

CHRISTMAS IN THE GOSPELS

INTRODUCTION

The birth of Jesus changed everything. Christ's arrival was the fulfillment of centuries of Jewish messianic hope. More significantly, the incarnation revealed the depth and fullness of God's love. By becoming one of us, God proved that He was not distant and uninvolved. He took on flesh to rescue His fallen creation. He came as a servant to show us the way. He came to give His life for the salvation of the world.

Given the importance of Christ's birth, you would expect it to play a major role in each gospel and for the story to be told in largely the same way. That is not the case. The gospel of Mark, the first gospel to be written, does not mention the birth of Jesus at all. Instead the gospel begins with the work of John the Baptist, just prior to the start of Jesus' ministry. The gospels of Matthew and Luke both deal with the story of Jesus' birth, but in radically different ways. Luke focuses on the role of Mary and emphasizes the humble circumstances and poverty that surrounded Jesus' birth. Matthew focuses more on the role of Joseph and talks about the political and implications of the birth story. The gospel of John ignores the actual birth of Jesus to take us back to the very dawn of creation. Jesus was there we are told. He was God's word, bringing all creation into existence.

In this study we will look at the story of Jesus' birth in each of the gospels. We will look at what each telling adds to our understanding of the love of God revealed in Jesus. Most significantly, we will be challenging you to realign your life with the Christmas message.

Merry Christmas,
Pastor John



PART TWO: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

1) Why was the birth of Jesus related to the emperor, to the census and to the governorship of Quirinius?

2) Joseph and Mary were not married. What does that tell us about them? About Jesus?

3) How do we know that Jesus was born in a stable?

4) What is significant about Jesus being born in a stable?

5) What does this story tell you about the incarnation?



PART THREE: HOW DOES IT APPLY TO US?

1) How do you feel when you hear the familiar words of this story? Happy, sad, bored?

2) Is there any way in which the story of Jesus' birth relates to your story?

3) Jesus was born in poverty and weakness. How does that impact your faith?

4) There was no room for Jesus. How does that speak to you about Jesus? About other poor people?

5) Jesus was fully God and fully man. Is it hard for you to imagine Jesus growing up? Why is that important?



PRAYER: Making Room

*No room in the inn
I can understand this
There's only so much
space
And it's already taken
It's simple
Factual*

*But your blessed Word
says more
No room for them in the
inn*

*Them
Joseph and Mary
are them
Unlike me and mine
Suspicious strangers
With complicated needs*

*I can't bring them in
No time
No room*

*I won't bring them in
Give them access to all I
have
All I've worked for
All I love*

*It isn't wise
It isn't safe*

*The stable is for them
Stay there
Over there
that hidden place
that place in the back
that place for animals
away from where I live
not here with me and
mine*

*But
I want Jesus
and
Jesus is them*

*There's no room for him
if there's no room for
them*

*That's who Jesus is
That's what Jesus does
He makes room*

*Born in a stable
making room
for the humble and the
homeless*

*King of kings
making room
for the rich and the royal*

*An outsider
making room
for those who've been
turned away
left out
rejected*

*An insider
making room
for the distinguished and
established
A laborer
making room*

*Well educated
making room*

*A migrant, a refugee
making room*

*making room
making room
always making room*

*That's who you are Jesus
That's what you do
You make room*

*You've even made room
for me*

*Now make room in me
Forgive me
Change me
Teach me
To do what you do
To make room*

*Prayer: Making Room©
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LESSON TWO
WORSHIP WORKS WONDERS
LUKE 2:8-20

INTRODUCTION

Two acts of worship are recorded in this brief passage. The first is that of the angels who came singing God's praises. The second is that of the shepherds who came to see the newborn child. The angels knew what they were doing, but did the shepherds? They knew something amazing and wonderful was happening, but probably they did not grasp its full significance. At what point does our wonder and amazement become worship? When are we truly worshipping?

PART ONE: WHAT DID WE READ?

1) What were the shepherds doing when they were visited by the angels?

2) How many angels appeared at first? How many appeared later?

3) What sign did the angels tell the shepherds to look for?

4) What song did the angels sing?

5) When the shepherds saw the baby what did they do next?



6) How did Mary respond to all this?

PART TWO: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

1) Why were shepherds the first to hear the good news of Jesus birth?

2) Angels sang the good news of Jesus' birth. Why were they there?

3) Would a baby lying in a manger be much of a sign after a heavenly host singing?

4) How many people do you think ended up hearing the news of Jesus' birth?

5) What does it mean that Mary "treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart."?



PART THREE: HOW DOES IT APPLY TO US?

1) What kind of signs have you received from God? Any?

2) Do you think the shepherds found the baby Jesus anticlimactic after seeing a host of angels sing?

3) Do you think the shepherds worshiped the baby Jesus?

4) Are there events in the lives of your children that you have treasured and pondered upon in your heart?

5) The shepherds shared with others about what they had seen and heard. How ready are you to share how God has been at work in your life? Would you be more ready to share if a host of angels sang to you?

Prayer

Father, what an amazing night the shepherds had! To have a glimpse of your heavenly glory, to hear a mighty army of praise, to see the Messiah-Child, to listen to the angel recite his glorious title -- Savior, Messiah-Lord. Thank you for letting us hear the story again. Write it large and indelibly in our hearts that we might be fervent Good News tellers, too. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

By Dr. Ralph F. Wilson



LESSON THREE

GOD GUIDES THE WISE

MATTHEW 2:1-12

INTRODUCTION

Technically, this story takes place sometime after Christmas. The Magi were not kings. They were priests (and astrologers) of the Zoroastrian faith. They saw something (we are not exactly sure what they saw) in the sky that told them of the birth of the King of the Jews. They came seeking him. They brought gifts and worshiped Jesus. What does their story have to tell us today?

PART ONE; WHAT DID WE READ?

1) Where did the Magi go first as they were looking for Jesus?

2) What was the purpose of the Magi's visit?

3) How did Herod respond to the words of the Magi?

4) How many Magi were there?

5) What did the Magi do when they saw Jesus?



6) Did the Magi return to Herod as he had requested?

PART TWO: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

1) What does the fact that the Magi came to Herod tell us?

2) Why was Herod and all of Jerusalem disturbed by the visit of the Magi?

3) Who did Herod consult to find out the location of the Messiah's birth?

4) Is there any meaning to the gifts that the Magi brought to Jesus?

5) What do you think it meant when the Magi bowed down to worship Jesus?

6) Why were the Magi warned not to return to Herod?



PART THREE: HOW DOES IT APPLY TO US?

1) When we talk about this passage, people often hear something like this: "Wise men still seek him." Do you think the wise men were really wise? Does wisdom really help us to find our way to God?

2) What do you think the Magi saw in the sky? Does it matter?

3) Jesus threatened the power structures of His day. Do you think He still threatens the power structures of today?

4) Can we worship Jesus without truly understanding what we are doing? The Magi seem to have done so?

5) What significance do you place on the gifts brought by the Magi?



PRAYER

God of all time,
we praise and adore you for breaking into the darkness of this world
with the glorious light of your presence.

A light which made your love for the world visible
in the babe born in Bethlehem—

Jesus Christ, your Son, our Saviour.

A light which guided those gift-bearing travellers from afar
to find and worship the Christ-child.

A light which leads us to you, now revealed in Jesus Christ.

We pray that you will accept our worship

for it arises from hearts and minds

in awe over the enormity of your gift to us of pure love.

In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

~ Moira Laidlaw, on Liturgies Online.

<http://www.liturgiesonline.com.au/index.php>



LESSON FOUR

OUR CHRISTMAS

JOHN 1:1-18

INTRODUCTION

The gospel of John is very different from the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke). It differs in style, content and theology. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the way the gospel introduces Jesus. In John we are swept up in the realms of philosophy and cosmology. We go to the dawn of creation where Jesus is described as the Word God spoke bringing all of creation into being. That Word is further described as the light that shines in the darkness. The incarnation is described as the Word becoming flesh. How does this gospel add to our understanding of the incarnation?

PART ONE: WHAT DID WE READ?

1) How does the gospel of John begin? What other Bible passage does it remind us of?

2) Without Christ, was anything created?

3) Besides the Word, what other person is mentioned in these verses?

4) What terms are used to describe Jesus in this passage?

5) When the Word became flesh it enabled us to see God. What words describe this in the gospel of John?



2) Do you struggle with the idea of the incarnation? That God took on flesh?

3) Do the words used to describe Jesus here (the Word, the Light, the glory of the One and Only) help you to understand the significance of Jesus?

4) What is the main truth that you would get out of this passage?

5) What do you struggle with in this passage?



PRAYER

Lord Jesus, I praise you as the one who is the Word of God, the one who existed in the beginning with God. You were and are God, and you were with God the Father in the beginning.

I glorify you as the one through whom all things were made. Without you, nothing was made that has been made. Life is in you, and the life that is in you is the light of all men. Your light shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it. You are the true light that gives light to every man who comes into the world.

I thank you that you loved us enough to become flesh and make your dwelling among us. The glory you displayed in the days of your flesh is the glory of the Only Begotten who came from the Father. Your glory is full of grace and truth.

Through you we all have received one blessing after another from the fullness of your grace. Truly grace and truth have come to us through you. I pray that everyone in our land will come to recognize that you and you alone have seen the Father, that you are God's Only Begotten Son, and that you have made him known to us.

May we be, like John, witnesses to your light. Please open doors for us that we may testify to others that you are the true light. I pray that through our life and witness others will come to recognize you and receive you.

This I ask in your name, the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

From pray.afa.net

