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BEYOND CHRIST'S BIRTH

Sorting through photos taken during the holiday season, or getting your albums to-date with the latest images of your family members? We don't have photos of the babe of Bethlehem and the youth of Nazareth, but we do have the Gospels, which give us a fascinating picture of the early life of Jesus. Luke 2:39-40 and Matthew 2:1-23 talk about the time beyond His birth, the childhood of Jesus Christ.

The past few weeks we've looked at these earliest days in some depth, from Luke 2. Then Luke says, *"when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom, and the favor of God was upon Him."* Matthew adds very interesting history of Jesus' early days. The key word is "fulfilled" because he chronicles how God worked out important ancient promises about the Christ.

1- FORETOLD - prophecies about Messiah. Matthew 2:1-6 presents the wisemen from the east who came looking for the King of the Jews. Hundreds of years before, Jewish exiles had taken the Scriptures to eastern lands, and these scholars had done their homework: *"For we saw His star when it rose, and have come to worship Him."* It is said "wise men still seek Him!" Is this true of you? Regardless of cost of friends, family, finances? Matthew Henry notes, *"those who truly desire to know Christ, and find Him, will not regard pains or perils in seeking after Him."*

But *"when Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him."* More than 350 specific Old Testament prophecies about Jesus show God at work in human history for His own purposes. Herod was paranoid about his reign and would stop at nothing to out-manuever anyone he suspected. He represents the self-willed world of darkness, into which the Light of truth and grace came.

Are you troubled? Turn to Jesus. He is the promised Christ who brings salvation and delivers you out of darkness into His marvelous light. God prophesied the place of Jesus' birth: *"O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd My people Israel"* (Micah 5:2, Ezekiel 34, 2 Samuel 5, Numbers 24). The prophecies of Christ traumatized Herod. Little did he know the far-reaching reality of the King of Kings, born just a few miles away in the shadow of his great palace.

2- OFFERINGS - presented to the Messiah. Matthew 2:7-12 records how Herod told the wisemen to bring him word of the Christ, *"that I too may come and worship."* Herod was half Edomite (ancient enemy of Israel) and gave the appearance of acknowledging Jewish beliefs, along with Greek and Roman. His great interest was himself and his rule. As for the wisemen, *"the star came to rest over the place where the child was, and they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy."* True of you? How would anyone know?

"Going into the house they saw the child with Mary His mother, and they fell down and worshiped Him." Jesus was no longer an infant, but a young child in a house. Still an unlikely habitation for a King, but the wisemen kneel and adore Him. Will you bow before Jesus and worship Him as Lord and Savior? That's how Christ comes to be born within you, so that His life lives through your Christian life.

"Then, opening their treasures, they offered Him gifts, gold, frankincense, and myrrh." Gold has always had universal value, and points to His royal reign (Exodus 35:5, Haggai 2:8). Costly frankincense was used at the altar (Exodus 30) and points to His deity. Myrrh was for anointing in burial (John 19) and points to His coming death. These gifts, fit for a king, point to the fulfillment of prophecy. Jesus' ministry ultimately fulfills God's promises about the coming Prophet, Priest, and King who came to save us.

The wisemen also represent prophesied Gentiles (Isaiah 11:10) ordained by God to believe in Christ. You too are counted among them as a child of the promise, if you believe and receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. All that you are, time, talent, treasures, already belong to Him, for His own purposes!

3- FLEE - escaping to and from Egypt. The narrative in Matthew 2:13-15 turns from worship to war. The angel of the Lord told Joseph, *"Rise, take the Child and His mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the Child, to destroy Him."* But God continues to preserve the Savior, and Joseph and Mary continue to obey God's providential instructions. The gifts of the wisemen provide funds for their journey. How are you obeying God's work and word in your own life? Do you see His providence, as you look at your past and present? He also has a plan for your future!

All this happened to Jesus to *"fulfill what the Lord spoke by the prophet, 'out of Egypt I called My Son'"* (Hosea 11). What does this have to do with the Christ? Consider the Joseph of the Old Testament, who in God's providence was taken to Egypt in order to save Israel. It is no coincidence that the Joseph of the New Testament follows God's instructions to go to Egypt. RC Sproul notes, "God is the architect of history. Fulfillment of Biblical prophecy is more than just one-to-one correspondence between prediction and realization. Fulfill means to fill up to overflowing." So Jesus completes what Joseph and Egypt did not - to be God's light to the world (Isaiah 49:6) as the true Israel, the true Son of God! □