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## Where is the Real Christmas?

**James 1:17:** *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.*

Yesterday was Christmas - or for some it was a winter holiday that was all about some jolly old man from the North Pole bringing presents to all the kids. There were lights, decorations, trees, gifts, food, family, fun and football - and everyone presumably had a good time. The only thing missing? Jesus, the real reason for the season! He may have been out of the loop in a lot of places yesterday, but I can assure you, Jesus has been found and will be heard about for the next two hours! Stay with us as we look at and celebrate the Real Christmas - its drama, its inspiration and its hope. This morning we will present a six-chapter story to you about Jesus' birth and the events that surrounded it.



### Chapter 1: A Forgotten Hope



*How do we keep faith when too much time has gone by?*

It had been a long time...a very long time. So long a time, that it had become almost hard to count the years - certainly, no one could remember that far back - not even your father's, father's father was around - it was *that* long ago. All we had were prophecies - old prophecies that spoke about his coming...but they were old, very old...the newest one was over 400 years old!!! And that was the newest one! What did it say? Something dramatic about the Day of the Lord...

**Malachi 4:1-2:** "The sun of righteousness rising with healing" - what a comforting thought in the midst of all the turmoil that the prophecy detailed...there were other prophecies as well - older - some much older but all pointing to the same thing.

**Genesis 3:15:** Wow, that was the oldest prophecy, kind of a veiled promise of redemption for the first sin.

**Genesis 22:16-18:** That is another old, old prophecy given to Abraham long before Israel was even a nation. That one gets so much more specific, detailing the blessing of all the nations of all the earth - not just one - or a few, but all!

**Isaiah 9:6-7:** No end of peace? Isn't that what everyone is hoping for, wishing for, working for...? Now that is a prophecy with a lot of hope! So it's the zeal of God that gets it done! But it has still been such a long time - thousands of years. Hmmm... so if God had been silent for the last 400 years, should that be such a problem? What God says, He does! What did he say at the end of Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament?

**Malachi 4:5-6:** So the last words of the Old Testament essentially tell us how the new Testament is going to start: Before the coming of Messiah there would be the coming of one who would prepare the people for the Messiah, even though hope might be forgotten over time, it does not mean that the giver of all hope forgets! **Isaiah 42:6-7** **Deuteronomy 18:15**



### Chapter 2: Doubt

*What do we do when we are told the seemingly impossible is about to happen?*

This chapter is about the experiences of Zacharias and Elizabeth becoming the parents of John the Baptist. The two of them were very faithful and the Scriptures say that they were righteous in the sight of God. Zacharias served the people as a priest of God and in spite of their faithfulness, his wife was childless. As they grew older, so did their hopes and their prayers for children. Yet, they went on with their lives humbly serving their God, until one day when Zacharias was serving in the Temple...

**Luke 1:11-13:** There must have been great fear and great exhilaration - all at once! Just like that, there was an answer to the years of humility and prayer before God. Not only was it an answer, but it was an answer delivered by an angel - a child and it was to be a boy! Zacharias' mind must have begun to race as the fear subsided. This was impossible - why me? Why here? Why now? Why the angel? Why? The angel continued...



Luke 1:14-15: Okay, so he is going to be special, very special. He will be a great man? He will be filled with the Holy Spirit? How is this possible? There was more and the angel continued...

Luke 1:16-17: My son will turn the hearts of Israel back to God? How would he do this? He is to be a forerunner to...no, this can't be, for these words are from the prophet Malachi - the last spoken words of a prophet in over 400 years! They were a prophecy of the coming of...wait... my son is to be the forerunner of the Messiah??? I just don't see how this can happen! So the table was set for the prophecies to come to pass. The doubt was too much for Zacharias. After all, none of this made any logical sense. He faced the angel, for he needed answers. His question, though a bold one in his mind, somehow didn't present such authority once spoken, "How will I know this *for certain*? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years." The angel was quick to respond:

Luke 1:19: I AM GABRIEL! The angels words echoed in Zacharias' mind...I AM GABRIEL! This surely was one of those most high in all of the Almighty's spiritual creation! Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God! Gabriel himself sent to deliver *me* this miraculous news! I am speaking to Gabriel and I am doubting...Gabriel continued...

Luke 1:20: Unable to speak? Even at that very moment, Zacharias felt his speech leave him. Unable to speak! I have been visited by a Holy Angel of the Almighty and can tell no one about it?! Zacharias thought a moment - doubt - doubt in the face of God's power and mercy does bring consequence - but it does not cancel His power and mercy! What a glorious God we have! Praise be unto God!

Luke 1:23-25: Even in the face of a long forgotten hope and under the circumstances of unlikely events, God's blessing would take root and grow. Elizabeth took this news with great humility and once pregnant, kept herself in seclusion, perhaps as a precaution due to her age; perhaps as a special time for prayer and meditation; perhaps as a time to marvel at the mercy of God. The will of God is sure and the plan of God is complete, all we need do is wait for His timing.

Later when John is born and Zacharias regains his speech...

Luke 1:67-74: There were pieces that needed to be put in place before Jesus' arrival. Certain specific important events needed to happen.

### Chapter 3: *From Fear to Faith*



#### *How do we respond to that which IS impossible?*

We have seen the results of doubt, perhaps justifiable doubt based upon our own human imperfection. But what about the experience of impossibility - being faced with something so contrary to reason that it resides beyond our imagination? Mary faced such a reality.

Luke 1:26-29: Again we see the angel Gabriel reappearing, now six months after Elizabeth conceived. This time the circumstances were near opposite. Elizabeth had been old and married. Mary was young and only engaged. Gabriel had spoken to the husband the first time, here he spoke to the young bride to be. His greeting was one of great favor, yet Mary's reaction was confused and fearful. The angel, Gabriel? Speaking to me? An angel? For what reason? The angel continued:

Luke 1:30-33: Questions would have swirled in Mary's head. Me? Have a son? He is to be called the "Son of the Most High?" He is to be a king...FOREVER...? His kingdom will have *no end*? How? Why? Then the question that needed answering above all else, for faith could perceive of these other things, but this one question could not be fathomed: "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" Gabriel answered:

Luke 1:35-37: Well, the angel had answered - an answer so unexpected and so out of the ordinary that for most people it would have been overload. For Mary, Gabriel's last words must have rung true in the deepest recesses of her young heart - *for nothing will be impossible with God*.

Luke 1:38: For Joseph, this would have been a unique and fearful dilemma. What should he do? He could have sent Mary away in public shame, but the Scriptures tell us that he was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her, so he determined to do it privately, as was his right. He slept on the decision, and as he slept, an angel of the lord came to him in a dream. And the angel said: Matthew 1:20-21: Here was an explanation, though seemingly far-fetched, that



carried with it clear direction and a Godly purpose. The angel continued: Matthew 1:22-23: Joseph awoke and thought a moment... This was *not* some far-fetched explanation at all, rather it was a fulfillment of prophecy! Not just any prophecy, but THE prophecy of THE MESSIAH! Mary, my espoused, was carrying the savior of all and I, Joseph, would have the opportunity to raise him to manhood! Glory to God!

And so we can see how a fear of the unknown can, by the grace and overruling power of God, be turned to faith through the unknown. For Mary and Joseph, this would be their experience.

Let us read what Mary said when she visited Elizabeth upon being given this most precious gift of mothering the son of God: Luke 1:46-55



### Chapter 4: The Joy of Life

*How do we not only grasp, but always remember the miracle of a new life?*

Think of the greatest joys of life that you have ever heard of or experienced and inevitably, you will think about the birth of a child. This is an event that marks an end and a beginning. It is the end of a 9-month pregnancy that literally has a physical attachment needing to be cut; and it marks the beginning of a new, viable human life, whose attachments can now grow exponentially and in all directions. Any birth is a miracle, but the birth of Jesus - now that was a miracle of Biblical proportions - for the heavens were alive with joy and celebration...miracle of miracles...!

Luke 2:1-5: The experience of Mary and Joseph was one of complete normality. There were no special provisions, no special exemptions, no special circumstances. They were required to do what everyone else did. They had to travel where everyone else traveled and pay what everyone else paid.

Luke 2:7: To be born in a stable and to be laid in a manger among the animals was the most fitting of places for the Lord of men to enter the world. After all, Jesus would live these humble beginnings each and every day for 33½ years, for it was through this humility that he would be able to pay the ransom price.

Luke 2:8-12: The fulfillment of prophecy required an angelic announcement to the most humble audience of shepherds. This was fitting - the baby Jesus would grow to assume the throne of David, once a shepherd himself.

Luke 2:13: Humility does not preclude heavenly celebration, rather it provokes it! In this manner was Jesus our Lord born.



### Chapter 5: The Joy of the Gift

*How do we show appreciation for a gift that is undeserved?*

We have been given a great gift. It is actually more than a gift, for without it we as a race would live without hope, for this gift is the gift of a ransomed life. It is the gift of **redemption**, freely given to every man woman and child who has ever breathed. It is a gift of such magnitude that it will take an eternity to say thank you. For now, we say thank you in small ways, sometimes seemingly insignificant ways, yet God knows our hearts. What may seem insignificant to us is of great magnitude to God.

The gifts of the three wise men were significant:

- **Gold** represented obedience and consecration;
- **Frankincense** represented praise, devotion, heart adoration, appreciation and gratitude;
- **Myrrh** represented submission, a willingness for service to the extent of bitterness and suffering.

Sometimes the greatest "thank you" we can give is the gift of recognition, looking behind us and recognizing that the plan of God has unfolded; looking around us and recognizing that the plan of God IS unfolding; and looking before us to anticipate the plan of God continuing to unfold. Recognition of a gift - that's what Simeon did just eight days after Jesus' birth:



Luke 2:21-24: Again this reminds us that Mary, Joseph and Jesus are given no special entitlement or dispensation; they are simply given opportunity to show and live their faith.

Luke 2:25-26: Here was a man who had *not* forgotten hope, who had *not* allowed doubt or fear to rule his heart; rather he lived in anticipation and expectation of God's gift.

Luke 2:27-29: Being aged, the only thing Simeon looked forward to in his life was a glimpse - just a glimpse - of God's gift of redemption. He sees the baby, takes him in his arms and knows that his life is now complete. For in *my* arms I hold the hope of the world!

Luke 2:30-33: Simeon realizes the full import of redemption - I have seen your salvation - with my own eyes! He is a light that even reaches to all Gentiles. He is a light that is the Glory of Israel! This light is now just a baby, but this baby is the hope of the world!

Luke 2:34-35: Simeon also knew that with great accomplishment comes great sacrifice... sometimes heart-breaking sacrifice.



## Chapter 6: The Joy of the Journey

### *How do we capture all of these lessons for our journey forward?*

Up to this point we have seen angels, miracles, and prophecy fulfilled. We have seen forgotten hope, doubt and fear. We have seen the joy of life and the joy of God's gift, we have seen faith and fulfillment. All of these things, and yet we have only looked upon the circumstances surrounding the birth of the infant Jesus. His life - yet to be lived, his humility - yet to be discovered, his ransom price - yet to be paid. Why all of these magnificent events before his life? *Because every journey of significance needs ample preparation to see it through.*

**Let's go back to the shepherds who were told of Jesus' birth:** Luke 2:15-20: These shepherds knew that they were part of something much bigger than they had ever conceived to be possible. They acted in faith, and they acted right away and found Mary and Joseph. The baby lay quietly in a manger. Think of the tranquility and peace of the moment as they lay their eyes on their future Savior...this was Jesus, the one who would save the world! Luke 2:17-18: To go and see him was one thing, to take this miracle and publish it amongst the people - that was another! These were just shepherds! Luke 2:19-20: For Mary, this was a time of awestruck wonder. She had been living in faith for the last nine months and now that Jesus was born, her faith would begin to take on new meaning. All that she saw she treasured, for it told her what Jesus would be. There is little written about Jesus before his thirtieth birthday and the beginning of his ministry. We can assume that his childhood experiences were filled with important lessons of faith, life and purpose. Let's look in on the one experience we do know about when he was a very young man: Luke 2:42-44: We could look at this and say, well there's a typical 12-year old boy, preoccupied and not paying attention! Ah, how far off we would be with such a judgment. Luke 2:45-48: This had gotten serious... missing for a day and then an additional three days looking throughout Jerusalem! I imagine they would have looked in all of the typical places, and I imagine that their anxiety and grief over their lost son would have been almost too much to bear. And then there he was, found safe! Luke 2:49-52: Now here is a curious thing. Jesus is bewildered! What? Didn't you know where I would be? All of the things you have taught me about doing my Father's will - I'm doing them! I am in my Father's house, learning about His business. Of course I am here, I could be no other place! All of this from a 12-year old boy. And Mary treasured these things in her heart as she watched her baby grow from the infant that angels sang about, to the boy seeking his God, to the man who would save the world.

So, there we have the Real Christmas - the real story about the real birth of the real savior. The six chapters presented here this morning are meant to inspire you to a greater appreciation of Jesus and his mission as the Son of God, coming to this earth to "pay a debt he didn't owe, because we owed a debt we could not pay."

Merry, merry Christmas to you all!

*So, where is the real Christmas?  
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...  
Think about it...!*