

Hymns: 86 Hark! The Herald Angels Sing
Psalm 72:1-11

16 Joy to the World

Last time (two weeks ago) we viewed some of the most significant events in history through the eyes of Mary Magdalene. That included the *reason* for Christmas. This week we'll venture into the *story* of Christmas. The approach we'll use is to move progressively deeper into the story, taking various perspectives of this momentous event. When we finish, hopefully each of us will have a better understanding of Christmas and how it applies to us.

We'll start with the familiar passage from Luke chapter 2:

[1] *And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from **Caesar Augustus**, that all the world should be taxed.*

[2] *(And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)*

[3] *And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.*

[4] *And **Joseph** also went up from **Galilee**, out of the city of **Nazareth**, into Judaea, unto **the city of David, which is called Bethlehem**; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:)*

[5] *To be taxed with **Mary** his espoused wife, being great with child.*

[6] *And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.*

[7] *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.*

[8] *And there were in the same country **shepherds** abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.*

[9] *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.*

[10] *And the **angel** said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of **great joy**, which shall be to all people.*

[11] *For unto you **is born** this day in the city of David a **Saviour**, which is **Christ the Lord**.*

[12] *And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.*

[13] *And **suddenly** there was with the angel a **multitude of the heavenly host** praising God, and saying,*

[14] ***Glory to God in the highest**, and on earth peace, good will toward men.*

[15] *And it came to pass, as the **angels** were gone away from them into heaven, the **shepherds** said one to another, Let us **now** go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.*

[16] *And they came **with haste**, and found **Mary**, and **Joseph**, and the **babe lying in a manger**.*

[17] *And when they had seen it, they made known abroad **the saying which was told them** concerning this **child**.*

[18] *And **all they** that heard it **wondered** at those things which were told them by the **shepherds**.*

[19] *But **Mary** kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.*

[20] *And the **shepherds** returned, **glorifying and praising God** for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.*

Who and When: Characters and Time

- Caesar Augustus (Emperor of Roman Empire - 27 BC to 14 AD)
- Herod the Great (King of Judea - 37 BC to 4 BC)
- Joseph
- Mary
- Shepherds
- Savior, Christ, the Lord
- Angels (note their prominence in this story)

Not surprisingly, the rulers cited reigned around the time of BC / AD.

Surprisingly though, Herod ended his reign in 4 BC. Does this say that there is something wrong with our Bible? No, it tells us our calendar is off.

Where and Travel Time

How many of you have visited the Holy Land? **From this map**, you can see the journey of Mary and Joseph was about 80 miles from Nazareth south west of the Sea of Galilee to Bethlehem just south of Jerusalem if they passed through Samaria---a somewhat hostile area. Did they travel alone? Probably not.

You may recall the story when Jesus was twelve and His parents took Him to the Passover Feast. When it was over, it says Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem.

Luke 2

*[44] But they, **supposing him to have been in the company**, went a day's journey; and they sought him **among their kinsfolk and acquaintance**.*

They found Him back in Jerusalem in the temple. What we can conclude from this is that since they traveled in a caravan when Jesus was twelve, it's very likely they traveled the same way when Jesus was about to be born. After all, many people had to make this trip to be taxed. Caravans offered a much safer way to travel than going it alone.

Our Christmas story from Luke 2:1-20 contained a number of characters whom we just enumerated. But can you think of any characters who were missing from the story? What about the wise men from the East?

This is a good place to pause and consider some very basic distinctions of the four Gospels. I first learned this from *What the Bible Is All About* by Henrietta Meares. There she demonstrated that each book of the Bible describes a different aspect of Jesus Christ.

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|-----------|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| • Matthew | → Messiah (King of the Jews) | → Davidic (kingly) Line |
| • Mark | → Servant (humility) | → none |
| • Luke | → Son of Man (human nature) | → Adamic (human) Line |
| • John | → Son of God (divine nature) | → eternal God |

We first read from Luke which emphasizes the *human* nature of Jesus. Now let's look at the account in Matthew chapter 2 which presents Jesus Christ the King:

[1] 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,

[2] Saying, Where is he that is born **King of the Jews**? for we have seen **his star** in the east, and are come to **worship him**.

[3] When **Herod the king** had heard these things, **he was troubled**, and **all Jerusalem with him**.

[4] And when he had gathered all the **chief priests and scribes** of the people together, he **demanded** of them where **Christ** [Messiah] should be born.

[5] And they said unto him, In **Bethlehem of Judaea**: for thus it is written by the prophet, [Micah 5:2]

[6] And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a **Governor**, that shall **rule my people Israel**.

[7] Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them **diligently** what time the star appeared.

[8] And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search **diligently** for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and **worship him** also.

[9] When they had heard **the king**, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.

[10] When they saw the star, they rejoiced with **exceeding great joy**.

[11] And when they were come **into the house**, they saw the young child with **Mary** his mother, and **fell down**, and **worshipped him**: and when they had opened their treasures, **they** presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

[12] And being **warned of God in a dream** that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

Here are some things to note from this passage:

1. Wise men came from the East
2. They were looking for a *king*
3. News of a *king* of the Jews being born troubled Herod, King of Judea
4. All Jerusalem was troubled. Why? We're not told.
5. Herod was demanding.
6. Chief priests and scribes knew the prophesy of the birthplace of the Messiah.
7. The discovery of Him brought exceeding great joy. (It still does today.)
8. Jesus was no longer in a manger but in a house.

What does the Gospel of Mark have to say about Jesus' birth? Nothing, which is consistent with the theme of a book portraying Him as a servant. A servant's lineage is of no consequence.

And what about the Gospel of John?

[1] *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

[14] *And **the Word was made flesh**, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.*

The emphasis in John clearly is on His eternal deity. John doesn't even give a clue *how* the Word was made flesh.

So we have really just two accounts of Jesus' birth—the one in Matthew and the one in Luke. It's interesting to note that each of the four Gospels contains the account of the Jesus' crucifixion and

resurrection, but only two—Matthew and Luke—contain any details related to His birth. Notice too, these accounts do not have angels coming to the high priest or prominent Jewish religious leaders or governors. Instead, the announcement is made to shepherds, wise men from the East (via the star), to Mary, and (as we shall see) Joseph.

Now another interesting aspect of this structure of Matthew depicting the Messiah and Luke depicting Jesus' humanity can be seen in the genealogies. As you will see, genealogies are important and they reflect the very personal relationship our God has to man. After all, we were created in His image.

Fear not! We're hitting just the highlights. Here's the kingly line of Joseph, Jesus' adopted father:

Matthew 1

[2] **Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; ...**

[11] **And Josias begat Jechonias and his brethren, about the time they were carried away to Babylon:**

But, Jechonia's line was cursed by God (Jeremiah 22:30).

[16] **And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.**

This is the kingly line that includes the right to the Throne of David.

Look at the difference in the geneology of Mary in Luke.

Luke 3

[23] **And Jesus ..., being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli,**

*[31] **..., which was the son of David,**

*[32] **Which was the son of Jesse, ..., which was the son of Booz, ...,**

*[34] **Which was the son of Jacob, which was the son of Isaac, which was the son of Abraham, ...,**

*[36] **..., which was the son of Sem, which was the son of Noe,**

*[37] **Which was the son of Mathusala, which was the son of Enoch, ...,**

[38] **..., which was the son of Seth, which was the son of Adam, which was the son of God.**

Matthew shows Jesus' line from Abraham through David to Joseph.

Luke gives Mary's line moving the *opposite direction* (*son of* rather than *begat*) back through David, Boaz, Abraham, Shem, Noah, Seth and Adam to God who created man. Even **in** this link to the first man, Adam, which emphatically proves His physical connection to man, Jesus is described as the son of God.

Christmas Story

Today we've been considering *Christmas* story. The word *Christmas* obviously contains Jesus' kingly title (*Christ*) in the name, but where did the *-mas* come from? The English word *Christmas* originated from the Old English word *Christes maesse* which means "Christ's mass." *Christ* means the *anointed one* or *king*. The word *mass* refers to the traditional service of the Roman Catholic church. It was first

celebrated as a Christian festival in the fourth century.

The December 25th date most likely correlates with the pagan celebration of the winter solstice. The actual month of Jesus' birth can best be calculated from the technical details we have of the birth of John the Baptist and Jesus' relative age to him. Those who have done that work, *speculate* that the actual month of His birth was September or perhaps March.

Speaking of John the Baptist, most people forget that the Christmas story includes **two** miracle births, not just one. Elizabeth, far beyond child-bearing age (Luke 1:18), gave birth to John the Baptist as foretold by the angel Gabriel (v. 13). Zacharias the priest, her husband, was struck dumb (v. 20) and likely deaf (v. 62) until John was born because of his unbelief.

When Elizabeth, a relative of Mary (v. 36), was in the sixth month of her pregnancy, the angel Gabriel announced to the virgin Mary espoused to Joseph (vv. 26-27) that she would deliver a son and call his name Jesus (v. 31) and that He would be conceived of the Holy Ghost and called the Son of God (v. 35).

Now, an angel had not just spoken to Mary, the shepherds, and Zacharias, but also to Joseph.

Matthew 1

[18] Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.

[19] Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily.

[20] But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

[21] And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.

[22] Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet [Isaiah 7:14], saying,

[23] Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

[24] Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife:

[25] And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.

Notice the faithfulness and obedience of Joseph. Trusting the words of the angel that his beloved Mary was a virgin, he took her as his wife, and gave the name of *Jesus* to the child.

Closing Thoughts

The poem, "The Night Before Christmas." contains the familiar phrase "...with visions of sugar-plumbs danc[ing] in their heads." During the Christmas season, like no other time of the year, people obsess over *presents*. Last time we got together, we learned of the *joy* of being in the *presence* of the Lord. This year let's turn our attention away from *Christmas presents* and focus instead on the Gift of God and his presence.

Romans 6

[23] For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Benediction

Numbers 6:24-26

[24] The LORD bless thee, and keep thee:

[25] The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee:

[26] The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.

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