



## Does the Day Belong to Jesus or Santa Claus?

**Luke 2:30-32: (NASB)** <sup>30</sup>*For my eyes have seen Your salvation, <sup>31</sup>Which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, And A light of revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel.*

So, **Christmas day** is here. Hopefully it is filled with family, joy and happiness! Hopefully it provides some time to sit back and reflect on the amazing opportunities we have for freedom. Honestly, sometimes we look at Christmas as a bittersweet holiday. While we enjoy the story of Santa and his elves and do appreciate the goodwill that does seem to surface at this time of year, we feel sadness at the lack of attention paid to the real story of Christmas. It is really too bad that we are so afraid to name the name of Jesus Christ at Christmas! Well, not today, not now! Stay with us as we stop everything else and honor the real story!

We love to celebrate the birth of Jesus...the whole story - the young virgin Mary, her fiancé Joseph, the journey to Bethlehem, the angels, the stable and the little baby who would grow up to be the Savior of the world. It is a story that not only helps us reflect on what is important; it is also a story that engages us in belief and hope. Hope. That is a word that is not too often heard anymore, for the conditions of our world are such that what we see through our 24-hour media exposure is a wide swath of pain, suffering, injustice and death. We are so bombarded, so constantly reminded of the horrors of our dysfunctional world that hope does not seem to have a chance. So, where has Christmas gone? It is where it always was - in the palm of God's hand!

The solution is hope. But this hope must of necessity be a hope founded on a foundation that is so sure, it cannot possibly be shaken; so deep that it cannot crumble and so enduring that it will outlast any and every fiber of fear and uncertainty the world possesses. Jesus IS this hope. He is this hope for every man, woman and child who has ever lived. Today as we honor this hope, we will do so by remembering the foundation - the deep and enduring foundation that the hope of Jesus is securely built upon the plan of God.



### "Where are you, Christmas?" (Verse one) Faith Hill

*Where are you, Christmas  
Why can't I find you  
Why have you gone away  
Where is the laughter  
You used to bring me  
Why can't I hear music play  
My world is changing  
I'm rearranging  
Does that mean Christmas changes, too*

### Here is God's plan - God's hope!

**Genesis 3:8-13: (NASB)** <sup>8</sup>*They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. <sup>9</sup>Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, where*



are you? <sup>10</sup>He said, I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself. <sup>11</sup>And He said, who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat? <sup>12</sup>The man said, the woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate. <sup>13</sup>Then the LORD God said to the woman, what is this you have done? And the woman said, the serpent deceived me, and I ate.

Here we have the very first sinful act occurring and the necessary consequences being doled out. This would have been a deeply sad moment, for the beauty of perfection, the splendor of the Garden and the innocence of life lived with God as their Father had all come to a crashing and devastating halt. All of these things would now be a mere memory to Adam and Eve, and their lives would now be spent in toil and strain. God pronounces judgment, and none before Him are innocent.



Where is hope? How could there be hope, for all had just been lost - life in harmony with God the Father had been frittered away for the price of an empty promise and a bite of a piece of fruit. To Adam and Eve, this surely was hopeless, for it was their death sentence. But to God this was merely an expected step in a very long journey that would ultimately bring perfection back to His beloved human creation. God saw hope. More than that, God had planned hope - He had built it into this debacle of sin.

**He spoke of this hope, and in a subtle yet powerful proclamation, He spoke it to Satan:**

**Genesis 3:14-15:** (NASB) <sup>14</sup>The LORD God said to the serpent, because you have done this, cursed are you more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; On your belly you will go, and dust you will eat all the days of your life; <sup>15</sup>And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.

God tells Satan, who had once been Lucifer, one of the Almighty's *morning stars*, not only was there a plan to redeem mankind already in place, this plan included the utter destruction of all who would stand against the benevolent power, justice and mercy of God Himself. Hope did live, but as with all of God's plans, it would take a long time to be developed and finally unfold.



**"Where are you, Christmas?" (Last verses) Faith Hill**

*Where are you, Christmas  
Do you remember  
The one you used to know  
I'm not the same one  
See what the time's done  
Is that why you have let me go  
Christmas is here  
Everywhere, oh  
Christmas is here  
If you care, oh  
If there is love in your heart and your mind  
You will feel like Christmas all the time  
Oh, I feel you Christmas  
I know I've found you  
You never fade away, oh*



*The joy of Christmas  
Stays here inside us  
Fills each and every heart with love  
Where are you Christmas  
Fill your heart with love*

God is patient. Because He is a God of eternity, time is merely a tool in His hands. He is not limited to a life span, nor is He daunted by "forever." HE IS. And as such, He defines our little lives by showing us the expanses of His plan. While they seem to be slow, they do have meaning and focus.

We now jump over two thousand years to the days of Abraham, the man of faith whom God had desired to be a father of hope. You know the story...Isaac was the promised son, born to Abraham and Sarah in their old age. Then God tested Abraham's faith and told him to sacrifice that promised child. Abraham was willing, and God accepted that willingness as a sign of true and deep faith.

#### Here is what God said:

Genesis 22:16-18: (NASB) <sup>16</sup>...By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, <sup>17</sup>indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. <sup>18</sup>In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.

Ancient hope! Here was the hope of blessing, the hope of posterity, the hope of redemption through Abraham and his own family! The hope in this promise was a direct link to Jesus himself, and this promise would not only echo through all of the Scriptures, it is destined to echo through all of the eternal life of mankind as a powerful rock of foundation in the very fabric of God's plan. This is a plan of hope!

#### So how far and wide do the prophecies spread about Jesus in the Old Testament?

When you have a plan of hope (especially a plan of eternal hope) and that plan includes ALL of the human family, it not only takes time to develop, it also by definition requires complex logistical events be put into place.

One of these amazing complexities was the preparation of the one who would be *the seed of Abraham*. This seed - this man - would need to be perfect as Adam was, yet born of a woman. He would need to be a man - to live the life that an ordinary man lives - yet be willing to sacrifice all of his own will and desire to fulfill the Law of Moses. He would need to be graced with the very







power of God above, yet be a humble and obedient son who was willing to be rejected and die.

**God, as the author of hope, let us know through prophecy who would take on this great challenge:**

Isaiah 6:8-10: (NIV) *<sup>8</sup>Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, whom shall I send? And who will go for us? And I said, here am I. Send me! <sup>9</sup>He said, go and tell this people: Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving. <sup>10</sup>Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.*

How do we know this prophecy was about Jesus and not just a proclamation by the prophet Isaiah? We know because Jesus himself told us by quoting this prophecy when explaining why he taught in parables.

The hope God gave us through Jesus is nothing short of spectacular! We have touched on just a few of the many prophecies God put in place foretelling key events in the coming of Jesus as the Savior of the world. Ask yourself, why did God arrange for all of these prophecies to be written? Was it to show how great He is? No, but they do show us that. These prophecies were written for our hope, so we could have glimpses of the intricate foundation of His plan and not only have hope but also live a transformative hope!

Let us look at a few of the many other prophecies that describe Jesus' life.

## PROPHECY

**Messiah was to be born a descendant of Judah:**

Genesis 49:10: (NASB) *The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.*

**Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem:**

Micah 5:2: (KJV) *But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.*

**After his birth, Messiah's family would flee to Egypt:**

Hosea 11:1: (KJV) *When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.*

## FULFILLED!

Luke 3:23,33: (NASB) *<sup>23</sup>When he began his ministry, Jesus himself was about thirty years of age, being, as was supposed, the son of Joseph, the son of Eli...<sup>33</sup>the son of Amminadab, the son of Admin, the son of Ram, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah.*

Matthew 2:1: (KJV) *Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem.*

Matthew 2:14: (KJV) *When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt.*



God's plan of hope through Jesus is deeply solid. We cannot stress enough the role hope plays in all of these prophecies. After all, over six thousand years has passed since that original sin, and the road through time back to God for mankind has been arduous and extreme. Such a road cannot be traversed without hope, and our God is SO gracious as He has always provided such hope through the ages. Interestingly, as the time of Jesus' birth got closer, all hope seemed to die out.

The last book of the Old Testament is Malachi. It was written over 400 years before Jesus came on the scene. During that time, hope truly did begin to wane, as it seemed God had forgotten His people. Had He forgotten? No, He simply was waiting for the proper time.

### **What was His final message to His people during this long period of silence?**

Malachi 4:1-2: (NASB) <sup>1</sup>*For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. <sup>2</sup>But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings;*

*The sun of righteousness rising with healing* - what a comforting thought in the midst of all the turmoil the prophecy had detailed. So, this last chapter of this last prophecy of the Old Testament narrowly focused on the coming of a new day that would come as a result of trouble, but it would be a new day of healing. Now, this focus was not new as there were other prophecies as well, some much older, but all pointing to the very same thing.



### **"His Name Shall Be Called," (Chorus) The Messiah**

*For unto us a child is born,  
Unto us a son is given,  
And the government shall be upon his shoulder  
And his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor,  
the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace*

Isaiah 9:6-7: (NASB) <sup>6</sup>*For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on his shoulders; And his name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.*

Hope here becomes very specific! Isaiah proclaims there will be one man upon whom all world order will rest. Of course, this had to be the same man as the one born of the tribe of Judah described by Jacob and the same man that God promised would be the seed of Abraham. Do you see how hope can grow once we put all of the individual elements together?

### **Isaiah continues...**

<sup>7</sup>*There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace...*

No end of peace! Isn't that the hope everyone is wishing for, waiting for and working for? Doesn't that statement fulfill the deepest hopes and dreams of humanity?

*...on the throne of David and over His kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.*



The hope of God's own plan comes to humanity through the throne and through the lineage of David. This hope has a government and the foundation of that government is justice and righteousness - God's justice and God's righteousness!

How does this happen? It is the zeal, energy and power of God Himself that gets it done! Let us go back to the last two verses of the last chapter of the last book of the Old Testament.

**These are the last written words before that 400-year silence:**

**Malachi 4:5-6:** (NASB) *<sup>5</sup>Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. <sup>6</sup>He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.*

These last words of the Old Testament, the last words of hope and prophecy before a 400-year silence, essentially tell us how the New Testament is going to start. Before the coming of Messiah, there would be the coming of one to prepare the people for the Messiah - he would do the work of Elijah, paving the way for hope. He would pave the way for Jesus. Even though hope might be forgotten or misplaced in the minds and the lives of man over time, it does not mean the Giver of all hope ever, ever forgets!

So, hope is clearly established through prophecy - through the thousands of years that had passed before Jesus ever came to earth, and through the many and often veiled proclamations in the Old Testament, God surely prepared The Way, The Truth and The Life!

The hope of Christmas is not just about the day; it is about God's plans and prophecies.



**"O Come All Ye Faithful," (Verse 1) Celtic Woman**

*O, come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant  
O, come ye, O, come ye to Bethlehem  
Come and behold him, born the king of angels  
O, come let us adore him  
O, come let us adore him  
O, come let us adore him  
Christ the Lord*

**Zacharias and Elizabeth - How do you handle  
an angel's message that changes your life?**

Four hundred years had passed and the time was now right for the one who was to announce the coming of Messiah to burst onto the scene. To accomplish this very special privilege, a very special preparation had to be made, for this forerunner could be no ordinary man. He had to be born and raised with this awesome responsibility in mind. He had to come from parents who understood the value of holiness and who would be willing to fully accept the necessary pathway. God knew that such a faithful couple existed and were ready for this challenge.

The Way  
The Truth  
The Life



Zacharias and Elizabeth were chosen to be the parents of John the Baptist. The two were faithful and the Scriptures say *they were righteous in the sight of God*. Zacharias served the people as a priest of God, yet in spite of their faithfulness, his wife was childless. As they grew older, their hopes and their prayers for children waned. 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:** (NASB) <sup>11</sup>...an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. <sup>12</sup>Zacharias was troubled when he saw the angel, and fear gripped him. <sup>13</sup>But the angel said to him do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John.

Can you imagine the great fear and great exhilaration all at once? Just like that, there was an answer to the years of humility and prayer before God! And not only was it an answer, it was an answer delivered by an angel - they would have a child and it was to be a boy.

Zacharias' mind must have begun to race as the initial fear began to subside and be replaced by many questions: How could this be? Why me? Why here? Why now? Why the angel? WHY?

### The angel continued...

**Luke 1:14-17:** (NASB) <sup>14</sup>You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. <sup>15</sup>For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb.

Zacharias was getting answers, but these were not the answers he expected. His son, to be named John, was going to have special privilege and responsibility. The angel said John would be a great man and he would be filled with the Holy Spirit. How could any of this even be possible?

### And there was more! The angel continued...

<sup>16</sup>And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. <sup>17</sup>It is he who will go as a forerunner before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

His son would *turn the hearts of Israel back to God*! How could he do this? Zacharias undoubtedly recognized the angel was quoting from the prophet Malachi - the last spoken words of a prophet in over 400 years! These words were a prophecy of the coming of Messiah, and this angel had just proclaimed that the just-announced son of Zacharias would be the forerunner of the Messiah!

The table was set for the prophecies to come to pass and Zacharias had just been told that he and his family were a direct link to the hope of the plan of God!



### "O Come All Ye Faithful," (Verses 2-3) Celtic Woman

God of gods, light of light  
Lo, He abhors not the Virgin's womb  
Very God, Begotten not created





*O, come let us adore him  
O, come let us adore him  
O, come let us adore him  
Christ the Lord*

*Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation  
Sing all ye citizens of Heaven above  
Glory to God in the highest  
O, come let us adore him  
O, come let us adore him  
O, come let us adore him  
Christ the Lord*

It really is all about faith and the gathering of the faithful to execute God's plan of hope. In every story of faith there is always the test of doubt, and right now, the doubt was too much for Zacharias. After all, none of this made any logical sense. It had all come out of the blue and was simply impossible! 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: (NASB) *I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.*

*I am Gabriel!* The angel's words would have echoed in Zacharias' mind *I am Gabriel!* This surely was a being most high in all of the Almighty's spiritual creation! Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, was sent to deliver this miraculous news to Zacharias.

Perhaps it began to dawn on Zacharias that as he was speaking to the mighty angel Gabriel, he actually doubted the angel's message...

**Gabriel continued:**

Luke 1:20: (NASB) *And behold, you shall be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time.*

*Unable to speak!* Maybe at that very moment, Zacharias felt his speech leave him. He would be unable to speak! He had been visited by a holy angel of the Almighty and could tell no one about it. Zacharias thought for a moment about his doubt. Doubt in the face of God's power and mercy does bring consequence, but even if we doubt, it does not cancel God's power and mercy. What a glorious God we have! What a glorious plan! What glorious hope!

Luke 1:23-25: (NASB) <sup>23</sup>*When the days of his priestly service were ended, he went back home.* <sup>24</sup>*After these days Elizabeth his wife became pregnant, and she kept herself in seclusion for five months, saying,* <sup>25</sup>*This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked with favor upon me, to take away my disgrace among men.*

So, even in the face of a long-forgotten hope and under the circumstances of unlikely events, God's blessings would take root and grow. Elizabeth took this news with great humility. Once pregnant she 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.





For the will of God is sure and the plan of God is complete. All we need do is wait for His timing, for in His timing we find hope. Truly God did gather those faithful ones to help us find that hope.

**"O Come All Ye Faithful," (Verse 4) Celtic Woman**

*Yea, Lord, we greet thee  
Born this happy morning  
Jesus, to thee be glory given  
Word of the Father now in flesh appearing  
O, come let us adore him  
O, come let us adore him  
O, come let us adore him  
Christ the Lord*

**Later when John is born and Zacharias regains his speech, Zacharias cannot help but gush forth praise!**

**Luke 1:59-64:** (NASB) <sup>59</sup>And it happened that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to call him Zacharias, after his father. <sup>60</sup>But his mother answered and said, no indeed; but he shall be called John. <sup>61</sup>And they said to her, there is no one among your relatives who is called by that name. <sup>62</sup>And they made signs to his father, as to what he wanted him called. <sup>63</sup>And he asked for a tablet and wrote as follows, his name is John. And they were all astonished. <sup>64</sup>And at once his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he began to speak in praise of God.

**Luke 1:67-74:** (NASB) <sup>67</sup>And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying: <sup>68</sup>Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people, <sup>69</sup>And has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David His servant— <sup>70</sup>As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old - <sup>71</sup>Salvation FROM OUR ENEMIES, and FROM THE HAND OF ALL WHO HATE US; <sup>72</sup>To show mercy toward our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant, <sup>73</sup>The oath which He swore to Abraham our father, <sup>74</sup>To grant us that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear.

**Joseph: How do you step up to be a real father when the circumstances are unbelievable?**

God's plan is sure. The prophecies He saw fit to reveal to us from ancient times serve as a foundation for extreme faith in His plan. Extreme faith can see and grasp extreme hope. Extreme hope brings extreme peace - and that is really what Christmas is all about - peace for all. We have thus far seen that many prophecies, coupled with the personal experiences of Zacharias and Elizabeth, laid a solid foundation for the birth of Jesus.

**Matthew 1:18:** (NASB) Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit.

God sees fit to have a virgin conceive (again a prophecy fulfilled) and chooses the young woman Mary. She is a truly faithful worshipper of God and is betrothed to an older man by the name of Joseph. God sends His messenger Gabriel to tell this young woman she will miraculously conceive, and it will be before she is married. Mary humbly accepts this unique favor from God and now must tell Joseph, her husband-to-be.

For Joseph, this would have been a completely unexpected, unique and horrifying dilemma. What should he do? He could have sent Mary away in



public shame, but the Scriptures tell us he was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her. As was his right, he determined to send her away privately, for he deeply respected Mary. This was an extraordinary and life-changing decision laid before him, so he would sleep on it to be sure.

### **As he slept, an angel of the Lord came to him in a dream:**

**Matthew 1:20:** (NASB) *...Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.*

Well, this certainly was an explanation in harmony with how Mary had tried to explain her dilemma, though it still seemed far-fetched. It did, however, carry with it clear direction and a godly purpose.

### **The angel continued...**

**Matthew 1:21-23:** (NASB) *<sup>21</sup>She will bear a son; and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. <sup>22</sup>Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: <sup>23</sup>behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel, which translated means, God with us.*

Joseph would have awakened with a start and with profound thoughtfulness. This was NOT some wildly contrived explanation at all, rather it was a direct fulfillment of prophecy! And not just any prophecy, but THE prophecy of THE MESSIAH! Mary, his espoused, was carrying the Savior of all and he, Joseph, would have the opportunity and privilege to raise this Savior to manhood! Glory to God in the highest!

And so we can see how a fear of the impossible can, by the grace and overruling power of God, be turned to faith that sees through the impossible. Oftentimes in our society we hear people talking about men "manning up" to face the challenges before them. Joseph wrote the book on what it means to "man up" - to be a godly man in the face of sure misunderstanding and persecution. Joseph took the reins given to him by God and forged ahead with courageous humility.



### **"How Could It Be," (Part one) 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?*



At this point of the story we usually begin to forget about Joseph and relegate him to being a background player, because the story becomes all about Mary and then all about Jesus. Meanwhile, Joseph showed courage, humility and leadership as he continued to receive and follow direct instructions from God. These instructions enabled him to best save and protect his baby son, the baby boy who would become the future Savior and protector of the world.

For the next few minutes, let us jump ahead in the story and track the strength, faith and leadership of Joseph, for through these next experiences his example teaches us about what being a man really means.



Traditional depictions of the Nativity scene show the three wise men in the stable with Joseph, Mary, Jesus and the animals. Actually, they came around to Bethlehem much later, and the Scriptures say they found Jesus and his family in a house and it was there they worshipped him and gave him gifts. The visit from the Magi was also a trigger for Herod, who was going to have nothing to do with any Savior being born and raised in his jurisdiction, so this meant danger was on the horizon.

**Matthew 2:13:** (NASB) *Now when they (the Magi) had gone, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, get up! Take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him.*

Joseph knew how to listen and how to act. All the angel had to do was tell Joseph the "what," "where" and "why," and Joseph's response was immediate and complete. Keep in mind they had not been living at home since Jesus' birth, but in Bethlehem. Now they were being instructed for a second time to relocate - and this time to another country! God's faith in Joseph was well placed, for he again courageously walked his family into the unknown. God had also provided the gifts of the Magi as a way for them to sustain themselves while in Egypt. God provided and so did Joseph!

We can see clearly how Joseph as the leader of his family had mastered the art of following God's will and direction. It is safe to assume that Joseph would be content to stay in the foreign land of Egypt until he had been otherwise instructed, for to move without instruction would have been to run ahead of God.

### **Soon enough he received his directions:**

**Matthew 2:19-21:** (NASB) *<sup>19</sup>But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, and said, <sup>20</sup>Get up, take the child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel; for those who sought the child's life are dead. <sup>21</sup>So Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel.*

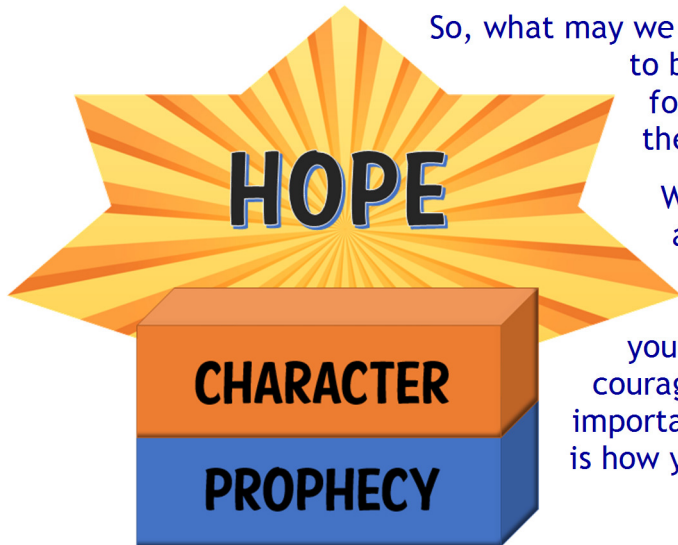
Again it was time to relocate; time to lead his family through another series of steps for their protection and well-being. Remember, the world then was not the way it is now - there was no 24-hour news for him to check. Nobody texted him that Herod was gone and all was well. He was going back into Israel on just the word of the angel. Joseph most likely was going to head back to



Bethlehem, but as he drew closer and discovered the current political landscape, his fatherly instincts caused him great concern.

**Matthew 2:22-23:(NASB)** *<sup>22</sup>But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Then after being warned by God in a dream, he left for the regions of Galilee, <sup>23</sup>and came and lived in a city called Nazareth. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets: he shall be called a Nazarene.*

God again guided Joseph, who changed course and finally came to settle in a place called Nazareth. Other than a brief mention when Jesus was 12 years old and left behind in Jerusalem, this is pretty much all that we know about Joseph.



So, what may we conclude? God's plan is a plan of hope. For that hope to be sure, it must not only be built upon the firm foundation of prophecy, but it must also be built with the sturdy and enduring materials of character.

We know Jesus' character was thoroughly competent and pure, but we do not often think about the strength of character necessary for the supporting cast.

Joseph was chosen as a critical early support for the young and tender Jesus. He was strong as a man, courageous in his decisions, daring in his actions and most importantly, humble in his obedience to God's will. Now that is how you "man up!" And that is the story of Joseph!



**"How Could It Be," (Part two) Michael Card**

*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?*

**If you were God, how would you introduce the hope of the world into the world?**

Think of the greatest joys of life 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 nine 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! The heavens were alive with joy and celebration. It was a miracle of miracles!





We have already seen glimpses of all of the work done to prepare for this particular event. God's plan of hope began ages before this moment, and He revealed pieces of it to us through the many prophecies of the Old Testament. God's preparations continued through the drafting of the right people of the right character to be the supporting cast for Jesus the Messiah surrounding this event.

### Now we pause to meditate on the birth of hope...

Luke 2:1-14: (KJV) <sup>1</sup>And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed...<sup>3</sup>And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. <sup>4</sup>And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem...<sup>5</sup>To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. <sup>6</sup>And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.



With all God went through to get ready for this moment, it is striking that Jesus would be born in such a common and humble way. There were no special provisions, no special exemptions, no special circumstances. They were required to do what everyone else did, travel where everyone else traveled and pay what everyone else paid.

<sup>7</sup>And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn.

To be born in a stable and 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 he would be able to pay the ransom price. It was through this humility that God's plan of hope would flourish.



### "Away in the Manger," Celtic Woman

*Away in a manger, no crib for his bed  
The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head  
The stars in the bright sky looked down where he lay  
The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay*

*The cattle are lowing the baby awakes  
A little Lord Jesus no crying he makes  
I love Thee, Lord Jesus look down from the sky  
And stay by my side, until morning is nigh.*

*Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask thee to stay  
Close by me forever and love me I pray  
Bless all the dear children in thy tender care  
And take us to heaven to live with thee there*

<sup>8</sup>And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup>And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. <sup>10</sup>And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. <sup>11</sup>For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup>And this shall be a sign unto you; ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.



In this case, the fulfillment of prophecy required an angelic announcement to the most humble audience of shepherds - fitting, as the baby Jesus would grow to assume the throne of David, once a shepherd himself. Imagine the fear, the thrill and the hope instilled in those shepherds! In the still of the night, under the vast expanse of the star lit heavens comes this glowing message - full of light, full of prophecy fulfilled and full of expectation.

**And then it was full of music - the thundering chorus of heavenly angelic voices singing praise:**

*<sup>13</sup>And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, <sup>14</sup>Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.*

Humility does not preclude heavenly celebration, rather it provokes it.

In this manner was Jesus our Lord born.



**"Hark the Herald Angels Sing," (Verse one) Celtic Woman**

*Hark! The herald angels sing  
Glory to the newborn king  
Peace on earth and mercy mild  
God and sinners reconciled  
Joyful, all ye nations rise  
Join the triumph of the skies  
With angelic host proclaim  
Christ is born in Bethlehem  
Hark! The herald angels sing  
Glory to the newborn king*

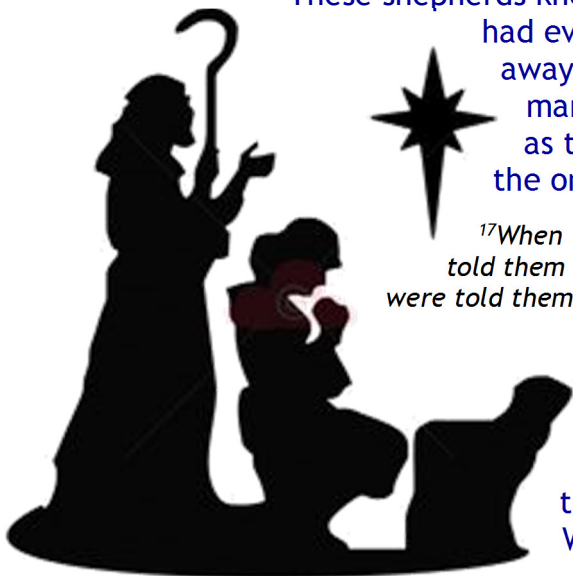
**Let's go back to the shepherds who were told of Jesus' birth:**

**Luke 2:15-20:** (NASB) *<sup>15</sup>When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us. <sup>16</sup>So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as he lay in the manger.*

These shepherds knew they were part of something much bigger than they had ever conceived to be possible. They acted in faith 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 cast their eyes on their future Savior. This was Jesus - the one who would save the world!

*<sup>17</sup>When they had seen this, they made known the statement, which had been told them about this child. <sup>18</sup>And all who heard it wondered at the things, which were told them by the shepherds.*

To go and see him was one thing, but to take this miracle and publish it amongst the people - that was another! These were just shepherds, but they were emboldened to speak out about the stunning event and the miraculous announcement they had been a part of. What a lesson for us - are we emboldened to speak out





about the good news of Christ? We also have been invited to be a part of its message!

<sup>19</sup>But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart. <sup>20</sup>The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.

For Mary, this was a time of awe-struck 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.



**"Hark the Herald Angels Sing," (Last verses) Celtic Woman**

*Hail the heav'n-born Prince of Peace  
Hail the Son of Righteousness  
Light and life to all he brings  
Ris'n with healing in his wings  
Mild he lays his glory by  
Born that man no more may die  
Born to raise the sons of earth  
Born to give them second birth  
Hark! The herald angels sing  
Glory to the newborn king  
Joyful, all ye nations rise  
Join the triumph of the skies  
With angelic host proclaim  
Christ is born in Bethlehem  
Hark! The herald angels sing  
Glory to the newborn king.*



**"God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen/He Has Come For Us," Nicole Sheahan**

*God rest ye merry gentlemen  
Let nothing you dismay  
Remember Christ, our Savior  
Was born on Christmas day  
To save us all from Satan's power  
When we were gone astray  
O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy  
O tidings of comfort and joy  
He has come for us  
This Jesus  
He's the hope for all  
Mankind  
He has come for us  
The Messiah  
Born to give us life*

**Jesus the Savior - all about his Father's business!**

There is little written about Jesus before his 30<sup>th</sup> birthday and the beginning of his ministry. We can assume his childhood experiences were filled with important lessons of faith, life and purpose. Let us look in on the one experience we do know about when he was a very young man.



**Luke 2:42-52: (NASB)** <sup>42</sup>And when he became twelve, they went up according to the custom of the Feast; <sup>43</sup>and as they were returning, after spending the full number of days, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. But his parents were unaware of it, <sup>44</sup>but supposed him to be in the caravan, and went a day's journey; and they began looking for him among their relatives and acquaintances.

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...**

<sup>45</sup>When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem looking for him. <sup>46</sup>Then, after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. <sup>47</sup>And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. <sup>48</sup>When they saw him, they were astonished; and his mother said to him, Son, why have you treated us this way? Behold, your father and I have been anxiously looking for you.

This had gotten serious! He was missing for a day and then his parents looking for an additional three days throughout Jerusalem! We imagine they would have looked in all the typical places and their anxiety and grief over their lost son would have been almost too much to bear.

**Then he was found safe:**

<sup>49</sup>And he said to them, why is it that you were looking for me? Did you not know that I had to be in my Father's house? <sup>50</sup>But they did not understand the statement, which he had made to them... and his mother treasured all these things in her heart. <sup>52</sup>And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

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 not be any other place."

All of this from a 12-year-old. Mary treasured these things in her heart as she watched her baby grow from the infant angels sang about, to the boy seeking his God, to the man who would save the world.



**"God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen/He Has Come For Us," Nicole Sheahan**

*From God, our Heavenly Father, a blessed angel came,  
And unto certain shepherds brought tidings of the same;  
How that in Bethlehem was born the Son of God by name,  
O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy,  
O tidings of comfort and joy.  
He has come for us  
This Jesus  
He's the hope for all  
Mankind  
He has come for us  
The Messiah  
Born to give us life*

Mary treasured these things in her heart. She stands as our example to treasure these things in our own hearts. But how do we do that, for this society frowns deeply upon what we hold dearly?





Here are a few suggestions on keeping the spirit of Christmas daily:

**Walk a Christian walk** - Walk through your every experience with the joy and hope that Christ brings.

**Pray for God's will in your life** - What we pray for we become aware of - God wants to direct you.

**Stand for truth** - Stand with kindness and firmness, realizing that most people would rather hear a convenient lie than a hard truth.

**Lead when necessary** - People generally flounder unless they are given someone to follow.

**Follow when appropriate** - Every humble leader knows how and when to follow.

**Love your neighbor** - That is what Jesus did.



**"O Holy Night," Celtic Woman**

*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 Spirit 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!  
O night divine, the night when Christ was born  
O night, O Holy Night, O night divine!  
O night, O Holy Night, O night divine!  
Chains he shall break, for the slave is our brother  
And in his name all oppression shall cease  
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we  
With all our hearts we praise his holy name  
Christ is the Lord! Then ever, ever praise we  
O night O Holy Night, O night divine!  
O night O Holy Night, O night divine!*

May the spirit of Christmas truly inspire you to seek Jesus' footsteps, to study the word of God and to live with a childlike enthusiasm in the hope we have because Jesus was born, lived, died and rose again!



We want to grab ahold of the depth of what the hope in Jesus means, and the realization that it is not just for you and me. But it is more powerful than that. He paid the ransom for all mankind. The holiday of Christmas gets so distracting from the most important focus of your mind at this time - what the birth of Jesus means. We have a huge foundation of prophecy coupled with the examples of spiritual character of those around Jesus. We are grateful for the intricate heavenly planning for this event.

Merry happy, HOPEFUL Christmas to every one of you!



*So, does the day belong to Jesus or Santa Claus?  
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...  
Think about it...!*