

THE CHRISTMAS STORY

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How is it possible to tell this glorious story, filled with twists and turns, with both tragedy and ultimate victory of the birth of the Son of God?

The Shepherds

Let's start with the shepherds. One cannot imagine what the shepherds felt as they watched their sheep on the rounding hills of Bethlehem that glorious night over 20 centuries ago. Many of the shepherds worked in this part of the country and sold their sheep for the required sacrifices in the temple. None of them had any idea that the true Lamb of God would soon become the very last sacrificial lamb for the sins of the world. The shepherds on those hills were in the business of selling lambs for a temporary sacrifice for men's sins. Little did they know that the angels would announce the birth of the Lamb of God, the eternal sacrifice for all of mankind.

Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds. They must have been absolutely terrified as the glory of the Lord shone around them as they listened to the announcement of the ages!

I am sure the shepherds were not able to grasp the background story. This very night, the Dispensation of Law would soon make way for a new day and the Dispensation of Grace, which would be followed

by the age of the kingdom. This very night, with the birth of the Son of God, preparation was being made for the introduction of the "Church" or the "called out" that most likely had its full birth on the day of Pentecost. Much was happening on the earth this night.

"Then the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: 'Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!'" So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds 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" (Luke 2:10-15, NKJV).

When God spoke by His Spirit as He did this night through the angels, His word and voice carried throughout the ages. When a man speaks, his word carries only as far as he has listeners. When God speaks, He speaks through eternity and His word never returns void.

"So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not

return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11, KJV).

That night the angels made a proclamation of good tidings to all people, and sang their praises, *“Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace and goodwill toward men.”* We know that there wasn’t goodwill to all men at that time. Within two years, Herod the Great, king of Judea would pour out the terror known as the Massacre of the Innocents by ordering the killing of all male children two years old and under in the vicinity of Bethlehem in his arrogant, futile attempt to kill the coming King of kings.

Yet, when God has completed His plan in His time, truly because of the birth and resurrection of the Son of God, there will come a day when there will be peace and goodwill towards all men on the earth.

Truly Isaiah prophesied accurately when he said: *“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, Upon them a light has shined” (Isaiah 9:2, NKJV).*

It was a puzzling matter that the angels revealed the birth of the Son of God, firstly to shepherds. Surely, this was the design of God. In the crowded streets of Bethlehem, as Joseph frantically sought lodging for his young wife Mary great with child, no one had a room. None of the innkeepers recognized that this very night, this young Mary was about to give birth to Jesus, the Son of God. This magnificent truth was hidden from all in that busy city, and yet it was revealed to the shepherds in the hills. The Lord still does this. He often hides Himself from the arrogant and reveals Himself to those of His choosing who walk humbly.

“For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence” (1 Corinthians 1:26-29, NKJV).

We must digress for just a moment to treasure the events of Luke 1:39-45. John the Baptist, as an unborn child still in the womb of his mother, Elizabeth, recognized Jesus who was still unborn in the womb of Mary and “leaped” in Elizabeth’s womb. One of the first to recognize Jesus was an unborn child. The unborn are real people, with real destinies before them.

Shepherds were on the lower end of the social status of Israel. They tended their sheep with devotion. They often camped out with their grazing sheep to offer protection from predators. I imagine that they smelled like their sheep. What an awesome endorsement and validation the Lord made of shepherds when He first announced the birth to them.

God has called men to be shepherds, to be leaders, to be willing to give themselves for the sheep in their care. A father in a home is a shepherd. An elder of a local assembly is a shepherd. Apostolic ministries are shepherding ministries. Jesus is our Great Shepherd. Jesus said *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep” (John 10:11, NKJV).*

Peter said, *“Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain*

but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away” (1 Peter 5:2-4, NKJV).

“So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds 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.” And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told to them concerning this Child. And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them” (Luke 2:15-20, NKJV).

Mary and Joseph

One cannot begin to comprehend the solemn task of being the parents of the Son of God. Mary and Joseph were certainly gracious souls; very humble, very poor, very quiet, very faithful, and obedient. We find no books in our Bible written by Joseph. I can only picture Mary and Joseph in my mind as unassuming, kind, faithful, reverent, and godly parents. God makes His own choosing of the vessels to do His work according to His requirements, not ours.

Can you imagine God revealing to you that you would be the parents of Jesus? As a single teenager, Mary received a frightening announcement from the angel Gabriel that would set in motion a change in dispensations, and usher in the birth of Jesus.

“Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. And having come in, the angel said to her, “Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!” But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.” Then Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I do not know a man?” And the angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible” (Luke 1:26-35, NKJV).

There is much that can be said and has been said throughout time about Mary. Sadly, there are many that believe that Mary became an intercessor between God and man. There are many that pray to Mary for grace. The enemy will always attempt to divert attention from Christ to a substitute. The Scriptures are very clear, *“For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5, NKJV)*

Let’s give some thought for a moment to someone who is rarely spoken about, and that is Joseph.

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother

Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins." So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us." Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name JESUS" (Matthew 1:18-25, NKJV).

By purpose, it appears that God called Joseph to be a faithful father to Jesus and husband to Mary. Joseph would care for Jesus, protect Him, care for Him, and love Him. The last time that Joseph is mentioned in the Bible is in Luke, chapter 2 when Jesus is twelve years old. Joseph is not mentioned at the wedding in Cana which speaks of the beginning of Jesus' adult ministry. Neither is Joseph at the crucifixion. Between the age of twelve and the beginning of Jesus' ministry, Joseph is no longer mentioned in the Scriptures. Somewhere in that time period, heaven must have welcomed Joseph to his eternal home.

Joseph was faithful in protecting the life of Jesus and Mary and obeyed the command of the angels to find temporary safety in Egypt.

"Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him." When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt" (Matthew 2:13-14, NKJV).

One might wonder, how would Joseph, a poor carpenter, have the funds to make an arduous journey to Egypt to protect his noble family? It would take a significant amount of funds that Joseph likely did not possess. However, according to the plan and purpose of God, Joseph had just received a gift of gold from the Magi of the east at the birth of Jesus.

"And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh" (Matthew 2:11, NKJV). The Lord always makes timely provisions for His purposes.

The three gifts presented by the wise men of the east at the birth of Jesus were ordinary and traditional gifts given to a king by tradition; gold, frankincense (a perfume), and myrrh (an embalming oil.)

The presentation of the gifts to this baby in the manger by Magi of the east (also known in history as kingmakers) endorsed the Kingship of this child.

The gold speaks of His Kingship. The frankincense speaks of His deity. The myrrh speaks of His death.

In wondering about what it was like to be the young father of the Son of God, I present the following lyrics from a beautiful song.

Joseph's Song by Michael Card

How could it be this baby in my arms
Sleeping now, so peacefully
The Son of God, the angel said
How could it be?

Lord, I know He's not my own
Not of my flesh, not of my bone
Still Father let this baby be
The son of my love

Father show me where I fit into this plan of yours
How can a man be father to the Son of God
Lord for all my life I've been a simple carpenter
How can I raise a king, how can I raise a king?

He looks so small, His face and hands so fair
And when He cries the sun just seems to disappear
But when He laughs it shines again
How could it be?

Father show me where I fit into this plan of yours
How can a man be father to the Son of God
Lord for all my life I've been a simple carpenter
How can I raise a king, how can I raise a king?

How could it be this baby in my arms
Sleeping now, so peacefully
The Son of God, the angel said
How could it be? How could it be?

A Child Is Born, A Son Is Given

2,700 years ago Isaiah the prophet prophesied by the eternal word of God mightily, and accurately when he said, *"For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given"* (Isaiah 9:6). Truly, the child Jesus was born to Mary and Joseph on a beautiful night in crowded Bethlehem. The King of kings made His entrance to the earth most likely in the lodging of a cave as there was no room in the inns that night. He was born in obscurity, with the knowledge of His birth revealed to very few; the shepherds, the Magi of the east, and Mary and Joseph.

Contained within that short verse is a comma that connects two monumental events. Yes, as Isaiah said long ago, truly a Child was born. But also that night, a Son was given, the Son of God.

There will be a second coming of Christ. There will be a great and terrible day of the Lord. It will be a great day for those that are ready to receive Him. It will be a terrible day for those that are not prepared. When Jesus made His first appearance He came obscurely as a baby in a manger. When He returns every eye shall see Him.

"The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come" (Joel 2:31, KJV).

"Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen" (Revelation 1:7, NKJV).

When Isaiah said, *"a Child is born, a Son is given,"* he was prophesying of the time when Israel and Jesus would be under the occupational forces of the mightiest empire of history, Rome. When he said *"the government will be upon His shoulder"* he was prophesying of the time when Jesus returns and we find Rome as well as all the empires and kingdoms of the world fallen. At that

time He will establish the government of His kingdom and the administration of that government will rest upon His shoulder. It is at this point in this writing that I am shouting to myself "Hallelujah! Come, Lord Jesus, come!"

"For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this" (Isaiah 9:6-7, NKJV).

The apostle Paul saw and wrote about the day when all the kingdoms of man would rest upon the shoulder of this Jesus. He used different words to partly describe what Isaiah had said in these verses. Paul leaves no doubt that regardless of what we see presently, Jesus is still King of kings and Lord of lords, and the day will fully come when we can all finally say *"Peace on earth, and goodwill to men."*

"All this energy issues from Christ: God raised him from death and set him on a throne in deep heaven, in charge of running the universe, everything from galaxies to governments, no name and no power exempt from his rule. And not just for the time being, but forever. He is in charge of it all, has the final word on everything. At the center of all this, Christ rules the church. The church, you see, is not peripheral to the world; the world is peripheral to the church. The church is Christ's body, in which he speaks and acts, by which he fills everything with his presence" (Ephesians 1:20-23, MSG).

I appreciate this particular paraphrase of Ephesians 1:20-23. Christ is in charge of running the universe. From galaxies to governments, no name and no power will be exempt from His rule. He rules because a Child was born and a Son was given. Every knee shall bow and every tongue shall one day confess that Jesus is Lord, because a Child was born, and a Son was given.

"Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:9-11, NKJV).

In closing, let us enjoy the following essay:

One Solitary Life

He was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in still another village where he worked until he was thirty. Then for three years, he was an itinerant preacher. He never wrote a book. He never held an office.

He never had a family or owned a home. He didn't go to college. He never traveled more than 200 miles from the place he was born.

He did none of the things one usually associates with greatness. He had no credentials but himself; he was only thirty-three when public opinion turned against him.

His friends ran away. He was turned over to his enemies and went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed to the cross between two thieves. While he was dying his executioners gambled for his clothing, the only property he had on earth. When he was dead he was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend.

Twenty centuries have come and gone and today he is the central figure of the human race, the leader of mankind's progress. All the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever sailed, all the parliaments that ever sat, all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man on earth as much as that **One Solitary Life**. (Adapted from Dr. James Allen Francis, 1926)

A blessed Christmas to you! ✚

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