

### 3. Christmas in July?

July 1, 2007

You may wonder, "Why does this worship team lead us with Christmas songs in the middle of Summer? Don't they know it is July 1st?" They did it at my requests.

First of all, we should celebrate the birth of Jesus our Savior and Lord all year long, not just December 25th which became nothing more than a commercialized holiday for more crazy shopping time. Second, we really don't know if December 25th is the birthdate of Jesus Christ. We will talk more about it a little later.

In America, we are so brainwashed by commercialized Christmas that we can not fathom the actual Christmas without the idea of gift exchanging. I am not against the gift exchanging. Just don't go into debt because of it.

The original Gift of Christmas came from none other than our God. As a matter of fact, He loves to give us gifts! He delights as we excitedly unwrap His many surprises: an answered prayer, a healing of body or spirit, a new friendship and much more.

*James 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.*

Overwhelmed at God's greatest blessing, apostle Paul once exclaimed this.

*2Corinthians 9:15 Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!*

Let's see how our God sent His indescribable gift to us.

#### **A. THE REAL KING BEHIND THE KING WHO THOUGHT HE WAS SPECIAL**

*Luke 2:1-3 And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2 This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. 3 So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city.*

Caesar Augustus was ruling, but God was in charge. The Lord simply used Caesar's decree to move Mary and Joseph eighty miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem to fulfill His Word. Rome took a census every fourteen years for both military and tax purposes, and each Jewish male had to return to the city of his fathers to record his name, occupation, property and family.

*Micah 5:2 "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting."*

At the end of the story, guess who does the world know more today – Jesus or Caesar Augustus?

#### **B. NO ROOM IN THE INN**

*Luke 2:4-7 Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, 5 to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. 6 So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. 7 And she brought forth her firstborn Son,*

*and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.*

Bethlehem means "house of bread," the ideal birthplace for 'the Bread of Life'.

By the way, at the beginning of this study, I mentioned that most likely December 25th would not have been the birthdate of Jesus. This date was first popularized in the church since the fourth century. For the shepherds to have their flocks in open area at night, it couldn't be winter time.

For centuries, these two simple verses have filled the imaginations of devout artists and writers, who have conjured up the most elaborate scenes. Somehow we also sanitized the place where Jesus was born a little too much.

What you see at the nativity scene is something like this:

Mary all dressed up with her hands folded in front of her, Joseph standing next to Mary with his staff in his hand and smiling, Baby Jesus cooing with a bright smile and His whole body glowing. Then you see the barn animals – clean, behaving themselves, lying down or standing there and adoring the Baby, and the Celestial angels hovering over this clean stable. Of course we have three wisemen kneeling down.

Guess what? Everything is incorrect. Those three wiseguys were not supposed to be there at least for two more years.

Author Ken Gire paints the scene the way it was meant to be seen-in human terms, without halos and glowing faces.

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By the time they arrive, the small hamlet of Bethlehem is swollen from an influx of travelers. The inn is packed, people feeling lucky if they were able to negotiate even a small space on the floor. Now it is late, everyone is asleep, and there is no room.

But fortunately, the innkeeper is not all shekels and mites. True, his stable is crowded with his guests' animals, but if they could squeeze out a little privacy there, they were welcome to it.

Joseph looks over at Mary, whose attention is concentrated on fighting a contraction. "We'll take it," he tells the innkeeper without hesitation.

The night is still when Joseph creaks open the stable door. As he does, a chorus of barn animals makes discordant note of the intrusion. The stench is pungent and humid, as there have not been enough hours in the day to tend the guests, let alone the livestock. A small oil lamp, lent them by the innkeeper, flickers to dance shadows on the walls. A disquieting place for a woman in the throes of childbirth. Far from home. Far from family. Far from what she had expected for her firstborn.

But Mary makes no complaint. It is relief just to finally get off the donkey. She leans back against the wall, her feet swollen, back aching, contractions growing stronger and closer together.

Joseph's eyes dart around the stable. Not a minute to lose. Quickly. A feeding trough would have to make do for a crib. Hay would serve as a mattress. Blankets? Blankets? Ah, his robe. That would do. And those rags hung out to dry would help. A gripping contraction doubles Mary over and sends him racing for a bucket of water....

A scream from Mary knifes through the calm of that silent night. Joseph returns, breathless, water sloshing from the wooden bucket.... Sweat pours from Mary's contorted face as Joseph, the most unlikely midwife in all Judea, rushes to her side.

The involuntary contractions are not enough, and Mary has to push with all her strength....

Joseph places a garment beneath her, and with a final push and a long sigh her labor is over.

The Messiah has arrived.

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Here is a photo of the first century manger that was made out of a stone from Megiddo, Israel.

### **C. THE RESPONSE FROM THE ANGELS**

*Luke 2:8-14 Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 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." 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, goodwill toward men!"*

Out of all the people God could choose, He chose this ragtag group of shepherds to be become an unlikely party of delegates to whom God's angel breaks the greatest news ever given to mankind.

The angels brought good tidings which literally means that they preached the Gospel to these shepherds, who were regarded as social outcasts. The class of shepherds had a bad reputation, because they had tendencies to steal from people. They were considered unreliable and were not allowed to give testimony in the court of law.

Why shepherds? Why not priests or scribes? By visiting the shepherds, the angel revealed the grace of God toward mankind. God does not call the rich and mighty. He calls the poor and the lowly.

The Messiah came to be both the Good Shepherd and the Lamb of God sacrificed for the sins of the world. Perhaps these shepherds were caring for the flocks that would provide sacrifices for the temple services. It was fitting that the Good News about God's Shepherd and Lamb of God be given first to humble shepherds.

### **D. THE RESPONSE FROM THE SHEPHERDS**

*Luke 2:15-18 So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us." 16 And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. 17 Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. 18 And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds.*

So the first evangelists to spread the word about God's precious Lamb are, fittingly, shepherds.

### **E. THE RESPONSE FROM THE MOTHER**

*Luke 2:19-20 But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.  
20 Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.*

Quietly, privately, Mary treasures the moment. She has protected and nourished this little life inside her for nine months in spite of all the sinners around her from Nazareth. Finally, she gets to meet her intimate stranger face-to-face. The angel's message for the conception, Elizabeth's prayer, the shepherd's report all race through her mind – she is cradling deity, the Lord of the universe, her own Creator.

The greatest demonstration of God's love for us has been sending his only Son into the world to give us life through Him.

Have you ever wondered why God hasn't given up on the human race? After a few thousand years of getting snubbed, mocked and ignored, even God has His breaking point, doesn't He? How much easier it would have been to start over with a new universe rather than patching up the old one.

He probably would have started over, if it hadn't been for one thing. Love for us. Do you want to touch God's love? Then you listen to me carefully, please.

### **F. THE RESPONSE FROM US**

When the shepherds were told by the angels about the arrival of the Messiah, they didn't waste time to see Him. They were not like those scribes who knew the Word of God and responded to the inquiry of king Herod in Matt 2.

*Matthew 2:5 So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: 6 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, Are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.'"*

If they heard that the King of the Jews was born and they knew the scripture from Micah 5, shouldn't they have gotten up their lazy behinds and sought the Messiah? The distance from Jerusalem to Bethlehem was only five miles. They had absolutely no excuse.

Some of us may think, "If I knew all of that, I would not be like them." Really? Does it mean that we put God in our first priority for everything and seek His will through His Word the Bible all the time? If that is the case, why is that other things stopping some of you from obeying His Word and seeking God's will with all of your hearts? You might want to argue with me to justify what you have done, actually, you need to talk with God, not me. You don't need my approval, but His.

What is your response to God? Does "haste" describe your action to follow God or "some other time" is more like? If "some other time" is your response, it is because you don't have a room for God in your heart.

As I have said many times before and will say many more times in the future, anything that takes our first priority from God is our idol – whether it is your spouse, house, car, bank account, stocks. Whatever it is, you cannot have it to compete with God in your heart.

When Jesus thought about you before the creation of the universe, He planned to die for your sin so that you may have eternal life with Him in heaven and was willing to put your name down on the Lamb's Book of Life.

From a few days to a couple years later, others would gaze at Jesus with a similar expression of awe: Simeon, Anna, the Magi from the East. Thirty years later, Jesus' life stirred a mixed pot of reactions:

John the Baptist proclaimed, "Behold, the Lamb of God!"

Disciple Peter declared, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

The Pharisees sneered at Him and said, "He's a blasphemer."

Pilate did not know what to do with Him.

Upon seeing Him die, a Roman centurion responded, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

### **G. THE ONLY ONE OPTION TO CHOOSE FROM**

As you gaze at the Child through the window of Scripture, who do you say that He is?

That's a question every person must answer. And, really, we have only three options:

**1) We could decide that Jesus wasn't who He claimed to be. Jesus was a liar.**

He deliberately deceived His followers and taught things He Himself didn't believe.

**2) Although Jesus wasn't who He claimed to be, He thought He was God, but He was a lunatic.**

He lived in a fantasy world, and, tragically, His followers were swept up in His delusion.

**3) We could believe that Jesus was who He claimed to be. Jesus is God.**

He said He was the Son of God and He proved it by His miracles, death, and resurrection.