

# Perspectives on Christmas

*Christmas*

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**Bible Text:** Luke 1:26-38

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Today I just want to look at the Christmas story from different perspectives. There are so many different people who were a part of that Christmas story, that first Christmas even that took place when our Savior was born. And this week as I was thinking about it and I wonder... try to think about what each of these groups of people or what each of these people must have been thinking.

What, you know, if they could sit down and talk with each of these people, what kind of a fresh perspective could they give you and what they were feeling and what they were experiencing during this time? And I am not sure that I could ever enter into that completely, but, you know, I think we hear the Christmas story so often that we lose something in the hearing of it, lose something of the magnificence of it, of what actually happened.

And sometimes I struggle with, you know, even preaching a Christmas message dealing with it when I shouldn't because we are so bombarded from the world with their view of Christmas. I think this last week as I was thinking Leon and Laura watched so many Christmas videos and different things like that and they are great videos. I mean, they are great clean entertainment. But I wonder if it doesn't send some kind of a message that really detracts from the real focus of Christmas. I mean I can't tell how many times we watched *Frosty the Snowman* and *The Little Drummer Boy*, you know, *Santa Claus is Coming to Town*. You know I grew up on those and I like to watch them with them. You know, I sit down and watch.

But in each one of them... And I have thought especially, bar *The Little Drummer Boy*, really none of them have that... the true Christmas message. But here I play them over and over for my kids so they can watch it and it is my own fault. And even *The Little Drummer Boy* there is things in there that, you know, we have no scriptural support for or anything like that. And so you don't know what kind of a mixed message our kids are getting that I am sending my children when it comes to Christmas.

But not only do they get that type of messages, but they also get the television, the advertisements, the marketing, to buy and to get and to want so that, again, I think it is important that we don't have to apologize for constantly telling the story over and over

again. I think we need to constantly let our kids know the story so they do have it memorized and they do get, at least, a glimpse of the significance of what took place.

And so today was thinking of that I thought of the hymn. There was actually a number of hymns, but one is, *I Love to Tell the Story* and there is another one *Tell me the Old, Old Story* and another one, *Tell me the Story of Jesus*. And, again, the whole thought of this is keep telling me the story. Don't ever stop. And I love to tell the story and even when I am in glory that is going to be my theme, you know, is what happened, is this great gospel message, the great gospel story of what God did for you and for me.

And so today I want to look at a little bit of... and maybe try to get a fresh perspective in looking from the different angles of the people who were involved in this great story. And the first one I want to start with, the two people, actually, are Mary and Joseph. And we know the story and it is told in Matthew chapter one verses 18 to 25 and Luke chapter one in verses 26 to 38. But I just want to read a few portions of Scripture this morning and look at this and then we will look at, also, some other perspectives rather briefly.

It says:

In the sixth month, 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. The virgin's name was Mary.

The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you." 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 favour with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. 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 the house of Jacob for ever; his kingdom will never end."

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God."

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said."

Then the angel left her.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 1:26-38

I think, like I said last week and just mentioned it, I think we lose some of the impact of what Mary must have experienced when an angel came to her and told her that she was going to be part in all that had ever been told to her or everything that she had ever heard about the coming of the Messiah, the one who was going to be born in the line of David and comes to her and says, “You are the one through whom this is going to take place.”

Her... you know, I don't know. It is hard to grasp and try to put yourself in her position that maybe the excitement and saying... you know, maybe even somewhat... maybe this is just me. Is that somewhat of the... maybe the pride that welled up in her to say, “You know, man, what an awesome thing.”

But I wonder if she realized that when she said, “May it be to me as you have said,”<sup>2</sup> and comes and says, “Ok, God, whatever you want to do, that's what I want you to do in my life. That's why I want to be a part of your plan and what you want to accomplish here,” If she really understood the implications of that in her own life? And here is a woman, a young woman who is a virgin, who now will have accusations made against her that she is not, she was no longer a virgin before she got married.

Or think of it from Joseph's perspective who wanted to put her away quietly because, I think, of his love of her and his devotion to her wanting to do what is right by the law, but not wanting Mary to suffer the consequences of what the law prescribed which was death. He comes to her and when the angel comes to him and reassures him that this child is of the Holy Spirit and what his name will be... And, again Joseph agrees and he submits himself to the divine plan of God.

But think of Joseph as well as he must now put up with maybe some of the gossip around town, the back biting that so often goes around especially in a small town or, you know, I grew up in a town that was smaller than Wahoo and the gossip flies so fast. Even before it happens everybody knows about it. This would be juicy stuff in a small town like I grew up in.

But think of the murmuring every once in a while behind Joseph's back. You know, we mentioned, you know, maybe see Joseph and Jesus together and the gossip that says... one leans over to another and says, “You know, that's not his son. That is not really his son.”

And go, then, to the story of what happened. Not really knowing the true thing that is happening, but yet knowing that somehow Mary left to go and three months later she comes back and she is pregnant and they married and they have the child before, you know, you can figure it out.

The reputation, especially of a father who... I don't have a son, but the idea of a son or a daughter and you know that child God has used you somehow to bring this child into the world and there is a sense of pride that goes along with that in saying, “That's my son or

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<sup>2</sup> Luke 1:38

that's my daughter." And then to have someone question that or something that is a slam. I mean it is unbelievable.

But here were two people who God sovereignly chose to go through this. And their perspective is a child... as this child is growing up the things that are said about this child, the thing that this child does has to just blow them away so that time after again it says we read about Mary pondering these things and treasuring these things in her heart.

And so they were unique. And I wonder if they ever really understood what was going on. I wonder if it happened just so fast that they were kind of caught up in the whirl wind of the whole thing and it was... and it just... they just couldn't even hardly catch up with everything that was happening. I have felt that often times myself when... especially when God is doing something that seems like he is just moving and you keep doing and you are going and it is just all unfolding before you almost as you are taking the next step. And I wonder if that wasn't what was happening for Joseph and Mary especially in the early days.

But the excitement and the knowledge of what they had been used to do and amazing miracle where God brought himself into human flesh and used Mary and used Joseph.

I would love to be able to sit down and talk with them and have them tell me what they were experiencing. Tell me what was going through your mind when an angel appeared to you and told you this. You know, I mean did you doubt him? Did you... You know, what was going on? It is just amazing.

I think if we could grasp Mary and Joseph's story, this story would never get old for us to hear. We would love to hear it over and over afresh every time.

But not only did Mary and Joseph do we see coming into it, but the shepherds. The shepherds as they hear the story, as they are out in their fields tending the flocks they could give us a perspective I bet, too, that would be so exciting if we could just grasp it, if we could somehow enter into their shoes and be out there with them in the fields as the angel appears and tells them this and great fear seizes their heart.

And I think that as I think about the shepherds is the shepherds being not the most reputable, having the most... the best reputation around. It is amazing to me that God went to shepherds, people who were somewhat suspect. Shepherds didn't have the reputation.

You think about King David being a shepherd and you think, you know, that must have been a pretty good exalted position. I mean King David was a shepherd. Jesus is the great shepherd. So we kind of look back on it and we say, you know, a shepherd. No wonder God went to him. He is a shepherd. He as got a shepherd's heart.

But for the people, they didn't look at shepherds in a good light. For God to go to the shepherds and to tell them the message had to be... the contrast between that and the wise

men and the religious leaders I think is a thing that sticks out in my mind the most is that God went to shepherds and he went to Gentiles to tell them of the good news that was happening in Bethlehem, especially for the wise men who came from the East.

What a slam that must have been to the religious leaders as they come before Herod and they said, “We have been following the star and we are looking for the king that was born and we want to worship him,” and asking them where it is at. And King Herod asking the religious leaders, “Where is that?”

And I wonder what those religious leaders were thinking about, thinking, “No, they have got to be crazy. God wouldn’t do anything without cluing us in that it is happening.”

But that is exactly what he did. He went to Gentiles, people who didn’t have the law. And he told them and they came and they bowed down before them.

That was the story in Sunday school this morning was that the wise men came and they worshipped and they bowed down before him. And to try to communicate the significance of what it means to bow down to someone or to bow down to something, the children... how do you communicate the significance of that? To hear these wise men, these people who maybe were even kings themselves come to this child who was born in the manger and they realize that there is within this child something so special that they are willing to humble themselves and to kneel at this manger and to say to this child, in essence by kneeling, “You are more important than I am,” and to give him homage and to worship, present gifts to this child.

I think one of the amazing players in this whole story that strikes... stands out in my mind is Herod. When he hears of this story of what has happened, the rage and the jealousy that wells up within him. And I think he really characterizes all the satanic powers that were there as even as Jesus grew up and as Jesus came and he defeated the powers of darkness. We see that represented so much in King Herod’s life. He was the king. He wasn’t going to share his kingdom with another. So he wanted to kill him. He wanted to destroy this child before he could grow up.

And it is so much like Satan is described for us as the God of this age who has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the glorious gospel of Christ and believe. And John tells us that the work of the devil is to kill and to destroy and to steal. It is so destructive. And that is exactly what Herod tried to do is he tried to kill the child. And the fear, I think, on Herod that he tried to lash out to kill this child is a fear, I think that Satan must have had when he knew that the king had entered in and when Jesus started preaching, “The Kingdom of God is near”<sup>3</sup> and to prove it he started healing the sick and casting out demons and raising the dead.

And I think of that great passage in Luke chapter four. It is one of my favorite passages of Scripture.

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<sup>3</sup> Mark 1:15

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."<sup>4</sup>

The release for all who are oppressed.

How many people do you know who are oppressed? How many people do you know who are down trodden, whom Jesus came to set free? I know some.

It brings new significance to the intent of what Jesus came to do as John tells us, again, in his epistle that Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil. And in Colossians it tells us that he did just that and not only did he destroy it, but he made a public spectacle of them, humiliating them in his defeat.

So no wonder Herod wanted to destroy him. He wanted to destroy the king.

But not only did we have that, again, the religious leaders that were all there, but you have two individuals who you don't really hear too much about because they are kind of removed from the Christmas story and that is Simeon and Anna.

As the eight days... on the eighth they were to be presented. Jesus was to be presented to be circumcised and dedicated to the temple. We read in Luke chapter two verse 25.

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

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<sup>4</sup> Luke 4:14-21

The child's father and mother marvelled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.<sup>5</sup>

Here you have an individual, Simeon, who is told that he will not die until he sees the consolation of Israel. This is amazing. Wouldn't you like to be in Simeon's shoes, to have a promise like that and then to be waiting with anticipation and expectation of every child who is brought into the temple to be dedicated wondering: Is this the one? Is this the one?

And then for that day finally to come, to see the fulfillment of the Word of God that was prophesied to him. It had to be amazing. It had to be amazing to be in Simeon's shoes and to see the fulfillment of everything that he was waiting for and for Anna the prophetess.

But there is another perspective that we get as it is revealed to us that we wouldn't know other than the Word of God and that is God's perspective. We get to see behind the scenes of what is going on and the passages of Scripture that are revealed to us.

In John chapter one, "The Word was with God and the Word was God... and the Word was made flesh."<sup>6</sup>

Philippians chapter two verses five through 11. He says:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name

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<sup>5</sup> Luke 2:25-40

<sup>6</sup> See John 1:1, 14

that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.<sup>7</sup>

Here we have a full picture, a much fuller picture than just looking at it from a human level as we see it from all eternity past that God, Jesus who being in the very nature God, in his whole existence and everything that he is, everything that he was and is and ever will be as God, who bears in himself the very nature, who is the same as God, he didn't consider that godhood, or the equality with God something to be held on to or grasped onto and to never let go of. But he made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant. He humbled himself.

We see in Philippians chapter two the whole, the true spirit of Christmas is what Christmas is represented is that whole spirit of humility and obedience and servanthood. It is something that we very seldom see pronounced from the world's perspective, if ever, is that Jesus who being God, is that Jesus who being God decided that there was something more important to take place than him to lay claims to his right as God.

I could almost see it today with as much emphasis is put on our rights, the rights that we have. Somebody come to you and asking you to do something or whatever. You say, "No, I have my rights."

Jesus had his rights as God. And yet he didn't grasp on or hold on to those rights to the point where he refused to do what God wanted him to do or what he should do as God, but he laid it aside who even being God humbled himself.

And the whole thing about the whole Christmas story is that there is always a shadow in the background, that to get the true Christmas picture we have to see that shadow. And even now as we celebrate Christmas that shadow might not be as clear as it will be at Easter time, but that shadow is always the cross in God's mind and God's plan. Even as we celebrate Christmas it is the cross. It always points to the cross of why Jesus came, of why Jesus came and took upon himself the flesh of men so that he could understand the depths of our suffering and not only does he understand the depth of our suffering, but he even took upon himself our sin and suffered and died for your sin and my sin. He was sinless. And yet he took upon his flesh knowing full well when he gave up... when he humbled himself and took upon himself the man, he knew ultimately what that would lead to in his death as a man and yet he did that for you and for me.

In 2 Corinthians chapter eight verse nine we read, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."<sup>8</sup>

And also that, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Philippians 2:5-11

<sup>8</sup> 2 Corinthians 8:9

These are the different perspectives of the Christmas story.

There is one more perspective that we have to look at, but you can only look at that yourself. It is what is your attitude? What is your perspective of this whole Christmas story?

Paul has been telling us in Colossians that the sum is foolishness, the very idea that God would become a man is foolishness to people. And they can't understand it. It is not like I understand it. It is not like you can completely understand it. But the apostle Paul says to some it is a stumbling block and to others it is just plain foolishness.<sup>10</sup>

So what is our perspective as we look on, as we get to see from hindsight everything that has taken place and everything that has revealed to us, what our perspective of this Christmas story? Is it just a story? Is it something we read about? Is it something that is real for me? Is it something that is real for you?

The amazing thing about the incarnation that I think is that it happens, to a certain degree, every time someone believes. Every time someone comes to the place where they receive Christ as their Savior, the incarnation happens all over again. It is where we are given the very person of the Holy Spirit to come and to live and to dwell within our lives, again, to live within human flesh, to empower us, to enable us to serve him, to have that same attitude that Jesus Christ had.

See, but it is not just enough knowing the story. It is not just enough knowing all the facts that Jesus Christ died on the cross or that he was born and he died on the cross. Until we make that personal, until we believe that he did it for me, until we receive that gift of eternal life, then it is really just a story. But when we see our need for this Savior who was born, when we understand that this Savior was born so that he might die for me because I needed a Savior, because I needed someone to save me from my sin, when we see that and when we receive him, that is when Christmas in its truest sense of the meaning becomes relevant for us and that is why we can come this morning and have such a rich time of worship and celebration, understanding what he has done.

I hope that as we celebrate Christmas this year, today, the rest of today and tomorrow, that that story would be something that is real for you, something that is real for me, some thing that we just don't forget about, something that is not just a story that is real neat for every once a year we tell it, that it becomes a reality for you in the spirit of Christmas. The whole spirit of Christmas is as displayed for us in Philippians chapter two becomes something that characterizes who we are so that we demonstrate that spirit of Christmas all throughout the whole year.

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<sup>9</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:21

<sup>10</sup> See 1 Corinthians 1:23

That is what Paul says. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:”<sup>11</sup> Let this attitude characterize who you are, this attitude of humility, this attitude of obedience, this attitude of serving.

Let’s pray.

*Father, I thank you for your grace. And, Lord, so often times we lose sight of the significance of this great story, that it is even more than a story. It is reality, something that still happens. Lord, I pray that everyone here today would know that reality within their own lives and, Lord, know the true meaning of Christmas and be able to celebrate it in a way that just magnifies and glorifies your name. Thank you in Jesus’ name. Amen.*

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<sup>11</sup> Philippians 2:5