

# What does Christmas mean to you?

12/22/2019

According to a recent study performed by the National Retail Federation, Americans were projected to spend more money on gifts in 2019 than they did at any other time. According to a Gallup study, American adults projected to spend approximately \$920 on gifts per person, up from \$885 per person last year, with total holiday spending exceeding \$1 trillion nationwide. That kind of money spending is out of my budget. Way, way out!

The Christmas shopping season at the mall is poetic ballet to me. It is a collection of people from all walks of life coming together in the pursuit of making their families and friends lives just a little more joyous, a chance to make life a bit more warm and fuzzy, and the greater opportunity to go deeper into debt.

Unlike those who actually go to the mall, I am an internet shopper. Click, click, click. I am done. I don't like to drive all the way to Tucson, park my truck and wait in lines to buy things.

While Christmas shopping can be fun to many, it also brings serious depressions to others who are less fortunate. With all that said, let me ask you a serious question: What does Christmas mean to you? As we think back to Bethlehem – the birthplace of Christ, the city of the King, the city of royalty, the city where David was born and grew up – we must notice some of the characters who were involved in the Christmas story – Joseph, Mary, the angel Gabriel, and the shepherds. I believe that we can learn what Christmas truly should mean to us.

## A. JOSEPH

*Matthew 1:18-21 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. 19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. 20 But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. 21 And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."*

Too little attention, I think, is given to Joseph. He was engaged to be married to Mary. To be engaged in that time was legally about the same as being married. We can summarize the character of Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus as "righteous and obedient."

How would you act if you find out that your fiance is pregnant, and you've never known her intimately? In other words, you had nothing to do with that pregnancy. How would you act? Don't answer that too loud and too quickly. I can almost hear you. Like you and me, Joseph did not buy Mary's story. I am sure Mary told him one day, "Guess what, hon? I am pregnant. It was totally awesome. The Holy Spirit came upon me and put a baby in my womb." I can imagine Joseph's mouth dropped to the floor and his eyes popping, his blood from his face was drained and his knees are buckling.

The first thing in his mind was, "Who is this scum who touched my woman?" Next thing he felt that she is impure. But he was righteous and still loves Mary. He didn't want to embarrass her by telling everyone which brings a certain death for her as an adulteress since the engagement was treated as important as actual marriage and terrible reputation to her family.

But when he saw an angel showed up in his dream and told him to take Mary as his wife, he did. No argument, no fuss, no nothing! What faith it took on Joseph's part to believe and to trust! You might say, "Hey, if I had a visitation by an angel, I would do the same." Listen, you and I have the very Word of God, the Bible, on our laps, which is better than the words from the angel. Whenever we pray to God as born-again Christians, He is all ears. Moreover, we have the very God Himself, the Holy Spirit, in our hearts where He resides every day wherever we go. Should we not obey Him as He teaches us through His Word?

## **B. MARY**

Mary was young, probably not more than 14 to 16 years of age. She was a young woman with tremendous faith in God. The announcement that she would bear a child was made by the angel Gabriel, the herald of God:

*Luke 1:28-30 And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" 29 But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. 30 Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.*

What kind of favor did she find? What were the results? Many of us would be reluctant today to claim that favor. She would go on a long and wearing journey from Nazareth to a small town Bethlehem. The pains of childbirth would come upon her in a dark, dingy, dirty, and stinky stable. Then there would be a long trip to Egypt, then return to Nazareth, long years of obscurity and perhaps poverty. And she would see her Son crucified on a Roman cross. That was her calling; that was the favor of God upon Mary.

Some of you who are suffering are thinking, could it be a favor from God? Maybe. This Christmas you are suffering the loss of a loved one, the end of a courtship that broke your heart, financial reverses. It may be something that has happened at your job. Whatever it is, it may be the favor of God in your life, because God is sovereign, and nothing happens to a believer by accident. When disappointments and heartbreaks come, that could be the favor of God – a steppingstone to a greater involvement with Christ and a great surrender to Him. God's favor for a person or a nation may be bestowed not by affluence but in a challenge when faith is put to a costly test.

Let's fast forward the scene from the birth of Jesus to the death of Jesus on the cross.

*John 19:25-27 Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son!" 27 Then He said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!" And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home.*

Mary didn't have the knowledge of the doctrine of the incarnation – God becoming flesh to save spiritually and physically dying human race, nor did she understand how God was going to orchestrate the whole thing after her Son's crucifixion. But there was

one thing clear in her mind: it is that Mary herself needed the Savior Jesus Christ to redeem her own sins just like everyone in the world.

That was why she could stand at the bottom of the cross watching her Son the Savior of the world die as the Lamb of God. We can learn this valuable lesson from Mary – though we may not understand the way of our God, we can trust Him and follow Him.

### **C. ANGEL GABRIEL**

There are two worlds, whether people would like to admit or not. One is our world – tangible, visible, but limited by space, time, and many natural laws, such as gravity. The other one, just as real, is the spiritual world where our God's heaven is located with His host of angels as well as their enemies somewhere else – satan and his cohorts, demons. In this world, two literal forces – angels and demons are fighting with one another for our spiritual domain.

Among all God's angels, we are interested in one particular angel named "Gabriel". I am sure that the Lord dispatched him many other times for His work, but there are 4 incidents that were recorded in the Bible – Gabriel delivered God's announcements twice to prophet Daniel about Israel's future in the OT, then close to 600 years later, to Zacharias about his son John the Baptist, followed by Mary to deliver the news of the conception in her womb of the Baby Jesus.

You might say, "Hey preacher, you forgot the angel who showed up to Joseph." No, I didn't forget. The Bible says that it was "*an angel of the Lord,*" not necessarily Gabriel. It could be some other angel.

Gabriel was obediently delivering the message though he could not comprehend the true meaning of salvation through Jesus Christ, because none of the angels have physical bodies. They are spirit beings. Since they cannot commit physical sins, they don't need redemption through Jesus Christ. The apostle Peter teaches about this:

*1 Peter 1:12 To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into.*

Angels are at work today as well, relentlessly busy and faithfully doing God's work in the unseen world around us. We, too, have a lot of work to do for the kingdom of God.

### **D. THE SHEPHERDS**

*Luke 2:9-12 And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. 10 Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. 11 For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."*

The first announcement of the Messiah's birth was given by an angel to some unknown shepherds. Why shepherds? Why not to priests or scribes? By visiting the shepherds, the angel revealed the grace of God toward mankind.

Shepherds were really outcasts in Israel. In other words, they were not at the top of the food chain. Additionally, as a class shepherds had a bad reputation. More

regrettable was their habit of stealing as they moved about the country. They were considered unreliable and were not allowed to give testimony in the law courts. God does not call the rich and mighty, rather He calls the poor and the lowly.

At first, they were afraid. They saw a bright light and heard the angels, and they were afraid. The first thing the angel said to them was, "Do not be afraid" in v10. 4 times in the Christmas story we read, "Do not be afraid."

Our world is trembling with fear today. Whether it is financial or geopolitical, no one can have assurance in their hearts, unless you have someone who can truly take away that fear.

If ever there was a moment to say, "Fear not! God reigns! God is sovereign! God has a plan," it is now! Unlike unbelievers, we can have that assurance, hope, and peace that come from our Lord Jesus. Whether it is our personal lives or our national lives, He will be with us.

*Isaiah 43:1-2 But now, thus says the Lord, who created you, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine. 2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you.*

There was a woman who was out Christmas shopping with her two children. After many hours of looking at row after row of toys and everything else imaginable, and after hours of hearing both her children asking for everything they saw on those many shelves, she finally made it to the elevator with her two kids. She was feeling what so many of us feel during the holiday season time of the year – overwhelming pressure to go to every party, make all the holiday food and treats, get that perfect gift for every single person on our shopping list, make sure we don't forget anyone on our card list, and the pressure of making sure we respond to everyone who sent us a card.

Finally, the elevator doors opened and there was already a crowd in the it. She pushed her way into the elevator and dragged her two kids in with her and all the bags of stuff. As the doors closed, she couldn't take it anymore and blurted it out loud, "Whoever started this whole Christmas thing should be found, strung up and shot." From the back of the elevator, everyone heard a quiet, calm voice respond, "Don't worry, lady. We already crucified Him." For the rest of the trip down the elevator it was so quiet you could have heard a pin drop.

Don't forget this year to keep the One who started this whole Christmas thing in your every thought, deed, purchase, and word. If we all did it, just think of how different this whole world would be.

Let me ask you again: What does Christmas mean to you today? Just another excuse to get together with family and exchange gifts? Or is it to celebrate our Savior and Lord Jesus who came to die for us so that we may live with Him in heaven forever? God does not send anyone to hell, but an individual person who rejects Jesus as one's Savior and Lord would.

This Christmas, let it mean the birth of the Person of Jesus. He didn't come just to be born; He came to die for us. His death was planned before the foundation of the world.

At this Christmas season, you can be assured that Jesus Christ is here. He is here to give us hope, to forgive our sins, to give us a new song, to impart faith, and to heal our spiritual wounds if only we will let Him. If you are a born-again Christian, you can go to bed tonight and know that your sins are forgiven and that you are ready to meet God.

Jesus said that there are two roads from which to choose, the broad road or the narrow road; that there are two masters from which to choose, self or Christ. And it is up to us to make the choice. God has given us that marvelous ability to choose. May God help you choose Jesus Christ.