

## The Light of Christmas

Scripture: Mark 1:1; John 1:9, 12, 14; John 20:31; Luke 1:26–33; Matthew 1:18–21, 24; Luke 2:1, 3–19; John 3:16–17

Today is the 4<sup>th</sup> and final sermon in our Advent Series, The Light of Christmas. I hope this series helped you get a fresh perspective on Christmas. I really do love the Christmas season; this is the most wonderful time of the year.

But some aspects of the season can be challenging or even painful. Last week I mentioned that for many people, it's a time of year that causes; or at least raises to the surface, tensions in relationships, unmet expectations. Some of it coming from the family they grew up in; and now with COVID or sickness or family moving away or whatever the case may be - there's pain of absent loved ones.

Let's be honest, for many people, at Christmas, we're faced with problems we can't fix, people we can't control, expectations we can't meet.

**Today, we are going to go through the Christmas story.** Sometimes, we get through Christmas and never even hear the whole Christmas story. We can see the nativity drive-thru and hear the Christmas Eve Lessons and Carols, but never hear the whole Christmas narrative!

**Today, I want to pull together the various Christmas stories from the different Gospels.** I'm sure you know this, we have 4 different narratives of Jesus life and ministry; Matthew Mark Luke and John. But there are only two of the Gospels that include the story of Jesus' birth - Matthew and Luke.

Mark and John don't include it.

- Now Mark is the shortest Gospel and takes the most direct approach. He's starts off talking about *who he's talking about*.

### **1. Mark 1:1**

The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God . . . Then Mark introduces John the Baptist, and then goes straight to Jesus Baptism and ministry!

## 2. Then we come to John - 1:1

John's Gospel on the other hand, he doesn't tell us what happened. Like we talked over the last few weeks, John's gospel starts by talking about the importance, or the significance of Jesus' birth.

- Even though John knew all about the stories of Jesus birth, after all it is believed that John took care of Mary, Jesus' Mom, after he was crucified, resurrected and ascended to heaven. He did not say, "Here's what happened."
- But, John did say, "Here's why it happened."

### John 1:14

For example, John said "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."

- Remember, John was an old man when he wrote his Gospel and had lived through many very hard times, he lost a lot. So John decided to explain that God decided to become a human... fully God and fully human! God decided to make an appearance and come to be with us, to live with us

John said things like, in **John 1:9**, "*The true light, that enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.*" In other words, on the first Christmas morning, God brought everyone a gift, the true light that gives light to everyone in the world, light in the darkness they experience in life. That even with the dark things we experience in life, God offers us light and hope, and insight to life.

**But what makes John's Gospel so fascinating, is that John get's very personal about Jesus!** That's why John said in **1:12**, ". . . to all (To everyone) who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. Now how do you receive someone you cannot see, touch or feel? John talked about to those who "believe in" – not believe that – but to trust in. Jesus have these people the right to become children of God! John was emphasizing that this is very personal! That's the Why! Jesus is a very personal God who wants to have a relationship with you!

- In fact, at the end of John's Gospel, John emphasizes "The Why." We talked about this a couple of weeks ago. So John writes in **John 20:31**,

“But these are written ***that you may believe*** that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing ***you may have life*** in his name.

- **This is where it get’s personal** - Yes, “God so loved the world.” But he loved the world one person at a time. Jesus died for the sin of the world and your personal sin – Jesus came to be your **personal Savior**.
- **John was clear**. God came for every single person, for EVERYONE to make an individual decision to trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of sin.

Then in Verse 31, John went on, “But these are written **that you may believe . . .**”

- John’s question for each of us is this: Do you believe? John is saying, “If you don’t believe, you need to keep seeking. That is **“WHY”** Jesus came and why Christmas is important, not to heal people or be a good example or to offer us freedom. ***Jesus came to have a personal relationship with you and everyone else in the world!***

3. On in the Christmas story, in **Luke**, Luke didn’t start with “Once upon a time,” he started by talking about the eyewitnesses, how he heard all these people tell their stories, and wrote this report. So in **Luke 1:26–33**, “*God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David.*”

- Luke starts by giving all this detail. And continued, “*The virgin’s name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are **highly favored!** The Lord is with you.”*

Remember back to week one of our series and we talked about the favor of God! Mary was favored and so are you and me!

Mary needed to hear this because “*Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found **favor** with God.”* Mary needed to hear this!

**This favor is also the light John talked about, it’s a gift God has put on you, to help you accomplish things you can’t accomplish on your own.**

The favor of God transforms relationships and brings you solutions to the issues of life, it causes you to stand out in the crowd and get breaks you didn't deserve, it causes you to change the atmosphere of a room – just by walking in, **this is the Favor of God.**

The Favor of God is a crucial part of the Christian life and an important part of the Christmas story. But the favor of God is often ignored and it's most especially overlooked in the Christmas story.

Mary needed to hear this because she now received the news that she would conceive and give birth to a son, and **she would name him 'Jesus.'**” (Remember this, I'll explain more in a minute!)

- *He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”*

4. **Now in Matthew**, he begins his story of Jesus like and birth in 1:18–21, 24. He starts by saying, “*This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was (And this was a bad day) found (literally it was discovered) to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.*”

- **This was a bad day because** – Mary is now pregnant, the Gospels don't say Mary told anyone, likely because she didn't. If she did, who would believe her? And for as awkward as it can be for an unmarried woman in our culture today, It was a capital offense in Mary's world. Since they were legally bound, she could have been stoned... or executed. At the least, Mary would certainly be sent away and told to live somewhere else – to be put outside the village.

Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he was a gracious and Godly man. So he decided to divorce her quietly. Now in their day, if you were engaged, it was like you were married. To break up with Mary, it wasn't like asking for the TV back or the ring back...

which can be bad enough. This was a legal engagement, Joseph had to legally divorce Mary! There was no way this could not be public.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “*Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.*” Even if people are going to talk and even if people are going to assume you weren’t the father or you didn’t wait and disrespected your family... don’t be afraid to take Mary as your wife!

**And...** Now here it get’s exciting for Joseph or any guy... “She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.” Joseph and Mary didn’t hear the angel say Jesus, that is the Greek form of the **Hebrew name “Joshua” that is pronounced “Yeshua.”** Joseph knew this is the name of the Old Testament warrior-deliverer Joshua.

**Imagine your son being named after a warrior-deliverer by an angel!  
Seriously? The Jews have been under foreign Rule for hundreds of years.  
Joseph just might have been thinking about Jesus being independence to the  
Jewish people.**

But the angel explained, “...*for he will save his people from their sins.*” I don’t know for sure, but I’m sure Joseph didn’t think that was as important a need as saving the Jewish people from their Roman oppressors.

- The Jewish people knew the prophecies of a coming Messiah, with the wisdom of Moses and be a military leader like Joshua! Just like Joshua took the Israelites into the promised land and concurred all of their enemies.

The Jewish people were looking for a Messiah to save them from Rome, Old Testament style with boils, lice, at least a thunderstorm of hail and fire. The Jewish people wanted a Savior with a sword to deal with Rome and crazy King Herod.

But saving from their sins... they didn’t see that as a pressing need. The Jewish people already had an elaborate “save-you-from-sin” system with the temple. But Jesus would come in the spirit of Joshua – the deliverer savior who will come to save the people from what they need saving from most... their sin...

- But when Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.

**Now back to Luke...**

5) **Luke 2:1, 3–19 we have heard this a thousand times...** But this was really a powerful event! Mary and Joseph are together, but there still wasn't a wedding, Mary is starting to show. Gossip is flowing. And then Luke gives more details.

In those days Caesar Augustus (looking for an effective way make sure he was taxing the people enough) issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world . . . And everyone went to their own town to register. This is amazing... **God made sure that there was a census, just so Jesus would be born in the right place, right where the prophecies said the Messiah would be born.**

**Just like with Herod, God used Caesar Augustus—the most powerful man in the world – to send Joseph and family along the 80 some miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem.**

Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

- This was not an easy journey! In all the pictures, Mary was riding a **what?** A donkey? What verse is that in the Bible? Nowhere, But the image looks good... Mary on a donkey, led by Joseph. Maybe she was in a cart, or worse yet... walking. This took a long time ... the trip took from 5 to 8 days.

They are making their way to Bethlehem to fulfill an Old Testament prophecy that would never have happened if not for the most powerful man in the world didn't decide to take a census to he could properly tax the people.

- While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

**And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.** An angel of the Lord appeared to them... why shepherds? Why not farmers or shopkeepers?

Why the shepherds? We don't know for sure, but we do know Shepherds were always ceremonially unclean. They could not enter the temple. When you spend your whole day walking behind a giant flock of sheep... you step in things and are ceremonially unclean.

**But God chose them to announce the birth of his son to the group of people who were least likely to participate in such an event.** "...and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and **they were terrified.** But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. **I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.**

Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. Who is he talking to? The shepherds... who were serving everyone else. Shepherds, the outcasts... a savior has been born to you... a savior. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." 15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 15 "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." [**What makes this the most wonderful time of the year is what happened . . . not necessarily what's happening. The foundation of our faith is events, not faith. Not a way of life, a philosophy, or a book. Events.]**

16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. [Who would believe her? Her reputation was shattered. But Matthew and Luke would do their best to tell the story. But John would be the one to summarize it:] John 3:16–17 16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever . . . 16 believes in him . . . 16 shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. [Because in spite of what we think we need, God understands what we actually need: a personal Savior who is Christ the Lord.]

## **Prayer**