

12202020 Christmas is about God doing what he said he would do... what Every book, every chapter, every page...the theme of the Old Testament—one great truth—"**He's coming**. That God would one day send the Messiah to the earth to deliver his people. Noah said He's coming....Moses said, "He's coming." David said, "He's coming." Isaiah said, "He's coming." Jeremiah said, "He's coming." Daniel said, "He's coming." Micah said, "He's coming." Zechariah said, "He's coming." Malachi said, "He's coming."

Yet when he did come in a camouflaged way... Why? Well generally speaking that is how how God operates... have you ever really thought about why God...who could do anything...would choose to have his son :

- Born to a young woman, who would be morally suspect...pregnant and betrothed...but not officially married? Why not to the most godly married couple with the husband being an up and coming rabbi first in his class in his phi beta kappa of his theological university ...with his own thriving synagogue and in line for the high priest hood?
- No... But to a carpenter...who has already planned months earlier on divorcing his unfaithful bride? Why not?
- And make this eight month pregnant woman travel to Bethlehem from her home in Nazareth, so she could give birth in a barn...rather than at least her own home?
- And why not Have his son born in a palace not a lowly barn...really why?
- Why was the birth announced to Shepherds and not one of the religious hierarchies?
- And why direct a foreign Maji...star readers...religious heads of foreign countries... to find the baby two years after his birth? Why wait?
- Surely God could have orchestrated the stars in a more timely fashion?
- Needless to say the family could have used the expensive gifts of gold immediately...after all they were settling in a new home and town...
- **Lesson one...It appears that God often if not always does things or allows things to happen in a way, a time and places that don't seem to make a lot of sense at the time and sometimes just seem so wrong...**

- **But there is purpose in it...** There is something much more cosmic happening ...there is a heavenly strategy working in the supernatural and natural realm. and the enemy who is

As Peter tells us...

NIV 1PE 1:10 Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, ¹¹ trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. ¹² It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

- Scripture from the beginning of Genesis to the end of Revelation...tells us what God is going to do...minus the time and circumstances
- The fullness of this plan of Salvation has come to us in the writing of the NT
- as directed by the Holy Spirit hundreds of years after the closing of the old testament
- but finding out the exact time and the exact circumstances have not been given... and main the reason is this...
- Satan also knew he was coming! So Gods keeps him off balance
Even angels long to look into these things. Verse 12

the word look ...that word is used of the angels looking as scripture...it means to stoop to a thing in order to look into it...to study intently...to inspect curiously... you see the angels can read which means the enemy of God and man...Satan and his demons...who were once angels...now fallen... can study intently also...

- **So in his brilliant strategy God informs his angels and his people of what he is going to do...giving enough information to trust but conceals His exact strategies until his designated time to reveal them...**

All the characters revealed in the Christmas narrative...the birth of the promised Messiah are either heroes...Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, Joseph, the Shepherds, and one is mentioned is a Villian King Herod....but you know who is not mentioned hardly at all yet played a key role? **The Boys of Bethelhem...the slaughter of boys under the age of two, in Bethlehem and it surrounding area. But lets start with the part of the story of Christmas that we all like...**

We love the story of the Maji visiting Jesus

2 Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, ² “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him.”

- **It was in Bethlehem, David's city, that the Jews expected great David's greatest Son to be born; it was there that they expected God's Anointed One to come into the world. So was in Bethlehem that Jesus was born.**
- **Bethlehem was quite a little town six miles to the south of Jerusalem. In the olden days it had been called Ephrath or Ephratah.**
- **It was in Bethlehem that Jacob had buried Rachel, and had set up a pillar of memory beside her grave .**
- **It was there that Ruth had lived when she married Boaz**
- **But above all Bethlehem was the home and the city of David; and it was for the water of the well of Bethlehem that David longed when he was a hunted fugitive upon the hills**
- **It stood high up on a grey limestone ridge more than two thousand five hundred feet in height. The ridge had a summit at each end, and a hollow like a saddle between them. So, from its position, Bethlehem looked like a town set in an amphitheatre of hills.**
- **the Magi were came representing a king from another land who could offer up these gifts and honor the new king, which is a custom among nations to keep the peace.**
- **Maji were the counselors and the teachers of the Babylon and later the Persian kings. In Persia no sacrifice could be offered unless one of the Magi was present. They were considered men of holiness and wisdom. In the book of**

Daniel chapter two we get insight into what type of people make up the Maji...or King's counselors

- **Magicians... ..a psychic...one who receives information from spirits**
Enchanters...talks to the dead...a medium **Sorcerers...one who practices witchcraft... one who possess occult knowledge... and practices magic arts ...one who cast spells uses potions... Astrologers...looks for guidance from the stars...also includes in those days astronomers...those who study the stars... **the kings looked to the gods the dead, and the stars for their guidance.****
- **In those ancient days all pagans believed in astrology. They believed that they could foretell the future from the stars, and they believed that a man's destiny was settled by the star under which he was born. It is not difficult to see how that belief arose. The stars pursue their unvarying courses; they represent the order of the universe. If then there suddenly appeared some brilliant star, if the unvarying order of the heavens was broken by some special phenomenon, it did look as if God was breaking into his own order, and announcing some special thing.**
- **But to Herod all he heard was a threat to his throne? **someone else called the King of the Jews?****

³ King Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard this, as was everyone in Jerusalem. ⁴ He called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law and asked, "Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?"

- **When Herod was disturbed or feeling threatened...you bet everyone was disturbed, for it usually meant heads were going to roll!**
- Herod summoned the chief priests and the scribes. The scribes were the experts in scripture and in the law. The chief priests consisted of two kinds of people. They consisted of ex-high priests. They were the priestly nobility, and the members of these select families were called the chief priests. So Herod summoned and asked them where, according to the scriptures, the Anointed One of God should be born.
- They quoted the text in Micah 5:2 to him.

⁵ “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they said, “for this is what the prophet wrote: ⁶ ‘And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah, are not least among the ruling cities of Judah, for a ruler will come from you who will be the shepherd for my people Israel.’” ⁷ Then Herod called for a private meeting with the wise men, and he learned from them the time when the star first appeared. ⁸ Then he told them, “Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. And when you find him, come back and tell me so that I can go and worship him, too!”

- **His plan was for the magi to lead him to the home of this young threat likely not more than a 18 months old.**
- **The magi heard the commands of Herod and were off with great excitement, because they now were less than a day’s journey to their final destiny**

⁹ After this interview the wise men went their way. And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! ¹¹ They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

- **Gold has been long valued due to its beauty and resistance to corrosion **It is a metal that does not tarnish.** It has been used in jewelry and commerce for thousands of years. the appropriate gift for a king**
- **Frankincense and Myrrh are aromatic resins extracted from rare trees.**
- **Frankincense an almost white resin, was one of the most prized and costly substances in the ancient world, worth more than its weight in gold. It was used in medicines and incense..it was the e presents the intersessor Priestly office**
- **Myrrh, a dark resin, was widely used in perfumes, incense and embalming. his death they knew he would die..**
- **All of these substances were extremely expensive, usually reserved for royalty when all three were combined because only royalty could afford this kind of wealth.**

- **the Magi were sent representing a king from another land who could offer up these gifts and honor the new king,**
- **God intervenes on Herod's plan**

¹² When it was time to leave, they returned to their own country by another route, for God had warned them in a dream not to return to Herod. ¹³ After the wise men were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up! Flee to Egypt with the child and his mother," the angel said. "Stay there until I tell you to return, because Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

¹⁴ That night Joseph left for Egypt with the child and Mary, his mother, ¹⁵ and they stayed there until Herod's death. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: "I called my Son out of Egypt."

- **So Joseph was warned in a dream to flee into Egypt to escape Herod's murderous intentions. The flight into Egypt was entirely natural. Often, throughout the troubled centuries before Jesus came, when some peril and some tyranny and some persecution made life intolerable for the Jews, they sought refuge in Egypt.**
- **The result was that every city in Egypt had its colony of Jews; and in the city of Alexandria there were actually more than a million Jews, and certain districts of the city were entirely handed over to them.**
- **Joseph in his hour of peril was doing what many a Jew had done before; and when Joseph and Mary reached Egypt they would not find themselves altogether amidst strangers, for in every town and city they would find Jews who had sought refuge there.**
- **That is a quotation from Hosea 11:1, which reads: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son".**
- **The costly part of the Christmas story... Jesus was safe but what about those the other little boys of Bethlehem...often considered the first martyrs... and their families? could not the angel warn them also?....**
- **but he did not... Evil visited Bethlehem that night. 30-60 toddlers and infants lost their lives that day...Nothing would ever be the same for their families.**

¹⁶ Herod was furious when he realized that the wise men had outwitted him. He sent soldiers to kill all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years

old and under, based on the wise men's report of the star's first appearance. ¹⁷ Herod's brutal action fulfilled what God had spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: ¹⁸ "*A cry was heard in Ramah—weeping and great mourning. Rachel weeps for her children, refusing to be comforted, for they are dead.*"

- **Their tears were those of mothers who would not be comforted. They are like the tears of Rachel..**

Matthew quotes Jeremiah 31:15, "¹⁵ This is what the LORD says: "A cry is heard in Ramah— deep anguish and bitter weeping. Rachel weeps for her children, refusing to be comforted— for her children are gone."

- **The picture in Jeremiah was this.** Ramah or Bethlehem was wher Jacob had buried Rachel, and had set up a pillar of memory beside her grave **Jeremiah was picturing the people of Jerusalem being led away in exile. In their sad way to an alien land they pass Ramah, and Ramah was the place where Rachel lay buried (1 Samuel 10:2); and Jeremiah pictures Rachel weeping, even in the tomb, for the fate that had befallen the people. and now mourning the boys of Bethlehem...**
- **If the angel knew about the impending massacre at Bethlehem, why did he warn Mary and Joseph and not the others? *On one level we know that Mary and Joseph were warned so that Jesus might be preserved from Herod's murderous intentions.***
- **But what shall we say about the other boys of Bethlehem? And what about their parents? Were not those babies precious to the Lord also? Does the Lord hear the wails that arise from the little town of Bethlehem?**
- **Yes the Lord does care and that he does hear the cries of those who hurt so deeply.**

Psalm 34:18 "*The LORD is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed.*"

- **God has promised to do that. Millions of people can testify to God's presence in the midst of the worst pain and the greatest loss.**
- **But this truth, wonderful as it is, does not cancel our very real pain and it does not reverse the loss.**

This much we know for certain. God always has a bigger plan. the Strategy's of must be seen in light of the Big Picture

- *his plans we cannot see from where we sit. He preserved his Son so that one day his Son could die on the cross for the sins of the world.*
- These babies died now, to put Herod off the chase...believing he had rid the thrat to his throne....and it thre off the Enemy Satan!
- **Jesus had to escape this time so that he would not escape the next time.**

Seen in broadest perspective, Jesus escaped the first time so that he wouldn't escape the second time so that we would escape for all time.

- Evil visited Bethlehem that night. Nothing could bring those little boys back to their grieving parents.\
- **I understand that this truth would have been small comfort to the weeping mothers of Bethlehem. On that night it seemed like a senseless slaughter, and the next night it seemed the same. One week later it still made no sense. One year later there was no explanation. Even a decade later no one could understand why those babies had to die.**
- *But run the clock forward about 33 years and suddenly things come into focus. Outside the walls of Jerusalem a man is dying on a cross. He was the one baby Herod could not kill; now he offers himself up for the sins of the world. In the end, he died too.*
- **If he had died in Bethlehem, he couldn't have died at Calvary. All of this was part of God's eternal plan.**
- **But if Christmas means anything, it is this: God wins in the end.**
- *We need to remind ourselves in these troubled days that the devil will not have the final word.*
- Though he strikes many painful blows, he cannot win because the battle belongs to the Lord.
- **Be encouraged, my friends. Do not despair. The boys of Bethlehem will be avenged and every enemy will be defeated.**

Rev 6:9 When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had

maintained. ¹⁰ They called out in a loud voice, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?” ¹¹ Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the full number of their fellow servants, their brothers and sisters, were killed just as they had been.

- **some of those speaking are the boys of Bethlehem!!**

The boys of Bethelhem would say...it was good we gave our lives and fooled Herod and his puppet master Satan....Jesus would live...so he could die later and save mankind! Our death's helped save the world

In that confidence let us trust in God and commit ourselves to Jesus Christ now and forever.

end

end

¹⁹ When Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt. ²⁰ “Get up!” the angel said. “Take the child and his mother back to the land of Israel, because those who were trying to kill the child are dead.”

²¹ So Joseph got up and returned to the land of Israel with Jesus and his mother. ²² But when he learned that the new ruler of Judea was Herod’s son Archelaus, he was afraid to go there. Then, after being warned in a dream, he left for the region of Galilee. ²³ So the family went and lived in a town called Nazareth. This fulfilled what the prophets had said: “He will be called a Nazarene.

- **Jesus was safe but what about those parents who lost their sons?
Their tears were those of mothers who would not be comforted.
They are like the tears of Rachel**

Matt 2:17 Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: ¹⁸ “A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.”

- **The loss is not lessened because we think we “understand” the tragedy. *Understanding only gives us a framework for thinking about the unthinkable. Nothing could bring those little boys back to their grieving parents.***
- **Evil visited Bethlehem that night. Nothing could bring those little boys back to their grieving parents.**
- **Meanwhile Jesus and Mary and Joseph escaped to Egypt, an angel having warned Joseph in a dream to leave Bethlehem. In another dream he is told it is time to return to Israel:**

Matt 2:19 After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt ²⁰ and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.”²¹ So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel.

- **So they returned, but not to Bethlehem because they feared it was not safe. They settled in Galilee, in the tiny village of Nazareth, where Jesus could grow up safely.**

What About the Boys of Bethlehem?

I want to ask a question that I can’t fully answer, but it is one that we all think about in different ways and at different times.

If the angel knew about the impending massacre at Bethlehem, why did he warn Mary and Joseph and not the others? *On one level we know that Mary and Joseph were warned so that Jesus might be preserved from Herod’s murderous intentions.*

But what shall we say about the other boys of Bethlehem? And what about their parents? Were not those babies precious to the Lord also? Does the Lord hear the wails that arise from the little town of Bethlehem?

God always has a bigger plan.

Here is my best attempt at an answer. *We know that the Lord does care and that he does hear the cries of those who hurt so deeply.*

“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.” ([Psalm 34:18](#)).

- **God has promised to do that. Millions of people can testify to God’s presence in the midst of the worst pain and the greatest loss.**
- **But this truth, wonderful as it is, does not cancel our very real pain and it does not reverse the loss.**
- **This much we know for certain. *God always has a bigger plan than we can ever see from where we sit.* He preserved his Son so that one day his Son could die on the cross for the sins of the world.**
- **These babies died now, the baby Jesus would grow up and die later. Jesus had to escape this time so that he would not escape the next time. *Seen in broadest perspective, Jesus escaped the first time so that he wouldn’t escape the second time so that we would escape for all time.***
- **I understand that this truth would have been small comfort to the weeping mothers of Bethlehem. On that night it seemed like a senseless slaughter, and the next night it seemed the same. One week later it still made no sense. One year later there was no explanation. Even a decade later no one could understand why those babies had to die.**
- ***But run the clock forward about 33 years and suddenly things come into focus.* Outside the walls of Jerusalem a man is dying on a cross. He was the one baby Herod could not kill; now he offers himself up for the sins of the world. *In the end, he died too.* If he had died in Bethlehem, he couldn’t have died at Calvary. All of this was part of God’s eternal plan.**
- **All the pain and suffering we see around us—every bit of it—may be traced back to that that fateful moment in the Garden of Eden. *Since then the armies of evil have been on the march in every generation.* They have landed wave after wave of soldiers on beachheads around the**

world. There are times when it seems as if the battle is over and evil will reign unmolested forever.

- **But if Christmas means anything, it is this: *God wins in the end.***
- **At Bethlehem God launched a mighty counteroffensive that continues to this very day. It all started with a tiny baby boy named Jesus, born in a scandalous way, in a barn, to unmarried teenagers who were homeless and alone. The world had no idea that night what was happening in Bethlehem. Only in retrospect do we understand.**
- **The Wrong Shall Fail**
- **That same battle of evil and good continues to the present moment and will continue into the future until the day when Jesus returns and defeats evil once and for all. Perhaps that thought is what led Longfellow to write one final verse to his poem in answer to his own despair:**
- *At Bethlehem God struck a blow to liberate the world from sin and death.*

At Bethlehem God launched a mighty counteroffensive that continues to this very day. **And his front line soldiers were the little boys of Bethlehem boy.**

The baby wrapped in rags is also the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. He's the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the undefeated Son of God.

He's the leader of the armies of heaven. **Jesus is the undefeated Son of God...**

We need to remind ourselves in these troubled days that the devil will not have the final word.

Though he strikes many painful blows, he cannot win because the battle belongs to the Lord.

Be encouraged, my friends. Do not despair. **The boys of Bethlehem will be avenged and every enemy will be defeated.**

Rev 6:9 When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had

maintained. ¹⁰ They called out in a loud voice, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?” ¹¹ Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the full number of their fellow servants, their brothers and sisters, were killed just as they had been.

- **some of those speaking are the boys of Bethlehem!!**

The boys of Bethelhem would say...it was good we gave our lives and fooled Herod and his puppet master Satan....Jesus would live...so he could die later and save mankind! Their death's helped save the world

Better days are coming. In that confidence let us trust in God and commit ourselves to Jesus Christ now and forever.

end

God declared war at Bethlehem.

That's hardly the way we think of it, but it is not unbiblical. *Ever since Eden, a battle has been raging between God and Satan for control of planet earth.* When Adam and Eve sinned, Satan struck a blow for evil. From that time until this very hour, sin has reigned in every corner of this planet and has found a home in every human heart.

All the pain and suffering we see around us—every bit of it—may be traced back to that that fateful moment in the Garden of Eden. Since then the armies of evil have been on the march in every generation. They have landed wave after wave of soldiers on beachheads around the world.

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The Wrong Shall Fail

That same battle of evil and good continues to the present moment and will continue into the future until the day when Jesus returns and defeats evil once and for all. Perhaps that thought is what led Longfellow to write one final verse to his poem in answer to his own despair:

At Bethlehem God struck a blow to liberate the world from sin and death.

And his front line soldiers the little boys of Bethlehem boy.

One of the boys of Bethlehem.

Don't take him for granted. There is in this little baby all the strength of Deity. The power of God is in those tiny fists. He has strength which is divine. Whatever he desires, he is able to achieve.

As Luther put it, "He whom the worlds could not enwrap, yonder lies on Mary's lap." *The baby wrapped in rags is also the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.* He's the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the undefeated Son of God.

He's the leader of the armies of heaven.

Jesus is the undefeated Son of God.

I urge you to say those words aloud. *We need to remind ourselves in these sad days that the devil will not have the final word.*

Though he strikes many painful blows, he cannot win because the battle belongs to the Lord.

Be encouraged, my friends. Do not despair. *Through your tears, lift up your eyes and look again to Bethlehem.* That sleeping child will rise to battle and no one will stand against him.

The boys of Bethlehem will be avenged and every enemy will be defeated. *Better days are coming.* In that confidence let us trust in God and commit ourselves to Jesus Christ now and forever. Because these things are true, I wish you all a very Merry Christmas. Amen.

Rev 6:9 When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. ¹⁰ They called out in a loud voice, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?” ¹¹ Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the full number of their fellow servants, their brothers and sisters,^[e] were killed just as they had been.

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Hebrews 13:²⁰ Now may the God of peace— who brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, and ratified an eternal covenant with his blood— ²¹ may he equip you with all you need for doing his will. May he produce in you, through the power of Jesus Christ, every good thing that is pleasing to him. All glory to him forever and ever! Amen.

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Contrary to the sanitized versions we prefer, the birth of Jesus was messy and troublesome, fraught with difficulty and surrounded by people who either didn't know, didn't care, or actively opposed this little baby boy.

Matt^{2:13} When they had gone, 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." ¹⁴ So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, ¹⁵ where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son." ¹⁶ When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.

Santa Claus is mans idea ...but his delivery method is nothing short of a miracle!! it is priority shipping at it highest!!

Here is what I believed when I was a kid....Santa Claus whom I did not know was a make believe character for a number of years...and I was quite traumatized when my sister told me he was really mom and dad..... but I believed everything pictured and told to me about him...He is A rather rotund man, who favors red and white clothing, and lives at the north pole, with his wife and many pointy eared little toy makers called elves...and he keeps a list of all the children names and he checks this list it at least twice during the year to see who has been naught or nice, and if you are nice the elves will make you cool toys...

Santa' mode of delivering these toys is a sleigh pulled by reindeer, and one having a bright red nose. This method of shipping these gifts is quite incredible as Santa while also flying and landing this sleigh will also personally separate and deliver the toys the elves have expertly created to the right children without error...and his preferred mode of entry into the homes is

through the chimney....and he delivers these wonderful gifts to every child in the world in the course of one night.

This has been calculated by math experts to mean...that including the difference in time zones, Santa has 31 hours to deliver all the gifts worldwide... **This means that he would have to visit 832 residences each second!** Not including the time it would take to eat cookies and drink the milk that many, many of these home will have set out for Him...talk about eating and running...

This is a great supernatural fantasy...The mixing of the supernatural and the natural... and all one has to be is kind of good to receive gifts!!...**the lesson is be good and life hands you good things**....the whole story of Santa is an imaginative creative supernatural, fake...

which leads to the real story of Christmas which is God's idea..... This story is also a creative, imaginative, supernatural story...the story of God becoming man ...but it is realwhat is the difference between Santa and Jesus ...

Well, God's supernatural work doesn't come nicely packaged and presented to us as a gift we simply have to unwrap...

God's supernatural gifts come wrapped in the common, they come wrapped in insurmountable problems and obstacles, failures and loss.....problems we want to be running away from...not waiting around to joyfully receive and unwrap in the morning...

God's shipping methods often look and sometimes feel like this...roll video...

After video....and like this video...they always get delivered on time...to their destination...and with a purpose...though the route will be full of bumps and troubles...assents and descents...the package will arrive!!

What amazes me is that God did not exempt his own son from this spiritual principle...

The God of Heaven would be priority shipped to the earth...in accordance with his general plan of calling and using the least of us...The birth of Jesus falls right into line with the stated principles of God's strategy in carrying out his will....

*Luke 1:26 In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who **are highly favored!** **The Lord is with you.**" ²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.*

- She is stressing...heart racing, adrenaline pumping...fear stricken.....he must have the wrong house and wrong person...

- Nobody has ever talked to me like that...and I am highly favored by God??...uh look around? and He is with me??
- Your words do not line up with my reality? it does not feel like that?
- So how does God favor me??? no power or position or pedigree I am a peasant Jewish teenager... living in the wrong town... Nazareth...**FAR FROM THE RELIGIOUS CENTER**...a small blue collar town...**in Galilee** which was looked down by the religious...non kosher and way to many gentiles...
- and the Messiah is supposed to come from Bethlehem any way.

LK 1: 30 But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. 31 You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. 32 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, 33 and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”

34 “How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”

- **FIRST OFF...WRONG SHIPPING ADDRESS...How can he possibly be great? I am a nobody**
- **Secondly..How can I be pregnant and still be a virgin...impossible..**
- **And you know it will be a boy...whose name means God Saves! which will by the way be his call..**

Luke 1:35 The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on 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. 36 Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. 37 For no word from God will ever fail.”

38 “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her.

- **Great step of faith...Ok God I trust your word!! the supernatural will interact with the natural...**
- **and by the way how is she highly favored?...There is no greater favor than God taking his Humanity from her DNA...**
- **Mary’s pregnancy would be a miracle.....His God DNA would be combined with His Human DNA...thus fully God and Fully man**

I wonder how good looking she was...for Isaiah says of Jesus

*Isaiah 53 :2.....He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.*

- He would carry no godly splendor!! no riches or glamour would draw people to him!!
- Even his looks were at best plain!! that he would not be considered desirable!!

The Lord has sent the gift in priority shipping...the enemy is none the wiser...nor any idea how the gift is being sent...

God didn't just choose a WOMAN, He chose a COUPLE, both godly and willing to make a great sacrifice. **Now to Joseph...**

MT 1: 18 This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. 19 Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

- These two verses do not begin to address the emotional devastation, relational conflict and inner conflict that Joseph and Mary would experience in the explanation Mary would give to Joseph upon her return after three months away visiting Elisabeth.
- at this time Mary who would have been pledged and considered legally married to Joseph though not officially wed ...was pregnant...and not by him

The three stages to Marriage...of which she was in the second...

- In those times an **engagement** was often made when the couple were only children...It was usually made by the parents or a professional match maker...
- Marriage was considered far too important to be left to the dictates of the human heart...immaturity or lack of judgment
- **The Pledge or betrothal**...was when the ratification of the engagement became official...the girl could call it off...but at this time they were considered in a legally binding marriage...although they would not be wed for one year...the year was spent in preparing for the marriage...home etc. but no living together or marital relations were allowed
- During this time a man and woman would be considered a husband and wife
- To break the pledge would be require an official divorce...
- The third stage was the **"Marriage proper"** which took place at the end of the year of betrothal or pledge

needless to say...

- Joseph would be highly stressed by the timing and circumstances of this event...
- **We are not given a time line...his wrestling with this situation could have taken days, weeks or evens month's**
- And he would have to make some choices...

1. one of which would be to believe what Mary certainly would have told him happened...which was probably dismissed outright
2. It obviously appears that he did not believe her... which would make her in his mind a not only an adulterer but a liar also...
3. And being a good man his only option was to do the right thing in this circumstance...he could disgrace her...in many ways...or he could exit quietly..
4. He chose quietly. To move on... to pick up the pieces of his life...

- Now ...We can only imagine the stress Mary was under....adultery was an offense which could be punishable by death...

- Saying yes to God is sure paying off...the gift is in smooth transit...

It is one thing to say yes to God ...it is another to stay yes when it all goes sideways...

- Will we say yes when it all goes sideways? Was Mary's yes to God request as strong now as it was earlier? Now that it appears her choice to follow God is costing her greatly...
- It is pretty easy to follow God when his will and our will line up...it is a whole other story when his leading takes us into the lions den... or the furnace fire...

But this is where character is displayed...

1. **Joseph was Righteous**...righteousness is often seen as not doing something wrong... like make sure you run away from sin...but in fact righteousness is doing something right...
2. righteousness is not just running away from sin... righteousness is chasing after that which is the right thing to do in a particular challenge...

Righteousness is first of all...

- Considerate ...which means he was thoughtful....he would consider what would be the right thing to do... (Matthew 1:19,20).
- So the first thing he did was to do nothing. The moral for us: when you have to make a difficult decision, don't be in a hurry: more mistakes are made by haste than by delay.
- He would consider...that he and Mary both lived in the same town. They were brought up in the same community. They both lived in Nazareth...they had family and friends...what was the bigger picture here...
- He thought that Mary had always told the truth their relationship was honest open and truthful...
- Her previous character had always been blameless. But now her story seemed unreal and strange. What happened...and her story must have stuck in his soul.
- The accepted normal thing to do would have been to expose her and make her a public disgrace. And Joseph considered doing that very thing, but his love and his compassion for Mary would not permit that kind of severe treatment.

- Clearly, Joseph's faithfulness and love to Mary led him to protect her life, even if she had betrayed him. I am sure he also thought about the child she was carrying and it's future...
- He needed to think this through....**He thought before he acted...**
- **That is always the right thing to do...**

Second...Being Righteous ...he would take into consideration what the righteous one...God would have him do..

- He was humble...willing to give God the final say.....
- Humility means we do not condemn...Joseph knew all are fallible...
 - He was humble...he did not condemn Mary even when he perceived he was deeply wronged...
- So Joseph decides to quietly...not gossip, not playing the victim card seeking sympathy,...he will simply release her from her vow.
- With the decision probably came a deep restful sleep...

But God intervened...

MT 1:20 But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." ^{MT 1:22} All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" --which means, "God with us."

- Well that was the end of that nights sleep...

Here is a very, very important choice that Joseph and we will have to make at times in our lives... **And that choice is this...**

- **Trading the good plan for the God plan...there is a time to be prudent but there is also a time to be valiant...**
- Joseph had chosen to take the high road the prudent decision...to do the right thing... even the godly thing...
- **Prudent people focus on avoiding problems...Valiant on what is right...**
- **Though emotionally devastated ...Joseph would come out smelling like a rose...**
- **It was risk free and failure proof... He could move on and she could never hurt him again...it would be hard but he could start over again...it was the good and right thing to do....**
- **Then God comes along and offers him the challenge to experience the GREAT THING.... By doing the valiant thing...**
- **But valiant people focus on Opportunities**
- **what I like about Mary and Joseph....they were not educated beyond their obedience**
- **what could be better or harder than to parent the Son of God...**

- that is the crazy thing about serving God...there is nothing better and there is nothing harder
- God has always been comfortable with making people uncomfortable the way he packages and ships his gifts!!
- Mary would carry the social stigma of being morally suspect
- they were just one risk away from breaking through a barrier that seemed impossible.
- Satan would not be attracted to nor look for Jesus

But the God's way is always the risky ...it could fail... if it were not God

- It is always more fearful...people will criticize him ...he will appear weak...it could fail...it is not the logical choice...certainly seems like the harder road...
- How do you explain to people ... it's all good...I am marrying her because she is carrying the Messiah...
- After a while you probably just shut up...

There is no such thing as risk free faith. And you can't experience success without risking failure.

But on the flip side...this could be the opportunity of his life...

- Step father of the Messiah...
- And The ushering in of the kingdom of God...God with us and His name would be Jesus!!!

The choice: play it good and safe...or experience something great...

So Joseph grabbed on to God's plan and let go of His...and he never regretted it!!

- **but a dream is one thing...reality is another...**

Joseph took Mary Home... that is supernatural...they continued their engagement..

MT 1:24 When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵ But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

- It is not how much you now but how much you will act upon what you know...that makes the difference... it is your obedience to what you know...

The couple are in place it is all down hill from here! Well not exactly!!!! but the gift has not arrived yet...the destination of the christmas gift is Bethlehem...God has to priority ship them there...

Luke 2 :1 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.*

What? how messy is that...traveling while eight plus months pregnant over 60 miles of rough terrain ...probably on a donkey... pulling or carrying their luggage

- **no phoning ahead for a hotel...the town crowded....Mary extremely uncomfortable and exhausted about to give birth...she is carrying God...**
- **...Joseph tired and Frustrated...these are the two highly favorer ...where is the help here?**
- **and the best accommodations they will find are in a stable or cave...for the animals... Everything going well in the sight of God!**

But they will arrive!! That is the way with God !! the destination is assured!!

want to bring up Jackie...who has been on an eight year journey...to receive custody of her own precious package...her son!!

she will tell us about it!!

you may be here today thinking how much longer God? will I ever get to where I am supposed to be?? will I ever become what you want me to be??

listen God's plan for you is in priority shipping...it is on the way...and has been...though the road is bumpy, long and tiresome...the destination is sure...

your job is to keep on obeying...to keep on going...and know that you are favored of God...

listen thirty years later Jesus went back to Nazareth, to the synagogue he grew up in...and was not ready to start his ministry... listen

Luke 16 *He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:*

¹⁸ *“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,*

¹⁹ *to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”*

That proclamation is still in effect today! The Lord's favor is on you!! when in doubt on the journey always trust his favor on you!! **though you may not get understand the ways of God trust the heart of God!!**

@@@@@

In our culture Christmas means mistletoe, parties, carols, eggnog, big meals, a decorated tree, and last-minute shopping, the giving and receiving of gifts. While I would venture to say that these things are not objectionable in themselves, none of them (with the exception of giving gifts) has anything to do with the circumstances surrounding the birth of Christ.

It is easy to decry the commercialization of Christmas and to bemoan the Christmas parties that cater more to drunkenness than to anything relating to the birth of Jesus. But as off target as those things are, we who are Christians ought to enjoy this season of the year. It would be a double shame if we allowed the world to take this holiday (a word that really means "Holy Day") away from us. How should we celebrate this great day? The first and most obvious answer is this. You should celebrate Christmas by believing in Jesus. After all, this is why He came to the earth from heaven. He was born to be a Savior. And until you can call him "my Savior," you will never fully understand what Christmas is all about. Celebrating the birth of Jesus without receiving the gift of Jesus...is quite odd!! yet so common!!

Christmas is about God doing what he said he would do... what Every book, every chapter, every page of the Old Testament testified to...This one great truth—"He's coming." That's the whole theme of the Old Testament—that God would one day send the Messiah to the earth to deliver his people Israel.

Noah said He's coming....Moses said, "He's coming." David said, "He's coming." Isaiah said, "He's coming." Jeremiah said, "He's coming." Daniel said, "He's coming." Micah said, "He's coming." Zechariah said, "He's coming." Malachi said, "He's coming." And when Jesus finally arrived, they didn't believe it. In fact John the Apostle writes

John 1:¹⁰ He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

- When he entered the world... The world did not recognize him... and his own missed him...
- in fact “that which was his own.” easily translate as “his own home.”
- He came to his own home—the Holy Land, and to his own people—the nation of Israel, and they did not receive him.
- Jesus came “home” to his own people—and they wouldn’t take him in.
- They should have known better. They knew he was coming from the earliest scriptures... —God had told them over and over again many times in many ways. They had ample warning. And when Jesus finally arrived, they didn’t believe he was the gift!!
- they were to receive him into their home... and introduce him to the nations of the world!! introduce the world to its savior...
- But the news is not entirely bad. While it is true that the world ignored him and his own people rejected him—not everyone ignored him and not everyone rejected him.
- Some people recognized him and welcomed him as Lord and Savior. It is useful to recall that all the apostles and 100% of the earliest disciples were Jewish.
- Even in the midst of general rejection, many followed the Lord.
- John 1:12-13 offers a very simple description of what it means to become a Christian. Here is that simple gospel, by which the most uninformed may be saved.”

John 1:12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— ¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.

- Verse 12 has been rightly seen as one of the greatest verses in all of the New Testament for it tells us how to be saved.

A Simple Step—Receiving ... The way of salvation begins with a simple step: “To all who received him.”

- The word “receive” means to welcome a visitor into your home. It’s what happens when someone knocks at your door and you open the door and invite them to come in.
- To “receive” Christ means to welcome him as an honored guest and to have him make you his home.

A Wonderful Result—Child of God

- “He gave the right to become children of God.” The word “right” means “honor” or “privilege.”
- The moment you receive Christ into your life, God gives you the honor of becoming a member of his family.
- God only gives the privilege of being his children to those who by personal faith receive Jesus as the God who became flesh to save us...

Verse 13 explains how this takes place... we become God’s children. There are three “nots” and one “but”—and all four are important.

A. Not of natural descent. You aren’t a Christian just because your parents were Christians And you won’t get brownie points with God just because you come from a good family and have a fine education. ... Your family background doesn’t count when it comes to salvation.

B. Nor of human decision. Literally this reads “not of the will,” meaning there is nothing you can do to save yourself—so don’t bother trying.

C. Or of a husband’s will. Literally it is “not of the will of a man,” meaning pedigree... No man is big enough to swing open the pearly gates on your behalf.

D. But born of God. Here is the heart of the gospel. Salvation is of the Lord. It’s a free gift—totally free and totally of grace. you receive it!! It’s not a cooperative venture where you do your part and God does his.

But someone may object, “Don’t I have a part to play in salvation?” Sure you have a part. Your part is to be hopelessly lost in sin and God’s part is to save you. That way God alone gets the credit. Salvation is a work of God from first to last.