

THE CHRISTMAS STORY

Advent means arrival - Jesus Christ is coming! Luke 2:1-4 records the familiar words, "A decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered." In God's providence, a census of the Roman empire was called, to assist in taxation. "And Joseph went up to Bethlehem because he was of the house and lineage of David." Joseph and Mary made an arduous ~90-mile journey of many days from Nazareth, for Jesus to be born in Bethlehem according to prophecy, as a descendant in the royal line.

1- BIRTH v4-6. Joseph went "to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child," conceived miraculously by the Holy Spirit. Betrothed is like a super engagement, a legal promise to be married. The couple did not live together nor were they intimate, and their commitment could be broken only by legal action. Think how the world so loosely views marriage and engagement today. Thank God that Jesus' love for you is not based upon mere feeling, but upon His everlasting covenant love. "And while they were in Bethlehem, the time came for Mary to give birth." As we celebrate the birth of Jesus, we thank God for the gift of every human life, conceived in God's image by the Creator's divine design.

2- RE-BIRTH v7. "Mary gave birth to her firstborn son." The miraculous conception of Christ results in the eternal second person of the Trinity being born in human form on earth. God coming in flesh. Thank God that His gift to you of life in Christ begins with re-birth - spiritual life by believing in Jesus as Lord and Savior. When you are spiritually re-born by the Holy Spirit, you become an adopted child of God. "And she wrapped Him in swaddling cloths," the common practice of wrapping newborns in long, narrow strips of cloth to keep them warm and to feel secure. When you are re-born in Christ, think how He wraps you up in His love and grace, forever! He is the trustworthy one, your Lord and Savior!

3- IRONY v7. "And she laid Him in a manger" Jesus may have been born in a stable, cave, or open air. The manger was most likely made of stone, a feeding trough used as a makeshift cradle. It foreshadows the stone tomb in which Jesus would be placed at His death. The irony is intentional - the divine King of kings and Creator of all things humbled Himself to be born as a poor infant, coming in a cradle, because He was going to the cross and a tomb, to live again and gain the crown of eternal life for all who put their trust in Him. Some people only think of Jesus in the Christmas cradle, preferring sentimental thoughts instead of the weighty reality of His coming for the cross, to die for sins. Receive His gift of forgiveness!

4- ROOM v7, "Because there was no place for them in the inn." Due to the crush of people for the census, all public and private lodging in the small village of Bethlehem was full. And who would want to deal with a pregnancy? Inconvenient. You must answer this question about Jesus: will you turn Him away? Or will you make room in your heart and mind and will and life for the Savior, the Son of God? John 1:12-13 says, "But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." Put all your trust in Jesus, and live for Him from this day forth, by His power within!

5- ANGEL v8-9. "And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night." Animals for temple sacrifice were kept outdoors year round, and Bethlehem is only seven miles from Jerusalem. But the lowly shepherds who cared for them were looked down upon, and their work kept them from observing the ceremonial laws. Perhaps some think your work seems lowly or menial, or the impact of your life of little matter. Yet, God identifies Himself in the Bible as the Shepherd of His people, and the promised Christ as the Good Shepherd. Suddenly, "an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear."

6- JOY v10. "And the angel said to them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people." The good news is the evangel, the gospel, the good news about Jesus, whose name means "Jehovah saves." Remember that the world exalts outward appearances, but the Lord sees inward realities. He came to save every kind of person, from every background and situation. All are sinners in need of the Savior. Trust His real purpose for your life as you trust and obey Him!

7- GLORY v11-12. The angels proclaimed the best news ever: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." An angel is a supernatural messenger sent by God to deliver an important message (and who had previously appeared to both Mary and Joseph to announce Jesus). "The glory of the Lord" which shone around them was part of the spectacular announcement they came to make: that the Creator, God Himself would come to earth as a child, to live with and to redeem His people, breaking through the earthly barrier of sin. Because God always keeps His promises!

8- YOU? - God's providence oversaw every detail of Christ's birth. And the Creator knows all about you, numbers every hair of your head, and tracks every day of your life. You were born in the time and place of His choosing. How are you fulfilling His purpose in your life: to trust Christ as Savior and Lord, living out His new spiritual life through you, sharing His good news, so others put their trust in Jesus too! ☐