and one will see a mess and the other will see a miracle. This whole Christmas story is nothing but a mess. Mary is with child before she and Joseph are married; Joseph wonders what to do with her and about her. When she is great with child, she must ride on a donkey back to her home town. When it is time to give birth to her child, there is no room and so she gives birth in a stable. And, yet, when you see this event with the eyes of faith, it is not a mess, but a miracle. We often don't see what God is doing in our world and life. How many others saw the star or this young mother-to-be, but didn't see anything? The Boulevard Baptist Church formed a committee to help those of their church who were in need at Christmas. They asked the post office if they could have the letters written to Santa. One letter read: Dear Santa: I hate to bother you, but if you don't help us, we won't have a very good Christmas. My wife is in the hospital and our four children don't have much to wear or eat. Please be a good Santa and send us \$600. Signed: Joe Henderson. They said, we know Joe, but he is not a member of our church, but they took up \$300 among themselves and sent it to Joe. The next year they found another letter from Joe. Dear Santa: I hate to bother you again but my wife is back in the hospital and the kids don't have much to eat. Please be a good Santa and send us \$600. P.S. Please send it through the Central Baptist Church. Last year you sent it through the Boulevard Baptist and the dirty crooks

stole half of it. On a call-in talk show, the host posed the question: “Tell me the best gift and the worst gift you ever received.” One man said, “My best gift and my worst gift was the same gift a (used) bike.” Later he remembered that the bike was the only gift under the tree.

C. Love Luke 2:16

What a moment – they met God!

Christmas can be reduced to one word: Love! Love can do what nothing else can do.

A man called his pastor and asked him if he could come to the hospital – the doctors said that his mother would die that day. The preacher asked the lady, “Is there anything that I can do for you?” She said, “Love me.”

That is what Christmas is all about. God loving us and our loving Him.

THE FIRST GIFTS GIVEN TO JESUS

Matthew 2:1-11

Would you notice again Matthew 2:11 – “They presented unto Him gifts.”

All across our land today people will come to a church house, just like this one, and bring their gifts – their offerings to God.

Have you ever stopped to think about it? The wonderful privilege of giving gifts to Jesus will take place hundreds of times here in this place. In Tupelo this act of presenting gifts to Jesus will take place thousands of times. In the State of Mississippi maybe over a million times gifts will be given to Jesus, through the Sunday School departments or as the collection plate is passed during the service.

Men and women will give – boys and girls will give. Some will give what we consider to be large gifts, while others will give what we consider to be small gifts, yet, all of these gifts will be presented to Jesus.

Have you ever thought HOW these wise men gave their gifts to Jesus? I have tried to picture in my mind's eye what was going on in the hearts of these men as they gave their gifts to Jesus and how they presented their gifts to Him.

I think that each one of them carefully pondered in their hearts what they should present to this new born King. I think that they took their gifts with care and in submission bowed before Him and, in an act of worship, laid their gifts before Him. I think that their hearts were filled with joy because they could give to Him.

The way that these men gave their gifts to Jesus ought to serve as an example to us as we give our gifts to Him.

Some will give cheerfully and thoughtfully, while others will give without much thought at all or without stopping to think about the meaning of their giving. Others will give just as a kind of routine or out of a sense of duty, rather than as an act of worship.

These were the first gifts that were ever brought to Jesus. I don't think that they were the largest gifts ever brought to Jesus. I don't think that they were the most meaningful gifts that were ever brought to Jesus. But they were the first gifts and because of that we need to stop and look at these gifts.

Their giving was:

I. Prompted Giving Matthew 2:2, 11

As you study this passage carefully, you will find that Jesus was no longer an infant. He was a “young child,” – somewhere around two years of age.

Look again at Matthew 2:11. Joseph, Mary and Jesus are no longer in a stable; but they found Him in a house.

There was the young child “and they worshiped Him.”

When they saw Him they worshiped Him. There was something about Him that prompted them in their hearts to fall down before Him and worship Him.

They recognized that God was doing something in their midst – Heaven was busy doing something on earth!

They did not see Him perform any miracles; they did not hear any of His teaching. And, yet, they were prompted in their hearts to worship Him.

Because of God's prompting their hearts, they realized that God, in love, reached down to do something for and in man, and these men responded to God's love by expressing their love and worship toward Him.

Notice: They worshiped Him and presented gifts unto Him. Their giving was not an addition to their worship – not just something that was tacked on to their worship. Their giving was a part of their worship to show their love and adoration to Jesus.

What is it that motivates us to give? When we realize that God, in love, has done something in our hearts and lives, and is doing something in us, we are prompted in our hearts to respond to Him in giving.

A person can give without loving, but he cannot love without giving. If a person loves Jesus as he should, the

preacher would never have to mention giving, because folks would give out of a heart of love and adoration.

These wise men were prompted in their hearts to give.

II. Proper Giving Matthew 2:11

Their giving came out of their worship. You are only partially worshiping if you don't give.

How we give says a lot about what we think about the One we are worshiping.

Much has been said about the symbolism in the gifts they gave:

- Gold for His royalty
- Frankincense for His deity
- Myrrh for His humanity

But the symbolism is not the point that Matthew is trying to get us to see.

They gave gold. What good is gold? It cannot fill you; it cannot warm you; it cannot transport you from one place to another. Take a wedge of gold and put it beside a hungry, cold, dying man and it will mock him. What can it do for him – unless it is transformed into something that will touch his life.

Frankincense is no good until it is burned, then it sends out a sweet odor. The same is true of dollar bills. They are just green pieces of paper until they are transformed into something useful.

God is not asking you and me to give Him something as puny as a few green dollar bills; but He wants us to give Him something that can be transformed to touch lives and be a blessing to others in His name.

III. Protected Giving

Where did these wise men come from? Some think over 100 miles – over enemy territory, where there were robbers.

If we are not careful we will never give anything to Jesus because we will be robbed – or our TIME – ENERGY – MONEY.

Here's the way the robbery takes place. We say that I'll take care of everything else first and if I have anything left then I'll give it to Jesus.

IV. Projected Giving Matthew 2:13-14

Mary, Joseph and Jesus went from Bethlehem to Egypt. How did they get there? Through the use of these gifts that were transformed into something that they could use to transport them. This was a most critical time in the life of Jesus. Herod would have killed Him if they had not left.

These wise men never saw all that their gifts did and how they were used for Jesus. Nor can we see all that our gifts are doing for Christ.

During World War II Winston Churchill plead with the coal miners to work harder and longer in the mines so that the people in the homeland could produce more weapons for their soldiers. He asked them to “keep your face turned toward the coal.”

At the end of his plea he said, “Imagine that we have won the war. Down the streets of London come the soldiers from battle. Applause comes from both sides of the street as they march down the street. Behind them are men with their faces covered with smut. Someone will ask, 'Who are these with smut covered faces?' The answer: 'They are the heroes who kept their faces turned to the coal.'”

In Heaven there will be a host of folks – declared faithful because, spiritually, they kept their faces turned toward the coal.

Revelation 2:10: “Be faithful unto death.”

MESSAGES FROM THE MANGER

Luke 2:1-15

Twice in this passage that I read, we are told that the infant – Jesus – was laid in a manger. A manger is just a simple feeding trough for sheep and cattle. There was nothing fancy about it and certainly it was not designed for an infant's care – anything but!

In our day of elaborate precaution to keep everyone from the baby after it is born, it is not what we would call proper care of a new born babe. But that was not even the norm then! Even the poorest of births deserved better!

But never has a single event so elevated a simple, crude piece of equipment – for laid in that hay rack that night 2,000 years ago was God's beloved Son.

What is the meaning in that manger? Not the wood frame structure, but the meaning of the little bundle of Life placed there – for it means very different things to different people.

Who is that baby who captures so much attention – who divided time by His birth? He is the Creator. He is the ultimate expression of God's love. He is the sin payment for my sin and yours.

The times have changed since that first Christmas, but the heart of man hasn't.

- The characters of that first Christmas and the way they responded to the birth of Jesus represents how men respond today.
 - 1. The Inn Keeper Had a Crowded Heart He didn't have time or space to give this Child.
 -
 - 2. Herod Had a Callous Heart His only concern was destroying his competition as king.
 -
 - 3. Wise Men Had a Confused Hear They saw the star, but was confused as to where it led.
 -
 - 4. Scribes Had a Cold Heart They knew what the Scriptures taught and even where He was to be born. They told the wise men where they could find Him, but they didn't go themselves.
 - 5. Shepherds Had a Captivated Heart When the angels told them to go see the Christ Child, they left their sheep – going to Him was their top priority. What kind of heart do you have this Christmas: Crowded, Callous, Confused, Cold, Captivated, or Celebrating.
 -
- What is the message from the manger?
 -
- I. To many, like the Innkeeper, He is the STRANGER in the Manger How sad. There were pages and pages of prophecy. There were miraculous happenings all around the Innkeeper, but he didn't see them. And the Babe was a stranger in the manger. Why? How could that be? Then – and now?
 - A. Some are too Busy
 - Not just at Christmas time, but the year round they find their lives cluttered with so many activities and happenings they have no time for this Babe. No time to serve God. God gives us 168 hours each week, and yet, we find (take) so little time to worship Him. We find time for eating, ballgames, friends, work – but so little time for Him. What is the difference in a heathen locked in ignorance and sin, and the man who hears His voice and turns Him away?
 - B. Some are too Blessed
 - We are so blessed, have so much, we don't need God. Could it be that the Innkeeper's business was booming so that he didn't need to bother with poor folks like Mary and Joesph. Like the man who prayed that God would bless his business so that he could give more to the Lord's work. God did bless, but now the man was making so much that he felt he couldn't tithe. His pastor told him, "Maybe we need to pray God will cut your income."
 - C. Some are too Blind
 - Paul tells us Satan blinds the eyes of the lost. Many have no room because they just do no see their need for Jesus nor do they care who He is.
 - Sweet little Jesus Boy, they made you be born in a manger.
 - Sweet little Holy Child, didn't know who you was.
 - Didn't know you'd come to save us, Lawd, to take our sins away. Our eyes was blind, we couldn't see, we didn't know who you was.
 - Long time ago, You was born, born in a manger low,
 - Sweet little Jesus Boy. De world treat you mean, Lawd, Treat me mean, too.
 - But that's how things is down here, we didn't know Who you is.
 - You done told us how, we is a try-in,
 - Master, you done show'd us how even when you was dying.

- Just seem like we can't do right, Look how we treated you.
 - But please, Sir, forgive us, Lawd, we didn't know who you was.
- D. Some are too Bland (They just didn't care.)
 - This may be the true reason, this may be where the largest group of people are found. They see their need and they know who Jesus is, but they don't care. The great sin which plagues the church is neglect. I think neglect, more than anything else must break the heart of Jesus.
 - Big Willie was not like most of the young people in his youth group. Willie was in a special school for slow learners and because he had been held back several years in school, he was bigger than the others in his group. When the time came for the Christmas play, he wanted to play one of the shepherds so he could wear a long robe and "carry one of those long sticks." But he was not given the part of a shepherd. He was given the part of the Innkeeper. He got his part down just right: "We have no room for you." Mary and Joseph, with head down, looking disappointed, started to walk off. Willie's big heart could take it no longer. He said, "We have no room, but you can take my place." Some laughed; some thought that he had messed up the story. But maybe he brought a dimension to Christmas that is needed by all of us.
- II. To some, like Herod, He is the DANGER in the manger. A Baby who is a danger to someone? A frightening Baby? Herod had heard of this Baby, and what he heard was in opposition to his living.
 - A. He would challenge the rule of wrong. Herod ruled his world with hate, greed, oppression and power. To anyone who wants to live with this approach to life, Jesus brings a chill! His first sermon – Luke 4 – was a declaration of freedom and new life. The "Herods" of this world are never at ease in His world!
 - B. He would expose the truth of man's evil heart. Herod said, "I want to worship Him" when he really wanted to kill Him – and tried to kill Him, even killed thousands trying to kill Him. It was a desperate attempt to destroy the Exposer! No wonder He is a danger in the manger!
- III. To some, like the Shepherds and Wise Men, He is the CHANGER in the Manger
 - Notice: The message came to Wise men and Working men. Here is the message: God finds a way to break through to every man – no matter what his interest or ability. He speaks to him in a language they can understand. George Forman, the boxer, after a defeat, took his gloves off, put his bloody face in his hands. When he looked at his bloody hands, he was reminded of things he heard in church as a child. He gave his heart to the Lord.
- IV. To many, like many here, He is the ARRANGER in the manger.
 - He arranges for us to know God – Who He is and how much He loves us!
 - He arranges for us to be forgiven of our sins.
 - What are you going to do with your sins. Keep them and they will bring guilt and destruction.
 - Bring them to Him and He will forgive them.
 - He arranges for us to have eternal life.

Little Jim Bowlin asked, "Why do people have to die and go to Heaven? Why can't God just come down here?" He did – to share His life, forever with us! God wrapped His gift in swaddling clothes.

John 3:16

Pete Young's little brother was mentally retarded – so much so that he had to stay in a hospital filled with boys and girls with the same problem. The week before Christmas, Pete and his family went to get his little brother from the hospital and told him that for that day they would go where he wanted to go, do what he wanted to do, eat what he wanted to eat, and buy what he wanted to buy.

At the end of the day, they had five big bags filled with things he had bought. They went back to the hospital. The hospital was shaped like a wheel with the main station in the center and isles of rooms going out from the center. As they started to the boy's room, they noticed that he stopped at the center station. He stood there and all his little friends came out to see him, laughing and greeting him.

He motioned for his family to bring the packages to him. One by one, he poured them all in a pile on the floor. Then smiling, he looked at his friends and said, "Come and dit them." Each one, in his own way – some walking funny, some in wheelchairs – came to pick out his toy.

Pete said that it took his retarded brother to teach him what Christmas was all about.

God gave us – sinful creatures that we are – His precious Beloved Son and said, "Come – Receive Him!"