

THE ARRIVAL OF JESUS – Christ at Christmas (sermon notes).

“But when the time finally came, God sent his only son” Galatians 4:4a.

Luke 2: 1-20. In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ² (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³ And everyone went to their own town to register.

⁴ So 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. ⁵ He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ⁷ 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. ⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² 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 favour rests.” ¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

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. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

In the 1990’s Queen Elizabeth visited the United States. Reporters delighted in spelling out the logistics for her trip. She bought with her, 1800 kilograms of luggage. Two outfits for every occasion, a mourning outfit in case someone died, 22 litres of plasma and special toilet seat covers. She also bought along her own hairdresser, two valets and a host of other attendants. A brief visit of royalty to a foreign country could easily cost \$20 million dollars.

By contrast, God’s visit to earth took place in a cowshed with no attendants present and nowhere to lay the newborn king but a trough that was used to feed animals. Its highly likely that more animals than humans witnessed the actual birth of Jesus.

The Christmas story is our story. It is part of our spiritual genealogy and forever links us to Jesus. This story of ours is a story of Faith and Trust. All those involved had huge faith and trust in God. Overcoming vast challenges by faith and Trust.

This Christmas story started a long time before the birth of Christ. There were many prophecies about the coming Messiah. The Bible records prophecies, given hundreds of years before Jesus, about the coming of the Messiah, the coming of the Christ. First, it was prophesied that when the Messiah was born, He would be a descendant of the House of David, from the tribe of Judah, and from the family line of Jesse. Jesus was.

Second, it was prophesied by the prophet Micah that the Messiah would be born in the small, obscure little town of Bethlehem. And though never planned by Joseph and Mary, the national decree of a census by the Roman government that forced the uprooting of thousands of people, took Joseph back to his hometown which was Bethlehem, and it was there that Mary gave birth to Jesus.

One more – the prophet Isaiah proclaimed that upon His birth, the Messiah would be presented with gifts, which came about through the gifts given Jesus by the wise men. Jesus didn't just fulfil three of the prophecies - but every single one of them! Specific prophecies, made hundreds of years earlier, about not only His birth, but his entire life and even His death.

Prophecies concerning how he would be betrayed for a specific amount of money, how they would cast lots for his clothing and even how he would be put to death. For example, the prophet Isaiah said that he would be pierced as part of His death. This was hundreds of years before crucifixion as a mode of execution was even practiced! All fulfilled in the life of Jesus.

Verse 13; ¹³Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying. Imagine what it must have been like to witness this. The heavens erupted at the news of Jesus' birth. It's because this is what the real celebration of Christmas is supposed to be about. God came to earth in human form. Could it be possible that over the years we lose a little bit of the awe and wonder about the birth of Christ.

God could have entered the world and made himself known in anyway he wanted. Philip Yancey writes in his book, *Then Jesus never Knew*, that the God who could have roared, "who could order armies and empires about like pawns on a chessboard, this God emerged as a baby who could not speak or eat solid food or control his bladder and who depended on a poor teenage mother for shelters, food and love.

God choose to come as a baby. The gentlest, approachable, smallest way imaginable. God wanted to be in a relationship with us. He did not want us to fear him. So, in an infant, God found a way to relate to human beings that didn't involve fear. God wants us to approach him, to come to him for a relationship.

The Christmas story is not myth, fable or legend. It is a true story. Jesus was a historical figure. He lived and breathed just like you or I. How do I know this? The Bible accounts in the New Testament. In Matthew, Mark Luke and John. Other sources that refer to Jesus Christ. This is a Roman Historian commenting about Christians, "They got their name from Christ, who was executed by sentence of Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius". Also, Josephus a Jewish historian recorded this; *About this time lived Jesus, a wise man, a teacher of those who delight in accepting the truth. He was the so-called Christ. On the accusation of leading men Pilate condemned him to the cross, but those who were attracted to him from the first did not cease to love him. The race of Christians named after him survived to this day*". Today nearly all historians, whether Christians or not, accept that Jesus existed.

God wanted to relate to human beings, so he became one. In his book, *God Came Near*, Max Lucado writes that God became a foetus. He was given eyebrows, elbows, two kidneys and a spleen. Once he was born, he needed his nappy changed. When he hit puberty, he probably had pimples. Perhaps a girl down the street even had a crush on him. Maybe he was a skinny kid with funny hair that would always stick up no matter how hard Mary tried to fix it. He was completely divine but he was also completely human. Mary's response is full of faith, worship and trust. She worships God for being in her life. She submits to what God has planned. In the midst of huge pressure and stress she digs down deep into her faith in God. Don't ever tell me that teenagers can't have a very strong faith.

Mary's feelings are clear. God owes her nothing, while she has received everything from him. For her, carrying the son of God was an honour. We do not have the honour of giving birth to the Saviour of the world but we do have the blessing of becoming one of his children.

She's told she's carrying the son of God. She's pregnant with that well known nesting instinct that women in the last stage of pregnancy get. Then, an Angel warns Joseph and she has to flee to another Country. *An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. Get up he said take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him. Matthew 2.13.*

It is possible through the supernatural power of God to speak to us in our dreams. God often wakes me in the middle of the night. The Bible has many occurrences of God speaking to people through dreams. Dreams are a way that God can speak to us.

Finally, there is nowhere to have this baby and she ends up having her child in a cow shed. No midwife, no pain relief or epidural. No family around to help her out and she is still only a teenager. I think Christmas stress originated with the mother of Christ. Perhaps a more noble stress than retail or shopping stress, nevertheless a very anxious time for her and Joseph.

I remember only too well the challenges of bringing up teenagers. My daughter loved to push the envelope shall we say. Spent a few nights watching out the window for my daughter to come home. Its good to be reminded of that image. Philip Yancey in his book, what's so Amazing about Grace puts it like this, we serve, "A God who is standing in front of the plate-glass window gazing achingly into the darkness waiting for his child to come home. And that Child is you. Only God didn't just wait by the window. He left heaven and came to earth and stopped at nothing to reach us. Pursuing us even to the point of a terrible and painful death. Jesus was born to have the wood of the manger turned into the wood of the cross.

Evangelist Luis Palau tells of a wealthy European family that decide they wanted their newborn baby baptised. Dozens of guests were invited to a very elaborate affair. After depositing all their coats and wraps on a bed upstairs, the guests were entrained royally. Soon came the time for the main event-the baptism of their baby. But where was the baby? No one seemed to know. The child governess ran upstairs and returned with a desperate look on her face. Everyone searched frantically. Finally, someone recalled having seen him asleep on one of the beds.

The Baby was buried beneath a pile of coats and wraps. The object of that day's celebration had been forgotten, neglected and nearly smothered. The baby whose birthday we celebrate at Christmas may also be hidden beneath the piles of stuff we are loading up at Christmas. We need to head towards Christmas asking this question- "Where's the baby?"