

“...And They Never Even Saw it Coming”

Matthew 1:18 ESV Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. **19** And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. **20** But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. **21** She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” **22** All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: **23** “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us). **24** When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, **25** but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

- I. When I think of the birth of Jesus Christ, I think of one word...obscurity. Think about that. God chose a young girl, living among common people to carry in her womb the King of the Universe. Sure, an angel came and visited her, and announced that she would give birth to the messiah, but he did it when she was all alone. Not even her fiancée believed her story. Convincing him took another angelic visitation!
 - A. And speaking of Joseph, the Bible tells us he was a carpenter, a blue-collar worker. Laborers in Jesus day were dirt poor. We have evidence of this in the fact that when they presented Jesus in the temple, they could not afford to sacrifice a Lamb, but instead offered the less expensive alternative of two turtledoves as prescribed in Leviticus 12:8.
 - B. Moreover, their hometown of Nazareth was so far off the beaten path that the boondocks considered it backwater! The backwaters considered it a podunk, and the podunks considered it “the sticks”! Nothing significant had ever happened in Nazareth. It is never once even mentioned in the Old Testament!
 - C. Luke tells us that the reason Mary and Joseph were in Bethlehem when Christ was born was they were summoned there by the government in order to be registered and taxed...just like everyone else. They were not summoned to the City of David for any unique or royal purpose; only because they were required to be there by the Romans who occupied their land.
 1. Once in Bethlehem, this very pregnant young girl was told that the city was full - that there were not accommodations to be had anywhere, except of course in the barn.
 2. Ladies, can you imagine bearing your first child in the presence of sheep, goats, donkeys and perhaps a camel or two?
 - a) Unlike the nativity scene that adorns many of our homes, there were no kings with gold, frankincense, or myrrh that night worshipping the baby (they probably didn’t show up for at least two years!). There were no halos crowning the three people in that barn. There were no trumpet-blowing angels hovering over their heads, or beams of glory descending from the heavens upon them.

- b) There was only a young couple, possibly scared and nervous, caring for their newborn son in the worst possible conditions, and still processing everything that was happening to them.
 - c) And forget all that “the little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes” jazz! Jesus was a normal human baby - hungry, squirmy, loud, often wet or dirty.
- D. It’s amazing to me how far off we can be in our assessment of what good and bad is in this life. Ravi Zacharias recounts a middle eastern story about a man who has one horse. One night, the horse runs off. The man’s neighbor says, “Wow, what bad luck”. The man replies “I know nothing of luck”. The next day, the horse returns to his property, leading 20 additional wild horses into the man’s fields. His neighbor says, “What great luck! Now you have 21 horses instead of one!” The man says, “I know nothing of luck.” The next day, the man’s son is working with one of the new, wild horses, when it kicks him and severely breaks the boy’s leg. The neighbor says, “What awful luck! The horse has injured your son!” The man says, “I know nothing of luck.” The next day, a band of thugs goes through the village, forcibly gathering young men to fight in their guerrilla army. When they come to the man’s house, they see that the boy cannot fight in his condition, and leaves him at home.
1. If there’s one thing we are all lousy at, it is determining the fundamental nature of what is good or bad at any given moment.
 2. But God, who is eternal, ever-present, all-knowing and all powerful has no lack of perspective on things! His ways are high and his plan is perfect.
- II. So while all of this uneventful and seemingly mundane story is unfolding in Bethlehem, the scene in Luke’s account shifts from the little family to the least likely bunch of misfits imaginable.
- A. **Luke 2:8 ESV** And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. **9** And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. **10** 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. **11** For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. **12** And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and 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 among those with whom he is pleased!”
1. The angel’s message was “good news of great joy”! It was not one of those “I’ve got good news and bad news” scenarios! No! It was good news for “all the people”.
 2. And what was that news? A savior had been born, and not just any savior (like the judges of the Old Testament who would temporarily rescue the people until they blew it again) but he was Christ - the Greek word name the Jewish Messiah - the promised deliverer! The one who would redeem God’s people and occupy (at long last) King David’s throne forever!
- B. At this announcement, the sky exploded with an innumerable multitude of Heavenly beings, declaring in no uncertain terms the significance of what was transpiring in their times: God was receiving the highest glory, and the human race, estranged

from the fellowship of the divine since their ancestors first sinned in the Garden of Eden, was now hearing a word from the throne of God that would forever change everything: "Peace on earth". Not wrath, nor judgement, but peace.

- C. Five months before Jesus was born in Bethlehem, his cousin, John the Baptist was also miraculously born to parents who were past child-bearing years. John's father, Zechariah, had been struck mute for the duration of his wife's pregnancy, as a sign that the promise of his child's destiny was of God.
 - 1. When the child was born, Zechariah's tongue was loosed and he began to prophesy about the Messiah, for whose ministry his own son would prepare.
 - 2. **Luke 1:73b HCSB He has given us the privilege, 74 since we have been rescued from our enemies' clutches, to serve Him without fear 75 in holiness and righteousness in His presence all our days.**
- D. And what was the privilege? The privilege of the fulfilled covenant, promised to Abraham; that in his seed (Jesus) the whole world would be blessed!
 - 1. And how would this be accomplished? By Christ rescuing us from the clutches of our enemies! Sin! Death! The devil! The world! All defeated!
 - 2. And what is the benefit to us of this defeat? We may now serve the Father through the Son without fear of wrath or judgement. We will be a people, who by his work, will be adorned with the very holiness and righteousness of God, as his Chosen One takes upon himself (in an unfair exchange) all of our sin, brokenness and sickness.
 - 3. And we will enjoy that righteousness and holiness in his very presence, not because we are destined to go to him, but because he is coming to us in the person of the Holy Spirit, who will be with us forever, throughout eternity.
- III. So God worked his plan, uniquely and covertly. Nobody but a man, his wife and a ragtag bunch of shepherds had any clue at first what was happening. But others would soon follow...wise men from the east; a prophet named Simeon and a prophetess named Anna in the temple; later John the Baptist, then 12 diverse men and a handful of women.
 - A. When he rose from the grave there would be more than 500 of them who could give eyewitness testimony to his resurrection. 120 of them would be filled with the Holy Spirit (as promised) 10 days after he ascended to his Father.
 - 1. Through the Holy Spirit, those 120 would give birth to a church numbering over 3,000 on the very first day of the church's existence. That church would disperse and take the message of the crucified, resurrected and ascended Savior to every corner of the known world in a single generation.
 - 2. And guess what? This message of "glad tidings of great joy" and "peace on earth" proclaimed at first by angels, is still spreading like wildfire all over the globe 24/7/365 since the day it began over 2,000 years ago!
 - B. The thing that seems so small at the beginning can shake the earth to its very core when God is the planner. Nobody may have noticed his secret invasion 2,000 years ago in Bethlehem, but he fulfilled his promise, established a kingdom, and crowned a king, overthrowing all the other kingdoms and idols, principalities and powers of this world.