

**THE MIRACLES OF CHRISTMAS**  
**MATTHEW 1:18-25; MATTHEW 2:1-11; LUKE 7:37-50**  
**2024-12-22**

Well, it's almost here! It's been a month of preparation—are you ready for Christmas yet? The fact is, it doesn't matter whether you are ready or not—regardless, the baby Jesus is coming! The Son of God, God Himself is coming. To change verb tenses, He has visited us, walked with us and has invited us to come and live with Him, to live like Him.

This month we've focused on the hope that the prophets foretold of the coming Messiah, the hope that God alone gives us. We've learned that the peace referred to by God is a very different thing than the peace that people typically speak of. It is a gift from God. Jesus says, "My peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to as the world gives to you." It is a peace that passes all understanding, because it is a peace that's not within us. Last week we learned once again that if anyone has the corner on joy, it is we as Christ-followers. Jesus came that we might have joy and have it abundantly—joy that carries on right into eternity.

The beautiful part of the hope we find in Christ is that we can't create it or duplicate it; it's not dependent on life's circumstances. It's a gift of God. The beautiful part of the peace we find in Christ is that we can't create it or duplicate it; it's not dependent on life's circumstances. It's a gift from God. The beautiful part of joy we find in Christ is that we can't create it or duplicate it; it's not dependent on life's circumstances. It's a gift from God. What do you expect we might find with respect to love, as we investigate it on this 4th week of Advent?

ADVENT means the coming of Christ. But it is every bit as much our coming to Him as He invites us to come to Him—to see Him at the manger, to come to know Him, to see Him grow, to imitate Him once we have invited Him into our hearts. So today, come.

Has God stepped into history? Are you kidding? It is HIS STORY! God has deliberately involved Himself in our history. He's come near to give us strength & security and peace that we cannot have without Jesus. Look at what He's done! Look at the miracles of Christmas alone! It was Arnold Schwarzenegger, OK, no it was Albert Schweizer who got us going down the road investigating the historical Jesus. He refused to consider any miracles when discussing Jesus. Jesus' story was reduced to Him being born, living an exemplary life and dying. That was it. Just 1 problem with that. Since when does humankind decide what God can or can't do, when He may or may not act and how He chooses to do so? So we will talk about the miracles of Christmas!

John the Baptist is miraculously born to a too-old, barren Elizabeth after the angel Gabriel appears to her husband, Zechariah, and leaves Zechariah mute for not believing what Gabriel had told him about God's plans. John is the one who prepares the way for Jesus' ministry.

Gabriel also visited Mary and explained that she would give birth to the Son of God. She couldn't figure this out, because she was a virgin. Gabriel assured Mary that she would be "found to be with child through the Holy Spirit."

Elizabeth, John the Baptist's mother, knew that Mary would give birth to the Messiah, without her having any way of knowing that, without any prior meeting. Clearly, she had been in-dwelt by the Holy Spirit—yet another example that God is omnipotent (all powerful), omniscient (all knowing) and omni-present (everywhere). The yet unborn baby John, "leapt for joy" at the arrival of the expectant mother Mary.

Next miracle. An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph to persuade him to stay with Mary and not follow his intention to divorce her. In all the history of humanity, no one other than Joseph ever had to deal with such a situation. He complied—though you never hear Joseph speak. You just get to see the integrity, trust and love of a man for God & of his family.

The baby Jesus Himself fulfills the prophesy from Isaiah, 750 years earlier, that He will be born of a virgin and will save people (Jesus means "the Lord saves") and He will be called Immanuel (God with us).

Surrounding these events Elizabeth prophecies, Zechariah prophecies and Mary prophecies about the One who will bring salvation through the forgiveness of sins.

And how about God who orders the events and times of history so that Emperor Augustus demands a census be taken of the Roman world, requiring people to return to their ancestral family town. For Mary and Joseph, this is an order to return to Bethlehem, the town of David. Hmm, funny, that just happens to fulfill the prophecy from Micah from 750 years earlier that the Christ would be born in Bethlehem! How does God do that?

The first "outsiders" to hear the news of the birth of the Saviour are the shepherds—first by an angel, then accompanied by a "heavenly host" filling the skies, glorifying and praising God. They told the shepherds where to find Jesus. Lo and behold, He and Mary and Joseph were exactly where the angel said.

From Matthew 2, without human prompting, Magi from the east came looking for "the first born king of the Jews"—because they saw "His star" in the east and had come to worship Him." They brought Him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Mysteriously, they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, who intended to kill Jesus, because He thought Jesus posed a threat to his own kingship.

Joseph is our man of dreams! He's warned in a dream to escape immediately—as soon as the dream was finished. This didn't wait until morning. They ran under the cover of night. This migration fulfilled another prophesy—Messiah would come out of Egypt. When the danger passed because Herod died, an angel of the Lord gave Joseph yet another vision to return home to Israel, ending up in Nazareth—and yes, you guessed right, this fulfilled another prophesy.

But bigger than all these miracles is that God chose to send Jesus to us in the first place. The umbrella over all of this is the obvious love that God pours on us. You've heard of extreme sports, extreme makeovers, but what we have here is extreme love! Just so you don't miss it, as with hope which in Christ is a very different thing than any hope the world speaks of, and as with peace in Christ, which is a very different thing than any peace the world ever talks about, and as with joy in Christ, which is a very different thing than the joy that the world ever thinks or imagine, so too, this love in Christ is a very different thing than the world has any clue about.

Every one of them—hope, peace, joy and love—are not conditional on any events. They are all gifts from God, and no one can take them away from you; no one can diminish their exquisiteness, their wonder, their miraculous nature. They are all found in Christ; they are all founded in Christ. Notice that those who are without Christ have no claim on this supernatural hope, peace, joy and love. We can fiddle each of them away. We can ignore them and diminish them that way, just as we can ignore any gift we receive and not get any benefit from it. Or, we can receive each of these gifts. Today we focus on the gift of love. Receive it with heart-felt gratitude and enjoy it, develop it and share it as God intends.

Do you get any inkling of how much God loves us and how He calls us to come to Him? He called Mary. He called Joseph. He called Zechariah. He called the shepherds. He called the Wise Guys. He later called the disciples—“Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.” He called everyone—“Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.” He's calling you and me. Come and see what God has done! Come to the manger! Come to the throne of grace!

God just gives and gives and gives! The Wise Men signified this as they brought gifts—gold, frankincense and myrrh—as an act of worship. The gold is the king of metals and is a gift, therefore, fit for a king. Frankincense was a sweet perfume that was used in the Temple sacrifices & so it was the gift for a priest. The Latin word for priest means “bridge-builder”. The priest is a man who builds a bridge between men and God. Does that sound like an appropriate description of Jesus, and a gift fit for Him? Myrrh was used to embalm the dead. So even at Jesus' birth, there was the reminder that He would be the One to die for us. And central in importance; they worship-ed Him, alone, no other. He is the only one who is worthy of our worship.

What we've seen so far today are three different types of responses to those around Jesus. First, the reaction of Herod was one of hatred and hostility. There are still those around today who would gladly destroy Jesus because they believe He would interfere with their lives. Those who only want to do what they themselves want, never have any use for Jesus. The Christ-follower is one who has stopped doing what he/she likes and has dedicated his/her life to what Christ likes. Second, the priests and scribes, of whom we have not spoken directly, nevertheless reacted with in-difference to Christ's coming. There are those today who are so busy with their own affairs, that Jesus means nothing to them. And third, take note of the reaction of the wise men, that of adoring worship, with the desire to lay at the feet of Jesus the noblest gifts they could bring.

When any of us realizes the love of Christ, we too should be lost in wonder, praise and love, and bow in pure worship of Him, before Him.

Let's close with the wonderful example of the lady with the alabaster jar in Luke 7:37-50. (READ SCRIPTURE) She loved Jesus lavishly! How much do you love Jesus? The disciples thought the pouring out of the alabaster—worth perhaps a year's wages—was a waste. What did Jesus think? What kind of a woman was this? She was a sinner. She had a questionable past. She was sad. She was repentant. She was generous. She was focused on Jesus. Yes, she was just like you and me.

Are you ready for Christmas yet? I began with that question. Maybe you're not ready until... As you leave here, consider just how much God loves you. Don't do that lightly. Meditate on it every day this week. Reflect on the miracles of Christmas. Ponder how God has stood on His head to turn the world upside down. Weigh how He has demonstrated His lavish love to you and for you. Receive the gifts of God—His hope, His peace, His joy, and today, His love. Remember, an unopened gift is absolutely useless! Then go rejoicing & sharing them with others. Live these gifts, be these gifts, to others this week. What better way to celebrate our Lord's coming to us in this Advent season!