

The Christmas Story ...according to Jesus Christ

What a special night this night is...a night to be in wonder, a night to celebrate a glorious birth. O holy night! O night divine! Tonight we remember the startling announcement of angels, we travel with shepherds to the see the baby in the manger. It is a night when we think about Mary and Joseph and the wonder they must have felt as they pondered the significance of this special birth. Luke 2:19 tells us that “Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.”

So we are here tonight also in awesome wonder and come to treasure the meaning of Christmas in our hearts. You know the historical accounts of Jesus’ birth are only recorded in two of the gospels, Matthew and Luke. And wouldn’t it be interesting if we could meet the characters of the Christmas story and interview them concerning their experiences. Both Mary and Joseph would tell about the appearance of an angel, Mary would tell about her visit to her cousin Elizabeth, they both would speak of their long journey to Bethlehem. If the shepherds were interviewed, they would tell us what it was like to be suddenly visited by heavenly messengers and feeling at first terrified but then rejoice as they become the recipients of good news of great joy. They would tell of their excitement of seeing the child and wanting to tell everyone all that they had seen and heard. Of course, the wise men would tell of their long journey of following a star, their encounter with Herod, and would explain the meaning of each of their gifts.

Yes, it would be interesting to interview these who had a vital role in the Christmas story. But have you ever read the Christmas story according to the One whose birth this season is all about. What about the Christmas story according to Jesus. Not the story of birth narratives written in the Gospels of Luke or Matthew, but the story from Jesus himself. It would be a perspective from the Lord of the Universe, one who was present at creation, One took on human form when he entered our world. This Jesus who says: “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” That would be interesting. Well, one of those perspectives comes from the book of Hebrews. It is a statement of words which are recorded in the 40th Psalm, which speak of Jesus’ understanding of his divine mission. Listen again to the words

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from Hebrews 10:5-7: “When Christ came into the world, he said, Sacrifice and offerings you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me, with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said: Here I am, it is written about me in the scroll. I have come to do your will, O God.” The focus of these words tell the Christmas story in a different way than Luke or Matthew. Rather than the story of shepherds and angels and wise men, it is a statement expressing the deeper meaning and purpose of Jesus’ coming to the earth. It describes the divine plan for the Son of God to do the will of his heavenly Father and become the perfect sacrifice for humanity. You might call it a summary statement of Christmas. I guess you could say that the Gospel writer John who didn’t write about Jesus’ birth, also had that larger picture and purpose in mind when he wrote: “God so loved the world that He gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” That’s the deeper Christmas story. As much as we like to romanticize Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem, and sing Christmas carols, and celebrate the season, we really miss the main message if we don’t grasp his reason for coming. To bring us salvation, to save us from sin and death, to give us a new life, to offer us real joy and lead us to be instruments of peace and hope and love in this world. This bigger picture, this story of Jesus Christ represents the Christmas story according to Jesus, the Savior of the world. Jesus himself describes the purpose of his mission in the gospel of Luke: “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost.” In Mark’s Gospel we hear these words of Jesus: “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Sometimes we focus all of our attention on the birth of the baby and all the details that go along with the story without remembering the meaning of the incarnation. Jesus was born in human form so we could see and know God personally. And this Jesus was born to die, this eternal Son of God took on the form of a human baby in order that he might become the means for our salvation. Jesus, in describing his mission, says: “I have come to do your will, O God.” And what was that will. God willed Jesus to be the Savior. And God willed that He would be our Savior. The Christmas story according to Jesus recognizes the full purpose of why he came, that He entered time for us, to be born as we are, to serve as our example and ultimately to become the sacrifice

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for our salvation on an old rugged cross. Yes, this is a very holy night, but it is a night that also points us to Good Friday, it is a night that points us to the victory Jesus won over sin and death that we celebrate on Easter. And what is required of us is to simply come in faith and trust and experience that message of God's grace and love. To turn to the Lord and receive God's gift of love and grace. And maybe it's the simple trust of a child-like faith that is needed for each of us.

It was Christmas morning and the pastor was walking through the sanctuary getting ready for the worship service, He paused beside the almost life-sized nativity scene and said a prayer for the service and a prayer of thanksgiving to the One whose birth is celebrated. He gazed at all the figures which had been so lovingly crafted, shepherds, wise men, Mary and Joseph. And then he realized it, the manger was empty! The small figure representing baby Jesus was gone. He looked all through the sanctuary and then other parts of the church. But no baby Jesus to be found. He called the custodian, thinking maybe he had seen the missing figure. He called others in the church, but no one had any explanation. Shaking his head sorrowfully, he had to accept the truth that the baby Jesus was not likely mislaid or lost, it must have been stolen. That morning the pastor shared the news with the congregation. For a person to steal the very symbol of their reason for celebrating, their very reason for hope, well, he just did not understand. He announced: "The figure of the Christ child must be returned before this Christmas day is over. No one will ask any questions, but if you know who took it, make sure it is brought back immediately. Well, the manger remained empty throughout the day. Very disappointed and discouraged, the pastor took a walk through the wintry streets of the neighborhood that evening. Ahead of him he saw one of the youngest members of his flock, six year old Tommy. Tommy trudged up the sidewalk proudly pulling behind him a shiny red wagon, obviously a Christmas present he got that day. The pastor was deeply touched because he knew the sacrifice such a gift would be for the boy's family since they could barely make ends meet. He stopped so he could wish Tommy a Merry Christmas and share the joy of the little boy's new wagon. But as he got closer, then he noticed it. The wagon was not empty. There in the wagon, lay the baby Jesus, now wrapped in a blanket but not quite hidden. The pastor with

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a face of disappointment leaned down beside Tommy. Yes, Tommy was only six but he still was old enough to know that stealing was wrong. The pastor made that crystal clear to the little boy when the boy's seemingly guiltless clear eyes began filling with what the pastor was sure were penitent tears. When the lecture was over, the little Tommy quivered and began to speak: "But Pastor, I didn't steal Jesus. It wasn't like that at all. I've been praying and asking Jesus for a red wagon for Christmas for a long time and I promised Him that when I got it, I'd take him out for the first ride."

Maybe that's the spirit Jesus was talking about when he said: "Unless you become like a little child, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven." It is coming to Jesus with that simple trust and faith. Acknowledging that this child born in Bethlehem came with a purpose of eternal significance. We turn to him in faith. We give thanks for this wonderful gift and we offer our lives to the One who was born in Bethlehem for our salvation.

On that first Christmas the light came into the world. John's gospel declares it: "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has never been able to put it out. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world." That's the message for this world of trouble and hurt and brokenness on this holy night.

That's the message for you and me to grasp and hold on to. It's the Christmas story from the eternal point of view. It is a story of great joy. Jesus' Christmas story includes more than Mary and Joseph, it is a story that includes more than angels, and shepherds, and wise men. Jesus' story also includes you and me.