

The Christmas Story
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Who can tell me why we celebrate Christmas?

Is Christmas about the giving of gifts?

Ans: Well actually it is, but not the kind of gift giving we usually think of. Christmas is about God giving us - you and me - the greatest and most valuable gift there has ever been; His only begotten Son.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Some people say we shouldn't give gifts on Christmas or that because it is Jesus' birthday we should give the gifts to Him like the wise men did after they found Jesus when He was about 2 years old. (I think it is mostly the TV preachers who like that idea.)

But actually, if you think about it, the giving of gifts when it is done in love and not all crazy carried away is a very Biblical thing to do.

God gave us the greatest gift of all and on top of that, every good thing we enjoy in life also comes as a gift from God...and then God tells us:

1John 4:10-11

10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins.

11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

So giving gifts to those we love really is following a Godly example, isn't it?

Before we read the Christmas story, let me teach you something about how we should receive a gift.

Christmas gifts are about someone who loves you expressing their love for you; it is not about getting just what you want.

Our job is to appreciate what we do receive and to be thankful to the person giving us the gift and to the Lord for making it all possible.

So, on Christmas morning or whenever you open your gifts, will you be all about what you wanted or what you got...or will you remember to be thankful, especially for the greatest gift of all, God's Son?

OK, on to the Christmas story:

Matthew 1:18-25

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came

- together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.
- 19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just *man*, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily.
- 20 But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.
- 21 And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.
- 22 Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying,
- 23 Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.
- 24 Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife:
- 25 And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.

There is so much to remember about the Christmas story; the obedience and bravery of Joseph and the wonderful character and the servant's heart and attitude of Mary.

About the time Mary was getting toward the end of her pregnancy, a Roman governor named Cyrenius began to enforce a taxation levied by Caesar, the Roman Emperor or King.

The law required them to go to their home city to register for the taxes; Joseph and Mary were in the family line of King David and were required to travel to Bethlehem.

This was a very long trip.

On the map we can see how far it was and what probable route they might have taken; what we don't see are the days or weeks of camping, trying to find water, eating old bread and dried meat for days on end.

Not to mention the dangers from predators; lions and bears and wolves; even human bandits were along that route through which they journeyed.

God without question was protecting Joseph and Mary as they journeyed.

How many of you have ever said from the back seat, "Are we there yet?" Imagine being tired and worn out and hearing "No, not yet" for three or four weeks!

And then when they finally get to Bethlehem; tired and beat; feet hurt, perhaps saddle sore, aching all over; there is no place to stay!

Luke 2:1-7

- 1 And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed.
- 2 (*And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.*)
- 3 And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.
- 4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; because (he was of the house and lineage of David:)
- 5 To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.
- 6 And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.
- 7 And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

How many of you have seen a manger scene?

There will be a manger, which is basically a feed trough with some nice clean straw and some nice petting zoo animals standing around; maybe a donkey and a lamb or two or a cow or a little goat.

That's not really the way it probably was. I used to live on a farm and we had cows and a few other animals. We also had a manger where we fed the cows. I remember especially

the area around the manger; it was about ankle deep in doo doo; animals make a real mess around the manger.

It did not smell like puppy breath either; it was pretty bad.

Straw, however, is one of the warmest, most comfortable things there is to lie down on; so God did provide for them.

Do you have a nice warm place to sleep? Maybe that ought to be one of things you are thankful for on Christmas?

The Bible says that Jesus left heaven with more riches than can even be imagined and came to earth and became poor; so that we could be made rich.

2Corinthians 8:9 For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.

If you are saved and have Jesus in your life; are you poor or rich?

The Christmas story also includes some hard working shepherds; these were those chosen of God to receive the announcement of Jesus' birth.

Luke 2:8-20

- 8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.
- 9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.
- 10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.
- 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.
- 12 And this *shall be* a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.
- 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,
- 14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.
- 15 And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.
- 16 And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.
- 17 And when they had seen *it*, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.
- 18 And all they that heard *it* wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

- 19 But Mary kept all these things, and pondered *them* in her heart.
- 20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

Wow! Imagine seeing what these guys saw on that amazing night.

They had to go see it for themselves.

That is the way it is for all of us; we all must come to Jesus for ourselves and by faith trust Him to save us from our sins.

Jesus would grow up, live a perfect sinless life; and then give that life; actually die for us on a horrible Roman cross.

What if someone who loves you gave all they had to give you the best gift anyone would ever receive and you said, "No, I don't want it"? You wouldn't be like that, would you?

Well that is just exactly what God did for you when He sent Jesus to die for your sins.

The Bible says: **Luke 2:20** And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God ...

How about you? Are you going to let Christmas be all about a lot of stuff...or are you going to make it about praising God for His wonderful Gift?