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– Jeremiah 6:16

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## *Have You Discovered Christmas?*

“But the angel said unto them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord.’” (Luke 2: 10 - 11)

One of the most familiar holidays of the year is Christmas. To children it is thought to be the most wonderful day of the year. What does the Biblical account of the Christmas story tell us?

1.) Christmas Is an Event: It is history and the baby Jesus born in Bethlehem was one of the greatest events of all time. Even though we cannot be sure of the actual date of Christ’s birth, Christmas is as real as our own birthday. The baby that lay in the manger was the miracle we call the incarnation. God became man without ceasing to be God. The creator of the world became a child. The birth of Christ has had more of an impact on the world than the birth of anyone else. To anyone who is a Christian, becoming born again was a real event in their life and Jesus Christ has had more of an influence on them than anyone else ever has or ever will.

2.) Christmas Is an Evangel: Christmas is good news because it proclaims that in spite of what we are, God loves us so much that He has provided a remedy from the destruction of sin. “*Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance, ‘Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.’*” (1 Timothy 1: 15) Since the time of Adam’s and Eve’s disobedience, God had promised a deliverer. In the baby born in Bethlehem, God fulfilled His promise to bring salvation to the world. By the sacrifice of Himself on the cross, Jesus overthrew the lawlessness of sin and He sets Christians free from sin’s bondage.

3.) Christmas Is an Experience: As you think of how Jesus was delivered in a lowly stable, most certainly an unfit place for the birth of a king, be reminded of His humility, for He came out of perfection to walk this guilty earth and suffer crucifixion for the sins of the world. You can walk into any stable that is cleaned three times daily, even into places that stable horses worth tens of thousands of dollars, you will find that all stables stink! When you allow the Holy Spirit to examine your heart with the Word of God, you will come to understand that you to are like a stinky stable, unfit for the King of kings to be born and reside in. However, born again Christians do have Jesus Christ living in them through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit of God. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come.*” Jesus comes to live with in Christians to make them like Himself. The sure sign and seal of the indwelling Savior is increasing Christ-likeness. Receiving God’s Christmas gift, Jesus Christ as personal Savior and Lord, will give you new motives, new desires and Holy Spirit empowerment to overcome the sins that try to demand dominion in your life. *Have you discovered Christmas?*

Preacher/Teacher Terry L Laughlin has spent 800 hours prayerfully studying God's Word and has placed in this "Christmas Compilation" eight, Word-filled, Christ-Centered, Holy Spirit anointed messages:

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**Title: Catching the Miracles of Christmas**  
**Theme: Miracles of Christmas**  
**Sermon Series: Grasping the Truths of Christmas**

“The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)

### **Word became flesh**

Miracles are an absolutely essential element in Christianity. If Jesus Christ is not God manifested in the flesh, then our faith is a silly myth. If He did not rise from the dead in bodily form, with the grave being empty and His appearance being recognizable, then we are yet in our sins and, of all people, the most miserable. If the miracle of grace is not verifiable in the transformation of the life of the one who puts his faith and trust in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, then our Christian gospel is a miserable fraud. (The New International Dictionary of the Bible)

C.S. Lewis gives this definition, “A miracle is an interference with nature by supernatural power.” One of the greatest miracles to have ever taken place was in Bethlehem a little over 2,000 years ago, when God interfered with the natural way of bringing children into this world through a virgin who gave birth to a child.

Listen as I read about one of the greatest miracles of all, John 1:14, “The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14) Pray!

*I would propose to you that one of the best ways to grasp the joys of Christmas is to fully understand and be prepared to tell others about the miracles of Christmas.*

Many people including Christians, too often focus on the manger, the stable, and many of the other earthly surroundings of the birth of Christ but miss the truths and purposes of God becoming man.

*Just what are four miracles that took place during that first Christmas season? Christians need to understand and be able to teach others who came at Christmas, how He came, who He came to and the benefits of His coming.*

### **Image of the invisible God**

*Christians need to take the event of the birth of Christ and point people to the miracles that took place at the time of His birth. One being God's coming to earth.*

The world stood amazed and watched as man walked on the moon. They need to know, however, that there was a much more amazing event that took place in Bethlehem. Christ while keeping His Deity, came as a baby and walked this earth for 30 plus years. Christmas is not the celebration of the beginning of Jesus Christ, it is the celebration of His arrival on earth. It must be understood and taught that Jesus' true beginnings were not in a stable.

Colossians 1:15-17 says, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together." (Colossians 1:15-17)

The Holy Spirit wants you to catch this in the first division of today's message, "He is the image of the invisible God." The key word is "image" (*eikon*) and here it means that Jesus is the image of God indicating the revelatory character of the incarnation. Yes Jesus is man; however, His character is the exact representation of God. (Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament; Word meaning in the New Testament) Jesus is not a feeble copy. He is the illumination of, the very essence of the heart of God. Our Lord said, "...Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father." (John 14:9) Jesus is the manifestation of God, literally displaying and proving the very existence of God.

The apostle Paul writes in Colossians 1:19 that "...God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in [Jesus]." (Colossians 1:19) Jesus is a portrait of God not a mere sketch. In Jesus you see the characteristics and the distinguishing marks of God. If you want to see what God is like you must look to Christ. Get a Biblical understanding of Jesus and the Holy Spirit will give you revelation of God.

This Greek word for image (*eikon*) is sometimes a diminutive form of another Greek word (*eikonion*) meaning portrait. It is the equivalent to our word photograph. It is also used when referring to a legal document which is drawn up for a receipt or an IOU. It always includes a description of the chief parties, so that there are no mistakes to all who are involved in the agreement.

I read a story about a boy whose dad went off to World War II for many years. The boy was just a toddler when his dad went away. Before he went away, dad made sure that he left a portrait of himself for his son. After a while the boy forgot about his dad as a person. He would look at the portrait of his dad more and more frequently and say, "If only Dad could step out of the picture and be real."

When Jesus was conceived in Mary's womb by the Holy Spirit, the Word which painted the portrait of Christ stepped out of heaven, the Word became flesh and He is the perfect replica, the precise copy, the image of the Father who made the promise of sending a Savior who would save mankind from their sins. He is more than a picture, He can be known and Jesus makes known to us the image of God and who is God in the flesh. According to the Word of God and the testimony of the Holy Spirit who brings revelation and illumination of the written Word, there is nothing more necessary for God to do in order to show His love for us.

God so loved the world He gave His one and only Son and the Son willingly gave His life on the Cross of Calvary and God by the Holy Spirit raised Jesus from the dead. (John 3:16; John 10:14-18; Romans 8:11)

Religion that focuses on a baby in manger is just dead religion. But true Christianity grasps the truth that the One who laid in that manger is the very image of God, the very One who created all the things in heaven and earth. He controls all kingdoms, powers and rulers and is the one who holds all things together. (Colossians 1:15-17) Christians who understand, grasp and can teach this truth are Christians who enjoy the forgiveness of God, find peace of mind and their purpose in serving the Lord.

### **Being made in human likeness**

*There was much more than just a baby lying in the manger on that night in Bethlehem. He was God coming to earth. Another miracle worth grasping about Christmas is that Jesus is God in the flesh and yet fully man.*

Philippians 2:6-8: "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself..." (Philippians 2:6-8a)

The words the Apostle Paul use in this passage of Scripture are chosen with great care to show the absolute reality that Jesus is God in the flesh as well as truly being man. He is flesh and blood just as you and I. The writer of the Book of Hebrews tells us the great benefit of the Lord becoming man.

"Since the children have flesh and blood, He too shared in their humanity so that by His death He might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels He helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason He had to be made like His brothers in every way, in order that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that He might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because He Himself suffered when He was tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted." (Hebrews 2:14-18)

Satan, the first sinner, is very powerful and effective in taking those who do not have Jesus Christ as personal Savior and Lord and putting them into the bondage of sin. Just as Satan wanted to dethrone God, he finds those who have dead souls and unprotected hearts and causes them to dethrone God in their lives. This causes mankind to curse and reject the Lord, ignore God's will for them and neglect His teachings. They do not seek Him for guidance nor use their talents and abilities for His glory but for their own pleasures. These people live lives marred by the acts of the sinful nature spelled out in Galatians 5:19-21.

Now is a good time to repeat that familiar phrase, "Jesus was born to die." He could not have been tempted as we are, lived a life of victory over sin unless He was of flesh and blood. Being man, the sins of the world were able to be laid upon Him. 1 John 3:8 says, "...The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work." (1 John 3:8) The devil's work was destroyed on the Cross of Christ. (Matthew Henry, Barnes Notes, The Expositors Bible Commentary) Colossians 2:15 says, "And having disarmed the powers and authorities [of Satan]. He, [Jesus] made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross." (Colossians 3:8)

Christians who have come under the blood of Christ are now able to get victory over the flesh, the world, and the devil. The Apostle Paul writes, "For [God] has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves." (Colossians 1:13-14)

Jesus coming to earth with the chief purpose of redeeming fallen mankind gave us a Savior, Priest or rather a Shepherd who is able to help those who are being tempted. The Greek word for "tempted" (*peirazo*) here can mean to try men by adversity, to test their faith and confidence in God. (The Complete Word Study Dictionary; Thru the Bible)

The Bible says, "Because He Himself suffered when He was tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted." (Hebrews 12:18) "Help" (*boetho*) meaning that Jesus will run to our aid at the hearing of a cry for help in times of suffering and pain, trials and temptations. He can give help and deliverance. (The Complete Word Study; The Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible) He has been made like us in flesh and blood in order to sympathize with us and come to our aid and deliverance in compassion and as a Savior who is victorious.

Christians who understand what Jesus' coming as man has purchased for them, become like Dietrich Bonhoeffer who wrote to his twin sister, "It is good to learn early enough that suffering and God are not contradictions but rather unity, for the idea that God Himself is suffering when we suffer is one of the most convincing teachings of Christianity. I think God is nearer to suffering than to happiness, and to experience [the presence of the Lord in trials and temptations gives way toward peace and rest and gains a strong and courageous heart.]" (Citation: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in a letter to his twin sister, Sabine. Christian History, no. 32)

I once read the testimony of a young lady who had let Satan lie to her about how she was worthless. At the age of 12 she began sleeping around, doing drugs and drinking and she gave her family a hard time by punishing them with her attitude because of unforgiveness and bitterness. She felt everyone who actually trying to help her where against her. One evening the family had to call the police because she had gotten so out of control. Over the course of just a few years she had been in and out of several mental hospitals. Drugs, drinking and a non productive life caused her to begin to hear voices.

She finally responded to a brother's invitation to start attending a Bible believing church and there the Lord met her cry for help and He touched her. She has sensed His presence in her life ever since that day when she received Christ as her personal Savior and Lord. She writes, "He restored my broken heart and now I am stronger than I have ever been. I am also now in Bible College and I plan to become a youth pastor." (Bec James: SheLovesGod.com)

Jesus, being born of the flesh, can minister to those born in the lowliest state for He was born in a stable. (Luke 2:7) He can minister to the poor for He was born to poor parents. (Luke 2:24) He can minister to those who are raised in despicable places and poor religious conditions. (John 1:46; The New International Dictionary of the Bible) Jesus knows how to come to the aid of those who are opposed by the religious and rejected by their listeners. (Mark 14:1-2; Matthew 13:53-58) He can minister to those who are being accused of being out of their minds and possessed by demons while serving God. (Mark 3:21-22) He can comfort those who have been betrayed by a co-worker in the work of God. (Mark 14:10-11) He can strengthen those who have been deserted in the heat of persecution. (Mark 15:50) He can strengthen those who stand before courts being falsely accused. (John 18:33) And He will be at the side of those who are being executed for the cause of Christ under false charges. (John 19:16)

The writer of the Book of Hebrews gives us this awesome promise about the Christ who is born of flesh and blood, "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." (Hebrews 4:14-16)

### **Jesus came through and came to common people**

*The blessings of having Christ being man born of flesh and blood, being fully man goes on and on and on.* Testimony after testimony can be shared by those who have grasped the truths of Christmas, Jesus being fully man and God. Another truth worth grasping is that Jesus came through and came to common people.

Luke 2:7 says, “and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped Him in cloths and placed Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.” (Luke 2:7) Luke 2:8-11 says, “And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord.’” (Luke 2:8-11)

The Bible goes on to say, “When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.’ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen Him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child,” (Luke 2:15-17)

The Lord came through and came to common people. The King of the universe was not born in a king’s palace nor was His birth announced first to the priesthood. No, He was conceived in a poor woman, Mary, who was simply a willing vessel of the Lord and a kingdom seeker. I love Mary’s answer to the angel Gabriel, (Luke 1:26) “I am the Lord’s servant... May it be to me as you have said.” (Luke 1:38) She was submissive to the Lord’s will for her.

The secret to grasping the truths and joy of Christmas is to be a willing humble common person sold out to the cause of Christ.

There is something worth grasping about these shepherds who were most likely devout men seeking the kingdom of God. They were servants about their business ready to receive the good news God was about to give them through the angels.

Take note, no one is out of the way of a divine visit of the Holy Spirit of God. The call of God to hear the good news can come at anytime and the privilege of spreading the good news to others will come to those who are diligently working in their callings. These shepherds were obedient, diligently doing their work; they were not sleeping, but keeping watch.

Christians must have a willingness to spread all they know about Jesus Christ. There can be no slumbering, nor wishing they were somewhere else, but faithfulness to their call and having a heart hungry and ready to pass on what God’s Word says about Christ.

**We might live through Him**

*Christmas came to common people and Jesus came for our benefit.* So Christians may no longer be bound by sin but be changed and set free to live a life of righteousness, walking in fellowship with God, Christ and in step with the Holy Spirit.

1 John 4:9 says, “This is how God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him.” (1 John 4:9)

There is a huge difference between existence and true life. All of mankind who walk upon this earth are existing but not all have life that is truly satisfying and pleasing to God. A famous doctor once said that men would find a cure for cancer more quickly than they would find a cure for selfish living. Jesus Christ gives Christians His purpose for their existence and directions for which they are to live. He gives them the heart desire and the strength to live pleasing lives to God. This life in Christ brings peace and this living turns mere existence into fullness of a life that testifies to the Lord’s mercy and grace. (William Barclay)

Jesus explained clearly why He came to this earth. John 18:37 says, “...In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.” (John 18:37)

“Truth” (*alethia*) here means that Jesus would testify to divine truth or true faith found only in and through Him. He is the key source of understanding the true gospel and in the declaration of the will of the One true God. He through the Holy Spirit of truth can guide in true worship as opposed to heathen practices. (The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament)

Heathen practice today is that worldly thinking among men that wants to recognize God only when it seems to be beneficial to them. For instance, when a tragedy strikes our nations borders, then prayer is okay. However, to seek God in prayer for daily guidance is a violation of a so called “Separation of Church and State.” There is a worldly opinion that Christ should not be mentioned nor worshiped publicly during the Christmas Holiday season because it may offend others.

Biblical truth is that the Children of God are to “...pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayer.” (Ephesians 6:18) Truth is that the only reason for this season is to celebrate the birth of Christ. To rob God of the worship due to Him and call it “Happy Holidays” so stores can have record sales for the year is to rob God for financial gain.

In John 10:10 He says, “...I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” (John 10:10) It is because of Jesus that God will send His Holy Spirit into the lives of Christians. Thus, they may live a full life walking with the Lord and exercising their Holy Spirit gifts under the guidance of sacrificial love. All this for the cause of Christ and for the benefit of all they serve.

Grasp the truths of Christmas this holy season and pray for opportunities to tell others about the miracle of God's coming to Earth when Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Grasp the benefits of Jesus being fully man so He can be the compassionate Shepherd to the Children of God. Let the Holy Spirit place so deep within your heart the truth that Christ through the Spirit of Christ indwells common people and makes great use of them. Lastly, meditate upon the benefits of Christ coming.

Let us pray!



**Title: Christmas Treasures Worth Pondering**

**Theme: What is so Special about Christmas**

**Series: Grasping the Truths of Christmas**

“But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.” (Luke 2:19)

### **There is much in “Grasping the Truths of Christmas” that is worthy of pondering**

*On the twenty-fifth of this month much of the United States will close their stores, business offices will be closed and very few people will be traveling in comparison to the normal day of the week. Christmas has even provided a day off for those who reject the worship due to Christ, the Savior of the world.*

The response of most today, even church attendees, is no where near like those who heard the proclamation of the birth of Christ on that first Christmas. However, to Holy Spirit-illuminated Christians there are treasures worth pondering in their hearts. They become like Mary, who in the midst of all the excitement, took time to ponder. The Bible says, “But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.” (Luke 2:19)

This passage of Scripture is the beautiful picture of a humble trusting heart that is after God. Mary had been told that her child was truly of God. The angel Gabriel said to Mary, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.” (Luke 1:35) Both Joseph and Mary were told that they were to name the baby, conceived through the Holy Spirit, Jesus. (Matthew 1:20-21; Luke 1:31,35) Mary and Joseph no doubt talked about their visits from the angel with each other over the several months of her pregnancy, therefore, she knew more than anybody that baby Jesus was the Messiah, (*Messias*) the Christ, (*Christos*) meaning “the anointed One” or the “anointed.” (The New International Dictionary of the Bible)

We live in a time which names mean very little or nothing. However, Joseph and Mary lived in a time when names meant something and almost everyone knew what they meant. I am convinced they knew why they were to name the Son of God, Jesus, (*Iesous*) meaning “Savior.” (The Complete Word Study Dictionary) As a matter of fact the angel, in a dream, told Joseph that he was to give the son born to them the name “Jesus” “because he [would] save His people from their sins.” (Matthew 1:21)

Mary “pondered” (sumballo) meaning to consider, putting one thing with another in her mind while considering the circumstances and all that has been said and then holding them in her heart. (The Complete Word Study Dictionary; Vines Amplified Expository Dictionary of the New Testament Words; Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon)

*I would propose to you there is much in “Grasping the Truths of Christmas” that is worthy of pondering, worth meditating on, and holding within the child of God’s heart. If you are a child of God, then the Holy Spirit has come into your life and has given you revelation and illumination about Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Holy Anointed One, the Savior of your soul. There is much for you to ponder on this Christmas.*

*What is so special about Christmas? Is there relevance in Christmas? What is the reason for and the result of Christmas?*

### **Many do not know the “Relevance of Christmas”**

*There are three truths that the Holy Spirit of God wants you to ponder on today. Many do not know the “Relevance of Christmas.” “Relevant,” means having to do with the case at hand.*

The Apostle Paul writes about the case at hand, Jesus Christ, “...being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:6-8)

On June 6, 1944, a date known ever since as D-Day, a mighty armada crossed a narrow strip of sea from England to Normandy, France. Simultaneously U.S., British, and Canadian forces landed on five separate beachheads. By the end of August 1944, just three months later all of northern France was liberated, and the invading forces reorganized for the drive into Germany, where they eventually meet with Soviet forces advancing from the east to bring an end to the Nazi grip on western Europe. That was big news regarding the results of World War II.

Just a little over 2,000 years ago, bigger news came through the angel announcing the birth of Christ, when God in the flesh came, walked on this war-torn earth during it’s battle with man’s sinful flesh, the world’s view and Satan. Sin always holds a multitude in its grip. God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit invaded and broke that grip by Jesus coming on the first Christmas. Jesus, being God and man, made the way to take on the sins of the world upon Himself, pay the ultimate price on the Cross of Calvary, be raised from the dead thus, getting victory over sin and death and liberating all who accept Him as personal Savior and Lord.

One truth worth pondering in Christ's coming is that He "emptied Himself" or rather "made Himself nothing" and became man. This was not "the humility of Christ," but rather what theologians refer to as the "humiliation of Christ." (The Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible; Thru the Bible)

Let the Holy Spirit place this deep within your heart, the Lord of the universe – He who existed in eternity and perfection, in glory and majesty, in dominion and power stepped down and came to walk this guilty sod, which is so full of sin, so He could take on the humiliation of sin.

Ponder these Biblical truths about Christ being man:

1.) The Lord, whom we are to serve for eternity came to serve us. As a matter fact one of His purposes in coming was to show all what God is like. He taught that Christians are to become His disciples and He said, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves." (Luke 22:25-27)

2.) The Lord, whom we are to love, came and showed the ultimate love for us. Jesus said, "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:12-13) There is a truth proclaimed often this time of the year, "Christ was born to die" and He commands us to have the same measure of love for our brothers in Christ as He showed for us. The beloved John caught the truths of Jesus' teaching. We read in 1 John 3:16, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers." (1 John 3:16)

3.) The Lord, whom we are to seek with all our hearts so that He may be found, came to seek that which was lost. While in the home of the tax collector, Zacchaeus, the Lord said, "Today salvation has come to this house... For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." (Luke 19:9-10) This passage of Scripture expresses the heart of Jesus' ministry.

Those who are bound by the flesh, the world and Satan's lies are always looking for something and are not listening for the call of the Lord upon their souls. However, He left the abode of God, heaven, to seek that which is lost and offer fellowship to those who will let Him into their hearts and lives.

### **Jesus came for a specific reason**

*Christ coming to earth is worth pondering in the hearts of Christians.* Jesus also came for a specific reason.

Many people and church attendees today form their views of the true God much as the pagan mythologist did. Their view of God is the product of their own experiences or the experiences they have heard recounted by others and is not formed by seeing God's inerrant revelation of Himself in the Scriptures. (Dr. Jim Berg, Created for His Glory)

The Bible says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning... The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:1-2,14)

This is the basic statement of the Incarnation, for Jesus entered into this earth through the gateway of childbirth and took up residence among men. His incarnation was the full manifestation of grace and truth because it was the greatest possible expression of God's compassion for people and the most perfect way of conveying truth to their understanding." God's personal revelation of Himself in Christ has no parallel elsewhere, nor has it ever been repeated. (The expositors Bible Commentary; Barnes Notes) The incarnation is often very hard to fully explain in just a phrase or sentence.

Paul Harvey took time to tell the story of a man whom the Lord gave a glimpse of one of the purposes of the incarnation.

On a raw winter night a man heard an irregular thumping sound against the kitchen storm door. He went to a window and watched as tiny, shivering sparrows, attracted to the evident warmth and light that was inside, beat in vain against the glass.

Touched, the farmer bundled up and trudged through the fresh snow to open the barn door for the struggling birds. He turned on the lights, tossed some hay in a corner, and sprinkled a trail of saltine crackers to direct them into the barn. But the sparrows, which had scattered in all directions when he emerged from the house, hid in the darkness.

He tried various tactics; circling behind the birds to drive them toward the barn, tossing cracker crumbs in the air toward them, retreating to his house to see if they would flutter into the barn on their own. Nothing worked and the birds could not understand that he actually desired to help. He withdrew to his house and watched the doomed sparrows through a window. As he stared, a thought hit: "If only I could become a bird – one of them – just for a moment in time... I could lead them to warmth and safety." Meditating on this thought he grasped a principle of the incarnation. Notice, I said a principle to the incarnation, not the whole truths of it.

Christ coming in the flesh was for man to see what God is like and to show Christians how to live the abundant life in the midst of a sin-torn world. William Barclay wrote in regards to the incarnation, "In Jesus we see the creating Word of God, the controlling reason of God, taking manhood upon Himself. In Jesus we see God living life as He would live it, thus, showing us how we should live on earth."

Because of the incarnation, through Jesus Christ we see what real love is and how to show it to others. We see how to communicate to God through prayer and how to live a life of obedience to God's commands and decrees, how to defeat the attacks of Satan, overcome the flesh and the world. Through knowing the life Christ lived down here on earth, we see what it is like to live a life that truly trusts in God.

Jesus is the embodiment of all that God is. Jesus said, "... Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father." (John 14:9) Jesus came to make understanding God simplistic. Very few people can grasp abstract ideas; most people think in pictures. We could think and argue forever and we would very likely not be able to give a clear definition of beauty. It seems ever since modern man began to think about God he has have been trying to define just who and what He is – and the best description of Him cannot be clearer than getting Holy Spirit revelation through the written Word of God about Christ. (William Barclay) A lifetime of study and thought could not exhaust the truths of the incarnation.

One more treasure worth pondering is, "...We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only..." (John 1:14)

"Glory," (*doxes*) as it is used here, means God's self-manifestation was exhibited in the character and life of Jesus Christ. God's glory was recognized in Jesus' divine character. (Vines Amplified Expository Dictionary; The Complete Word Study) Jesus was the glorious power and the full perfect guiding light of God, the magnificence of God. This word, glory, refers to that which is the visible presence of God among men. (William Barclay)

The practical application of what Jesus was and is can be explained by meditating upon Exodus 40:34-38. The cloud in Exodus symbolized God's presence. What John is saying is, "We beheld," actually saw, the Shekinah glory, God's very presence actually living among us. (Practical Word Studies in the New Testament) Because of everything Jesus did upon this earth and His going to the Father and the sending the Holy Spirit to us, we can behold the presence of Christ living in us through the Spirit of Christ. (Romans 8:9-11) There is no greater Christmas present than having, experiencing and enjoying the life changing presence of Jesus Christ in our lives. And that is a treasure worth pondering.

***Christians today can really know the Lord***

*Just as the people in the time of Jesus walking upon this earth beheld the glory of God, Christians today can really know the Lord.*

The life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus mean that God acted decisively to save people from sin and eternal death. The God who saves people in Christ is the God of His redeemed, those who are under the blood of Jesus Christ. And when sinners find Jesus Christ as both Savior and Lord they are allowed to come to God because of the cost paid at Calvary. These Christians are under the new covenant of whom the writer of the Book of Hebrews wrote about.

In Hebrews 8:10-12 the writer quotes Jeremiah as he foresaw this dispensation that we live in today, which is Jesus Christ being Mediator. (Hebrews 8:10-12; The Expositors Bible Commentary; Barnes Notes; Matthew Henry Commentary; The Pulpit Commentary)

Hebrews 8:10-12 says "...I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." (Hebrews 8:10-12)

All those who enter into the new covenant and are interested in all that the Lord is doing in this time in which we live today, will become acquainted with the Lord; learn His character and determine His will for them in this life and service unto Him. Each child of God will have his own intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus. God Himself will put His Holy Spirit within each of them and He will write His Word upon their hearts and move them to follow His decrees and be careful to keep His laws. The Lord says through Ezekiel, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws." (Ezekiel 36:26-27)

The ministry that Jesus had on this earth surpassed that of the Levitical priesthood and His ministry is far more exciting. (Hebrews 8:6; The Expositors Bible Commentary) He will have worshipers who from the heart are obedient to Him, worship, which come from an expression of love rather than from works trying to obtain merit before the Lord. He will move them by His Holy Spirit to seek His truths found in God's Word, thus, birthing a relationship built on trust and faithfulness.

I remember before I got saved nearly twenty years ago, I had no draw to the things of God. I had no desire to be in the house of God, have fellowship with Christians, and there was no way I was going to read the Bible. I got saved in August 1987 and in September the Holy Spirit spoke to my heart about getting a Bible and by October the Lord gave me a hunger to be in His Word. To this day He moves me to want to know more and constantly reminds me to strive for obedience to it.

The Holy Spirit moved me to study God's Word in January of 1991 and He enabled me to stay up late at night, He moved on this church, CrossRoads Church to pay for my schooling and by May of 1998 after many trials He made the way for me to obtain 82 credit hours with the Assembly of God, maintaining a 3.5 GPA. In the last 6 months, the Holy Spirit has put a new fire in my heart for prayerfully reading God's Word and just recently a desire for deeper study. I have always read and studied the Word; however, this is a fresh touch. I want to know more of God's Word, more of Him, more of Christ and have a deeper walk with the Holy Spirit. For weeks now I've sat in my chair, pondering on how I can get to know more of God, Christ and enjoy a deeper fellowship in the Holy Spirit. In my office for weeks now I have been silently praying asking the Lord for Bible software so I can have what I need to prayerfully work on critical ministry needs when I am away from my office.

Just recently my wife came and told me what she wants to get me for Christmas. She had heard on AFR about a new high quality Bible software used by people who I know are greatly used of God, Christians like Kay Arthur, Joshua McDowell, John MacArthur and John Piper and many more.

Is this taking us off the point of the knowing God? No, for God's Word says in the very same Book of Hebrews in chapter 13:7-8, "Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.<sup>8</sup> Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." (Hebrews 13:7-8)

There are Christians that the Lord is going to bring into your path that live the life, that excel in what God is called them to do and have some kind of spiritual authority over you. "Leaders," (*hegeomai*) here is a general term, therefore, this means anyone who has authority over you and has the Biblical integrity to teach you the Word of God in regards to all that you are doing. Most generally these leaders will be elders or spiritual leaders in a church. It is the outcome of their ministry that determines your loyalty and your undivided attention. Once Christian character is established, take heed to their teachings and imitate their faith in God, their obedience to Christ and their willingness to walk by the leading of the Holy Spirit of God, in good times, trials and victory over temptations. (Thayers Greek-English Lexicon; The Complete Word Study Dictionary; Thru the Bible; Matthew Henry Commentary; The Expositors Bible Commentary)

The Lord is going to use His Word and set before you Christians, who live a life reflecting a relationship with Him, to show you how you should live the Christian life before your family, friends and co-workers. Knowing God and how to know Him more is worth pondering in the heart of Christians.

## **Have you opened the gift God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit has for you**

*What is so special about Christmas?* The Christ and the walk He had on this earth is "Relevant." God sent His Son to invade the dominion of sin upon this earth and the Holy Spirit to liberate Christians from the grip of the flesh, the world and the devil.

Christ coming in the flesh was for man to see what God is like and to show Christians how to live the abundant life in the midst of a sin-torn world. Because of the incarnation, through Jesus Christ we see what real love is and how to show it to others. We see how to communicate to God through prayer and how to live a life of obedience to God's commands and decrees. Knowing about the life of Christ gives us the knowledge of how to truly trust in God.

Because of Christmas, Christians can know God, be intimate with Christ, learn His character and determine His will for them in this life and service unto Him.

Rick Warren told about a very embarrassing time in His life when he found an unopened Christmas gift in one of his drawers of his desk. The gift was given to him a year before at Christmas time. He opened it and it said, "A gift for Rick Warren." It was a wonderful gift and he was concern that the certificate had expired. The point is an unopened gift is a worthless gift.

Have you opened the gift God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit has for you? You can choose this day to enjoy the gift of getting victory in your life through having Jesus Christ as personal Savior and Lord. Thus, the flesh, the world, and the Devil will no longer have a death grip on your heart and life.

Have you grasped the glory of the incarnation of Christ? Do you live a life that expresses Christ-like character, a hunger for God's will in this life and service unto Him?

Let us pray!



**Title: Eternal Gifts of Christmas**  
**Theme: What Will You Find at Christmas**  
**Series: Grasping the Truths of Christmas**

“Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace to men, on whom His favor rests.” (Luke 2:14)

***Eternal gifts for those who grasp the truths of Christmas with their hearts***

*There are eternal gifts for those who grasp the truths of Christmas with their hearts.* Understanding those gifts and walking in the free grace by which these gifts come will completely change a person’s attitude toward the season which we now celebrate.

*I would propose to you that there are wonderful benefits for those on whom God’s favor rests.* Most people including church attendees quote only part of the angel’s message from the Lord in Luke 2:14, “Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace to men...” However, the Holy Spirit leads the Children of God to understand the rest of the verse, “...on whom His favor rests.” It is Christians with a heart after God that are the ones that express a life that walks in the grace and mercy of God.

Pastor Rick Warren was 100% correct when he said, “You are going to find what you are looking for this Christmas.” For those who have the heart of Pharaoh, He is going to give them that hard heart they so want. (Exodus 8:15; 9:15; 10:1,20,27; 11:1; 14:8; Joshua 11:20; 2 Chronicles 36:13) For those who want to believe the lies of those brought forth by the devil, the Lord will cause them to believe those lies. (2 Thessalonians 2:11; 2 Timothy 3:3-4)

However, there is something different for those who have the heart of David after his sin was exposed by the prophet Nathan, who wrote, “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.” (Psalm 51:10-12)

To these types of spiritual hearts God will cast His favor in great amounts. Those who have the favor of God upon their lives will live a life that expresses God’s forgiveness, peace of mind, and eternal life found in Christ Jesus.

*The Holy Spirit has this question for all today, “What will you find this Christmas? What will be the expression of your life for all to see?”*

## Forgiveness of sins through His name

*There are many benefits for those who grasp the truths of Christmas, one being forgiveness.*

Acts 10:43 says, “All the prophets testify about [Jesus] that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name.” (Acts 10:43)

A little boy wrote Santa Claus saying, “Dear Santa, there are three boys who live in our home. Jeffery is two and he is good some of the time. David is four and he is good some of the time. Norman is seven and he is good all the time, I am Norman.” (Rick Warren, Christmas Message)

The Bible tells one truth that must be grasped there are no Normans in this world. If we could tap into the brains of Christians and recall all they thought and did this last year and project it upon our big screen there would be some extremely embarrassed Christians. There are no Normans in this world. Thus, even today we are in great need of God’s forgiveness and mercy both available in Jesus’ Name.

A Christmas card sent to Pastor Rick Warren said, “If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent an educator. If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent a scientist. If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent an economist. If our greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent an entertainer. But our greatest need was forgiveness so He sent a Savior.” The greatest need for all of mankind is forgiveness and the greatest need for Christians is the continued forgiveness that can be found in Jesus’ Name.

“Forgiveness” (*apheseoes*) in Acts 10:43 means to release one’s sins from the sinner. This required Jesus’ coming as man so the sins of the world may be cast upon Him. Thus He can take on the punishment of sin upon Himself. He did this because His Father sent Him, and He came voluntarily. The reason this forgiveness needs to be a continual forgiveness is because the children of God are not delivered from the presence of sin when they get saved. Thus, Christians will slip into sin. However, sin will not have dominion over them because the Holy Spirit will convict them of sin and draw them to repentance. In Jesus’ Name they will be forgiven. (The Complete Word Study Dictionary; 1 John 1:8; Hebrews 8:24 )

1 John 1:8 says, “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” (1 John 1:8) Christians who think that they no longer sin deceive themselves.

Dr J. Vernon McGee was in Bible College. When he met his first room mate he had quite a surprise. His roommate informed him that he had not committed a sin over the last three years. Dr. McGee was shocked to meet someone who was so sanctified in this life that he no longer slipped into sin.

As time went on, Vernon McGee's roommate blamed him for everything that went wrong, no matter what. After the first semester, freshman were able to change roommates. McGee went to his roommate and informed him that he was moving into another room with someone who was like him. That is, a sinner saved by grace who God was still doing a work in. Vernon and his new roommate got along just great. Two Christians standing in need of much prayer, just two sinners resting in the continued forgiveness of God given to them in Jesus' name.

The great news of the angel was, "...in the town of David a Savior has been born to you: He is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2: 11) "Savior" (*soter*) is Jesus Christ who delivers and preserves at saving sinners from the danger and destruction of sin, and puts sinners in a state of prosperity and happiness. Jesus as Messiah, the Savior of men, saves the repentant sinner from the guilt and the power of sin, from eternal death, from punishment, and misery as the consequence of sin. (The Complete Word Study Dictionary)

Walter B. Knight wrote about an African pagan, Masagr. He was a man known for lying, stealing, polygamy, slavery, and drunkenness. After hearing the message of God's forgiving and saving grace found in Jesus Christ, he surrendered His heart and life to Jesus. He was very old and so wanted others to hear the good news that was proclaimed by the angels, "A Savior has been born to you." He saved every penny he could and even sold his cow to buy a bicycle.

He found a missionary, gave the bicycle to him and encouraged him to find a young person who was full of zeal for the Lord, that he may go and tell his fellow tribesmen about Jesus Christ.

This pagan African became a child of God, forgiven and saved from the sins that once held him in bondage. He had the Holy Spirit living in him, giving him the same burning desire as the shepherds had on that first Christmas. He wanted others to hear what has been told them about Jesus.

### **Great peace**

*Christians who find the Christ of Christmas are sinners who are saved by grace. They depend upon the forgiveness that is given in Jesus' name. And this brings them a great peace.*

Psalm 119:165 says, “Great peace have they who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble.” (Psalm 119:165) “Law” (*torah*) is used twenty-five times in Psalm 119 in parallel with various other words with the same meaning. The word in itself is an active verb meaning to love the instructions in a general way from the Lord. It means loving the ways, customs and directions from God as David so longed to know and love the Lord’s ways. (The Complete Word Study)

There are those who develop such close relationships in Christian marriages, with Christian parents, with friends, co-workers and spiritual overseers, that they long to be around these Christians for instruction and guidance in the Word of God. These Christians will deny themselves certain pleasures in life to prayerfully read and study the Word of God. They pray not only revelation of God’s Word, but illumination of the Word so they can have the Lord’s strength to live it out. These Christians find themselves getting victory over the flesh, overcoming the world, and exposing the lies of the devil.

They find peace in the way they use the Lord’s provision, talents, and abilities the Lord has given them. The guidance of the Holy Spirit as He illuminates the Word of God in their lives enables them to walk victoriously rather than stumbling over the temptations and in the trials of life.

Pastor Rick Warren very rightfully observed that there are three things that rob people from enjoying Christmas. They are guilt, grief, and grudges.

Satan has a way of bringing up past regrets around Christmas time. He uses family members, co-workers and even those in the church to point out past sins of people. The great news is that if the child of God has confessed his sin to the Lord and is producing the fruit of repentance, then those sins are not held against him anymore. The Holy Spirit wrote through Ezekiel, “But if a wicked man turns away from all the sins he has committed and keeps all my decrees and does what is just and right, he will surely live; he will not die. None of the offenses he has committed will be remembered against him. (Ezekiel 18:21-22) The prophet Micah gives this promise of God regarding the sins of the repentant, God will “...hurl all [their] iniquities into the depths of the sea.” (Micah 7:19) (The Expositors Bible Commentary; Matthew Henry)

It is like the Lord takes those sins that have been confessed and turned from, calls them up on the computer screen, highlights them, and pushes the delete button. The list of sins goes blank. Sins unknown or repented for will not be recalled by the Lord.

Christmas time is that time of the year when grief haunts many. Loved ones that have passed on, and broken relationships lurk around each corner. Unmet expectations hit hard at this time of the year. Every Christian has a cross to bear and they must bear it daily. (Luke 9:23) However, because of Christ they do not have to bear it alone. Jesus said, “Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”<sup>29</sup> Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” (Matthew 11:28-29)

Roy Fowler saw an illustration that shows so clearly how Christians try to live. While in the Philippines he saw the driver of a caribou wagon stop for a very old man who was carrying a heavy load. The driver offered the old man a ride for free. Carefully the old gentleman accepted. He got into the wagon and held on to the rails but never set his load he down in the wagon.

So many Christians are carrying a big load and they refuse to lay it into Jesus’ hands. They live miserable lives and carry unnecessary burdens, hoping to hold on until they get to heaven.

There are plenty of rewards here on this earth for Christians who will just lay their burdens into Jesus hands. Christians are called to take Christ’s yoke upon them. Christians cannot find rest if they are looking only for personal comfort and escape from Christian duty, for this will make them restless and miserable. They will only find ease as they give themselves and what has been given to them to the service of Jesus Christ. (The Pulpit Commentary)

As afflictions in Christ abound and are prolonged, consolations abound and perseverance is given by Jesus as long as Christians go to Him as teacher for He invites them to be His students. (Matthew Henry Commentary)

As Christians throw off the yoke of the flesh, the world and the lies of the devil, they find that Jesus’ yoke is easy and fashioned just for them to make them Christ-like. Jesus said “My yoke is easy.” (Matthew 11:30) “Easy” (*chrestos*) means well fitting. It is not harsh or galling nor will it put a callous on the spiritual heart. (The Complete Bible Dictionary; William Barclay; The Preachers Outline & Sermon Bible)

As Christians carry their cross they must bear and lay their burdens into the hands of Jesus Christ and allow what He is taking them through to mold them into His image. They will find that the yoke He puts on them is easy.

The yoke refers to oxen’s yoke. The yoke was a wooden collar-like instrument placed on the neck and shoulders of the oxen. It was extremely important that the yoke be fitted for the shoulders of the oxen to prevent rubbing the flesh raw and causing sores. Measurements were taken, the yoke was roughed out and then oxen were brought back to have the yoke tailor-made. According to some traditions, some carpenter’s shop may very well have carried signs like “My yoke fits well.” (William Barclay; The Preacher’s Outline & Sermon Bible)

The yoke refers to a man's life and task as he lives on this earth. Jesus is saying to take on His yoke, not the yoke of the flesh, the world, or the devil's lies. His yoke will fit Christians perfectly, making them useful to the life and task that He has planned for them down here. (The Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible)

Whatever God has you facing right now is made to fit you perfectly. You have the Spiritual gifts, talents, and abilities to handle everything He allows you to go through. Therefore, lay your grief into His loving hands and surrender to His will for you.

Grudges and resentful are keeping many from enjoying Christmas. People, who have been hurt, hurt others by what they say, what they do, and even with their presence. This is done intentionally and unintentionally, and how Christians respond to that hurt will determine their level of happiness in this life, especially around Christmas time. Very few people walk continuously and victoriously over the sin of resentment. It so easily entangles, and can grip you at a moment's notice.

Jesus gives us a powerful truth that must be grasped in forgiving. He says, "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." (Matthew 6:14-15) This passage of Scripture is found in the teaching of Jesus Christ's teaching about prayer, just before His teachings on fasting.

One of the most cheerful men of God I have ever known of in ministry was Dr. Bill Bright, a man whom I am convinced allowed the Lord to teach Him much about prayer and fasting. Dr. Bill Bright is the founder of Campus Crusade for Christ. I remember being around him a little in Louisville, Kentucky. I watched the ministry he had overseen for some time. I once heard him say that it was through fasting and prayer that the Holy Spirit of God enabled Him to release all resentment toward everyone who had ever hurt him in any way.

He was most certainly the most joyful man in ministry that I have ever known about. He testified once, "The Holy Spirit has given me the ability to not hold grudges, there is absolutely not one person or circumstance in my life that I am resentful over."

The Holy Spirit wants Christians to know the joy of Christmas by becoming like Jesus, letting Him clear their hearts of any guilt, take their grief upon himself, and free them freed from all grudges so that they can have a joyous Christmas spirit.

### **Gift of God is eternal life**

*The Christ of Christmas most certainly wants Christians to know His peace. He wants all to have the gift of eternal life.*

Everyone is going to die someday. The Bible says, “Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment,” (Hebrews 9:27) Everyone who has ever been conceived in his mother’s womb has eternal existence. It is up to each individual to decide just where they are going to spend it. The choice is heaven or hell.

The fact is everyone is going to spend more time on the other side of this life than is spent here. Some will live fifty, sixty, seventy, eighty, ninety and maybe even a 100 years on this side. The other side is forever.

Romans 6:23 says, “the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 6:23)

The Devil is a paymaster and he will make sure you suffer the consequences of sin. Those wages are death, and eternal separation from God. Through faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, by the power of the Holy Spirit Christians enjoy the gift of eternal life in heaven.

Christianity is not the stage that someone has reached but always the direction of life that a saved man is heading. Instead of living a life that is bondage to sin, it is a life reaching out to and obtaining righteousness. It is a life fed by the Word of God, Illuminated by the Holy Spirit. A man’s talents, abilities, possessions and Holy Spirit gifts are spent for the glory of God, and not on self and the accumulation of worldly wealth.

Receiving the Gift of God, Jesus Christ as personal Savior and Lord, offers three wonderful gifts. He clears the Christian’s past, takes care of him in his present state in life, and secures his future here and in eternity.

The Baptist Standard ran the true story of a man whom, I believe, came to understand that Jesus was the only person who could give him the forgiveness he sought, comfort in his most difficult circumstance and determination of where his eternal existence will be.

There was a poor drunkard who awakened one morning in a strange kind of bed. He felt something near him that was warm and soft, which was much different from his usual sleeping place in an alley somewhere. Finally it dawned on him that he was in a stable lying right beside a cow which was also lying in the straw beside him.

He was hungry, but realized that those in the street would be too offended by his low sinful condition to give him any breakfast. Then he heard those familiar Christmas bells that rang every year on Christmas morning. He realized that he had spent Christmas Eve night in a stable.

His thoughts turned to that story of Christ being born in a stable. He thought maybe the Christ who was born in a lowly place could help a poor fellow like himself, for he had heard the story of the birth of Christ and the gospel message before. So right then and there he chose to get down on his knees and invite Jesus into his life and heart. He chose to receive the gift of free forgiveness, a Savior who could understand and minister to him right where he was in life and determine where his eternal existence would be. He found Christ at Christmas.

What will you find this Christmas? Jesus offers forgiveness, empowerment for all of life situations and circumstances. He offers a life of true satisfaction and life spent forever with God the Father, Jesus the Son and a fellowship in the Holy Spirit. What will you find this Christmas?

Let us pray!



**Title: God's Internal Gifts**  
**Theme: Benefits of Receiving God's Gift, Christ**  
**Series: Grasping the Truths of Christmas**

“But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests.” (Luke 2:10-11, 14)

### **Have you ever received a gift inside a gift?**

*Have you ever received a gift inside a gift?* I once read of a lady who received a pair of gloves for Christmas. The fingers of the gloves were stuffed with \$20.00 bills. One man received a Russian doll that is Yeltsin on the outside, open that and on the inside is Berniv, open that and on the inside is Stalin, open that and on the inside is a little tiny Lenin. (Rick Warren, Christmas Message)

*I would propose to that when Christians receive the Gift of God, Jesus Christ as personal Savior and Lord, there are gifts that are put on the inside of them that manifest themselves in a way that is beneficial to spiritual health and to the building of the kingdom of God.*

Listen as I read Luke 2:10-11, 14, “But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests.” (Luke 2:10-11, 14)

*Just what are gifts that are the results of having the Gift, Jesus Christ indwelling Christians and what benefit is that to the Body of Christ?*

### **There is an abundant life**

*Receiving Jesus is the greatest Gift anyone can receive, for the receiver of God's Gift there is an abundant life promised.* “Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.” (John 1:12-13)

The description of a Christian is a person who believes in Jesus and has received Christ into his life and heart. This repentant sinner has received Christ as being a gift from God. He must receive the Word of God as final authority, receive God's offer of kindness and begin to take on the Lord's image and His impressions of love as the governing principle of his affections and actions. (Matthew Henry) This repentant sinner believes in the teachings of Jesus Christ and is open to allowing the Holy Spirit to enable him to live out the Word of God. (The Pulpit Commentary)

To the born again Christian, Jesus says, "...I have come that [you] might have life, and have it to the full." (John 10:10) The New American Standard Bible says, "...I came that [you] might have life, and might have it abundantly." (John 10:10 NAS)

This passage of Scripture holds a key truth that the Holy Spirit wants you to grasp today. You can have life in Christ that is beyond existing. Jesus gives meaning to life to those whom He indwells because He gives full satisfaction and perfect guidance. I have always appreciated what Elder Don Malcolm has said often, "Because of Jesus, I have found a reason for living."

"Life," (zoe) meaning a blessed life, life that satisfies, being indwelt by God but not necessarily favored by circumstances. (The Complete Word Study Dictionary) Jesus had on many occasions faced difficult circumstances and so have many of His most faithful servants, the apostle Paul, just to name one. This word for "life" is an active verb affecting every part of the child of God's eternal existence. Jesus' life offered freely is:

**One:** His life is energy, the force and the power of being. Your Christian life has a powerful influence on someone. Jesus has worked so powerfully through certain Christians that many ministries receive prayer and financial support from people they never see face to face on a regular basis, because someone in that ministry has helped, encouraged and fed the soul of someone.

When I was serving on the board of TFC, many times a special love offering would come in from someone who had once been touched by a Teens for Christ staff member some years ago back. They would often write expressing thanks and the love offering sent would often be just the right amount for a specific need. Because Christians receive God's gift, Jesus Christ, they experience the blessing of sharing the life-giving force of Christ to others in need.

Christians who grasp the truths of Christmas know the truth of their very existence and they say like the apostle Paul, "But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of Him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life." (2 Corinthians 2:14-16)

**Two:** His life is opposite of perishing. This gift of deliverance from condemnation and death is the guarantee of being part of the resurrection of the children of God. This new resurrected body will not see deterioration and decay, nor be touched by corruption. (John 3:16; 5:24,29; 10:28) Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes Him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself. And He has given Him authority to judge because He is the Son of Man. Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear His voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.” (John 5:24-29)

**Three:** His life brings satisfaction and security. Jesus said, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.” (John 6:35) Jesus is the support of spiritual life and His teachings give guidance in every part of life for those who have the courage and heart to seek the truths that He teaches. The blessing of having accepted God’s free gift leads to enjoying that ever-flowing never-exhausted communication with the Lord, which can only be interrupted by self-will. It is a life that overflows in trust, obedience and in love with Christ.

Jesus is the divine bounty in all that God has for His children and Jesus using the word “comes” shows that those wanting eternal blessings must be willing to allow God to work in their lives. (Barnes Notes; Matthew Henry; The Pulpit Commentary)

There is one thing that can stop the work of God and that is the stubborn heart that does not want to release control. The defiance of the human heart is the most dangerous enemy out there to the human soul. The life promised in Christ is right there for the taking or the refusing.

When a person takes on the life of Christ, the human heart finds what it was created for and this person moves from just existing into a life of spiritual excitement, adventure and peace. However, it must be sought with a repentant heart surrendered to the will of God.

In his best selling book called, “Into Thin Air,” the author (Jon Krakauer) relates the hazards that plagued some climbers as they attempted to reach the summit of Mount Everest. Andy Harris, one of the expedition leaders stayed at the peak too long and on his descent, he became in dire need of oxygen.

Harris radioed the base and told them about his predicament. He mentioned that he had come across a supply of oxygen canisters left by other climbers but they

were empty. Climbers ahead of him on the same descent over heard the radio transmission and told Mr. Harris that they had just passed those canisters on their way down and he was not seeing properly because of his lack of oxygen, the canisters were not empty but full. They pleaded with him on the radio to make use of them but it was to no avail, Harris was starved for oxygen and he continued to argue that the canisters were empty. His lack of oxygen had ravaged his capacity to recognize what was right in front of him and his lack of faith in what he was told led to his death. (Brian Bill in Bread of Life, sermoncentral.com)

What oxygen is to the body, the Bread of life, Jesus Christ, is to the soul. When a baby is born he must grasp for continued life through breathing air which unseen, everyone knows is there. Through what is created everybody knows there is God who is unseen and His plan has been made known to mankind through creation.

Romans 1:19-20 says, “since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.” (Romans 1:19-20)

Everything about God and Christ and revelation of the Holy Spirit has and is being made known by all that the Lord does. It is only man’s love for self-pleasure, the world and his longing to listen to the lies of the devil that prevents him from having eternal life. Sinful man must first be resolved to seek God for forgiveness, invite Christ in and surrender to the work of the Holy Spirit and eternal life is assured to the repentant.

Andy Harris needed life giving oxygen, sinners need to receive Christ. Unbelief kept Mr. Harris from believing what he was told. The flesh, the world, and the Devil keep sinners from understanding the life giving truths of God’s Word. Is the sin of self, the world and the deception of Satan choking the breath of God, the Holy Spirit of Christ from entering into you? Thus, causing you to refuse truth that lies right before you. Are you allowing Christ’s life to live through you? Does your life proclaim the “Gift” of God saying, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.” (Galatians 2:20) The child of God who understands and submits to this truth walks secure in the promise of Jesus.

He said, “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Matthew 6:33)

Jesus makes it clear that His disciples are to replace the pursuit of earthly things for the pursuit of greater significance. To seek His kingdom is to have a heart desire to enter into, submit to, and participate in spreading the news of the saving

grace of God. It must be remembered that the Lord's kingdom is established through Christ, submission to His Father, His victory over sin and death and through the on-going work of the Holy Spirit to cause man to think of eternal things. (The Expositors Bible Commentary)

Seeking His righteousness is to become interested in His favor resting upon you through prayerful reading and studying of the Word of God, through surrendering to the Holy Spirit as He cleanses you through the washing of the Word of God. (Ephesians 5:26) This involves becoming illuminated by the Holy Spirit so one can apply the truths of God's Word. (Barnes Notes; Thru the Bible; Psalm 119:9,11)

A life satisfied with the righteousness of God will have all necessary things provided for him. (Barnes Notes; The Pulpit Commentary) The child of God who has God's Gift, Jesus Christ, has the One who clothes the lilies of the field. He feeds the birds of the air and Christians are far more important to Him than flowers and birds. He will provide clothes, drink, and food for those who are living according to His will and have a desire for His purposes to be achieved in and through their lives. (Matthew 6:25-34)

Recently I read a message (by Pastor Melvin Maughmer) that shared some valuable information about army maneuvers. When they were out in battle or patrolling in enemy areas there was a key position that was essential to a company of soldiers. It is called the "Point Position" and it was highly esteemed and respected because the person who held it had the responsibility of all the other soldiers upon his shoulders.

What the point man did was to lead the company through hostile territory. He would go first ensuring that the way was clear, that there were no land mines or any danger before the soldiers were allowed to move onward. What would happen sometimes by him being first was if the enemy was out there somewhere, the enemy would notice him first and they more than likely would shoot him. What this did was give the rest of the company the knowledge that the enemy was out there and they could take the appropriate action to save the lives of the other soldiers.

When a sinner accepts God's gift, Jesus Christ becomes his point man. The Lord leads the Christian through hostile territory of the devil. He points out all that would destroy physical and spiritual life, the snares that lead to bondage and entanglement. He provides safe shelter, the food and water sufficient for the upcoming battles. This soldier of Christ goes into life's battles saying, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me." (Psalm 23:4)

**Christians also have the gift of "hope"**

*The man or woman who accepts God's free gift and receives Christ lives a full, abundant life that is satisfying and exciting.* Christians also have the gift of "hope."

In Ephesians 1:18 the apostle Paul prays a prayer that is birthed forth by the Holy Spirit and is the heart of Christ and from God. Every Christian parent and grand parent needs to be regularly praying this prayer, petitioning the God of mercy to give this revelation to all who has ever proclaimed to be a Christian. "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the Hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints." (Ephesians 1:17-18)

This "hope" (*elpis*) is placed deep within the heart of those who have experienced salvation through Christ. This brings an awareness of eternal life and all the blessedness that comes in knowing Jesus Christ.

Dr. Jim Berg does an outstanding job in giving us insight on what this hope is in comparison to how the word hope is often used today. It must be noted that "hope" in the Bible is used much differently as it used today. It must be pointed out that the way hope is often used today is not wrong.

Hope as it is used today is usually an expression of a strong desire that seems in all likelihood of being fulfilled. For example: Hundreds of people have a hope that they will be able get a loan on their house and in about 40 years through hard work and faithfulness get the home paid off. For those who stay faithful and stay on the plan, that is usually what happens. However, you never know what may come up, illness, tragedy in the family, a great depression in our economy or as many have found out this year, a natural disaster could completely destroy your home and cause you to refinance.

However, "hope" as it is used in the Bible is not the expression of a strong desire with a measure mixed with uncertainty of what could happen. This hope finds its foundation upon the written Word of God and this is an expectation that what is promised will be completed. For example: When the apostle Paul speaks of "looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ," (Titus 2:13) he is speaking about an event that is going to take place.

One truth that shores up the hope found in born-again Christians is the sealing of the Holy Spirit. Notice what the apostle Paul teaches in Ephesians 1:13-14 regarding the Holy Spirit just before his prayer for illumination in Ephesians 1:17-18. "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel

of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession..." (Ephesians 1:13-14)

The seal of the Holy Spirit is His presence within the believer. His presence is the authorized signature of God that He will complete the work He has started in you. He will provide, protect and equip those who are faithful.

The child of God who receives God's gift has an unshakeable hope when the Holy Spirit has opened his spiritual eyes to the fact that Jesus Christ Himself takes up residence in such a sinful dwelling as his heart through the Spirit of Christ. (Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 3:16)

My son Caleb cleans stalls for one of the finest horse barns in Norton County. He cleans stalls 6 days a week and he does a great job at it. His brothers, Caleb and I can tell you, no matter how much you clean a stall, there is always that stench of filth. Sometimes it make your eyes water. If you just walk in the barn that smell gets in your hair and clothes, thus you have a bad odor. Sin jumps on us just as easy.

We are sinners saved by grace and we sin daily through thought or deed. Yet, our Lord, in humility is content to indwell the children of God by the Holy Spirit to sanctify them and mold them into His image, to empower them for service unto Him, the brethren, and to mankind in general. Just as He was willing to be born in a stinky stable and walk on this sin-trodden earth nearly 2000 years ago so man may have hope in God, He is willing to live within Christians.

Peter writes this about God's elect, those who have received God's gift, "Through Him you believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and glorified Him, and so your faith and hope are in God." (1 Peter 1:21)

Once a child of God has received the Gift, Jesus Christ, who is the Word made flesh, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit of Christ, Biblical hope is birthed from God's Word.

When Satan, the father of lies, speaks to the mind of a Christian, bringing up his past sins, the Holy Spirit brings to mind what the Bible says about forgiveness. The Holy Spirit moved the beloved John to write this sure hope, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9) Ezekiel writes about the sinner who turns to God and gives this sure hope, "None of the offenses he has committed will be remembered against him." (Ezekiel 18:22)

The man who accepts God's free gift, Jesus Christ, is a man who has a fresh clean start with God and His love endures forever.

When the flesh, the world view and the devil tells a child of God that he is worthless and has no value in this life, The Son of God, through the Holy Spirit brings to mind Psalm 139:13-14, “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;” (Psalm 139:13-14) He reminds them that they have Holy Spirit gifts for ministering to others. (1 Corinthians 12:7)

For those who obey the call of making disciples He gives these promises, “...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8) Those who possess God’s Gift will be moved like the shepherds were on that first Christmas of whom the Bible says, “they spread word concerning all what had been told them about this child.” (Luke 2:17) To those who proclaim the birth of Christ and the gospel message there is the sure hope that, “...[their] labor in the Lord is not in vain.” (1 Corinthians 15:58) And if they do “not become weary... at the proper time [they] will reap a harvest if [they] do not give up.” (Galatians 6:9)

These are hopes that come with a “yes and Amen.” There are many more hopes found in the Word of God for those who have received Christ and the Holy Spirit will enlighten all who will take the time to prayerfully read and study the Word of God.

Benefits in receiving God’s free Gift, Jesus Christ, are for the taking or the rejecting. When Christ is received in the heart as Savior and Lord, Christians find out that there are many gifts that are placed inside them and their lives become satisfied, exciting and useful to the building of the kingdom of God.

Christians receive life with the Gift of Christ, in this world and in eternity. They have a sure hope placed within them that the Christ they have received will never leave them nor forsake them. His faithfulness to us is as sure as His faithfulness to His Father’s will for Him. You can trust a Lord who was obedient even unto death, for the sake of purchasing a bride, His church.

Have you “Grasped the Truths of Christmas? Have you received God’s Gift and are you expressing His life and a sure hope in God and Christ?

Let us Pray!



**Title: Christmas Courage**  
**Theme: The Courage of Joseph**

“This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins.’ All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel’ --which means, ‘God with us.’ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave Him the name Jesus.” (Matthew 1:18-24)

**There are many miracles connected with the birth of Christ**

*There are many miracles connected with the birth of Christ.* The best way of overcoming the world's view of Christmas is to have a Biblical understanding of the miraculous events that took place at the first Christmas. I remember the first Christmas after becoming a Christian, the holiday season became so exciting to me because the Holy Spirit illuminated within me what Christmas was really about.

I have found personally the best way for me to maintain and restore joy for the Christmas season is to meditate upon what the Word of God says about the lives of those who were so closely involved in the earthly life of Jesus Christ.

*Just what is found in Joseph's life that made him such a valuable person in the gospel of Jesus Christ? Can these character traits be found in the children of God today?*

*I would propose to you that the Biblical account of the life of Joseph holds truths that the Holy Spirit of Christ wants you to grasp this Christmas season. Many have Biblical revelation or understanding of the life of Joseph. However, Christians who live a life expressing that the birth of Christ is an event worth celebrating take time to invite the Holy Spirit to illuminate Biblical truth into their hearts.*

**Lord takes ordinary men and makes useful vessels of them**

*The first truth worth grasping is that the Lord takes ordinary men and makes useful vessels of them.* Joseph was a man doing ordinary common work and to my knowledge he held no place of what men of this world would call authority or worldly fame. Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus had the character that should be found in all Christian fathers, yet very little is said of him in Christian writings.

What is revealed to us in Scripture about Joseph is that he was poor and he observed the Word of God expressing a heart that is willing to seek out and do the will of God. Luke 2:21-27 says, "On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise Him, He was named Jesus, the name the angel had given Him before he had been conceived. When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, 'Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord'), and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: 'a pair of doves or two young pigeons.'" (Luke 2:21-14) The Bible says Joseph and Mary, "brought in the child Jesus to do for Him what the custom of the Law required..." (Luke 2:27) Joseph as head of his family knew what was written in the Book of Leviticus chapter 12 and made the offering required for a woman who was poor financially. (Who's Who in the Bible; The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia)

This is a great encouragement to all Christians. Most Christians are not going to be famous, have a place of authority nor be rich in the world's eyes. They can, however, become very important in proclaiming the good news of the gospel of Christ as long as they are willing to seek the will of the Lord through the written Word of God and obey what the Holy Spirit of Christ calls them to do. The Holy Spirit gives this exhortation through the writings of the Apostle Peter, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light." (1 Peter 2:9) It has been very well said, "God takes ordinary people and does extraordinary things through them."

### **Live as Joseph, a moral upright life**

*It takes a courageous man to die to self, seek out the Lord's will and pray through to completion of God's plan for him.* It also takes courage to live as Joseph, a moral upright life. Our text says, "This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly."

Matthew 1:24 -25 tells us that Joseph did what the angel of the Lord commanded him to do and he did not have sex with his wife until after Mary gave birth to Jesus Christ. (Matthew 1:18-19, 35)

The first truth worth grasping in these passages of Scripture is that Joseph was a righteous man. "Righteous" (dikaios) in this passage of Scripture means to be merciful, kind and tender. The application is that Joseph was not a man given to passionate vengeance, rather he had a right relationship with God. Joseph lived in accordance with God's compelling standard. (The Expositors Bible Commentary; Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament; The Completer Word Study of the New Testament)

In his natural man Joseph's response in regard to being engaged to a woman of God who told him she was now pregnant would have been shock, thinking his bride to be pure having a heart only for him. He would have had deep sorrow. His dreams of marriage to a Godly woman, surrender to purity of the Lord and raising children in God's perfect will now chattered. In his natural man there would have been anger. Joseph very well could have felt betrayed. No one would have blamed him if he would have laid the full blunt of the written law upon Mary and done all he could to save face in the community. Not only was she subject to accusations of giving in to sin, but Joseph as well. In the natural it takes two to bring about pregnancy.

To our western ways of thinking the engagement relationship is bewildering in this passage of Scripture. To the Jews the marriage relationship was far too serious a step in a person's life to let marriage be dictated by the human heart.

According to William Barclay there were three major steps to the Jewish marriage procedure. Here are two of them, 1.) the engagement was often made through the parents, or through a professional match-maker. 2.) The betrothal stage and by this stage the woman involved could break off the engagement if she chose not to go through with the marriage. It is in this stage the marriage becomes binding and it lasted one year. They were referred to as man and wife, although consummation of the marriage is not permitted until the marriage ceremony is over.

It was during the betrothal stage when Joseph learned of Mary being with child. According to Deuteronomy 24:1, Joseph, from what he could see in the present circumstance before his dream, had every Biblical right to write a certificate of divorce.

Joseph could have been angry because it was customary for the groom to give a marriage present to the bride's family. This gift to the family was a form of compensation and sealed a covenant between the two families. The gift could have been in the form of money or service or any other consideration that was agreeable to all the parties involved. (The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia; Genesis 34:12; Exodus 22:16; 1 Samuel 18:25; Genesis 29; Joshua 15:16) They had a deal, Biblically a covenant that was to last until death do they part and up to Matthew 1:18-19, it appeared to Joseph that Mary had broke that covenant.

At this time in history we have two people called of God to play a very important part of the Christmas story, and they are both being tested in their faith in God. Mary had been told ahead of time that she would be with child by the power of the Holy Spirit and what to name the child. (Luke 1:31)

For some reason Joseph felt it was a necessity to divorce Mary and I am not going to go off into man made fantasies. I am going to stick with the Biblical fact that God's character had a powerful effect on Joseph enabling him to handle this difficult time in his life by showing mercy, kindness and tenderness to Mary and her family.

Joseph knew the consequence of being accused of adultery and he most likely knew how the world of his day handled those accused of it. Those accused and convicted were met with public disgrace. In Joseph's day in Egypt the punishment was cutting of the nose, in Persia the punishment was cutting of the nose and ears and in Judea the punishment could have meant being stoned to death. In Joseph's day most often a certificate of divorce stated the reason for the divorce. This great man of God most certainly had the mercy of God overriding fleshly desires and worldly influences. Our text clearly says, Joseph, being a righteous man, a man expressing the mercy of God through his life did not want Mary to be exposed to public disgrace.

Not only did Joseph have the courage to live out the mercy of God, he had the courage to subdue the flesh so he could protect Mary's purity until the Child was born, thus, bringing us the surety of the Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ. I purposely repeat what the Bible says, Joseph, "...did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home to be his wife.

But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son and he gave Him the name Jesus." (Matthew 1:24-25) I am fully persuaded that Joseph had the Godly character he had because he was a man of the Word of God.

Hearing the angel quote what the Prophet Isaiah said 700 years before in his dream, "The virgin will be with Child and will give birth to a Son and they will call His Name 'Immanuel' meaning God with us" (Matthew 1:22-23) was more than enough to give Joseph the courage he needed to subdue the flesh and trust in his God. This gave him strength to fulfill his part as the head of the house, enabling him to protect his wife from any impurities that could keep her from fulfilling her part of the Christmas story.

Christians with the courage of Joseph will make themselves available and aware of what the written Word of God says. Knowing God's Word and being open and sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading will make them a very important part of proclaiming Jesus as the Savior of the world, not only at Christmas time but in every part of their lives.

Too much time can be spent on the term “an angel of the Lord” in Matthew 1:20. Some say it was an angel, others say it was a manifestation of God. The high and safe road is to rejoice in God’s gracious intervention to communicate privately with those who are sold out to His will. All Christians can take courage. The Lord is always ready and able to intercede in their lives in the most difficult time of life. He has a great plan for using Christians and allowing them to be a very important part of proclaiming the truths of Christmas.

### **Courage to live a life of righteousness opens the door to receive revelation from God**

*Joseph had the courage to live a life of righteousness, expressing compassion, mercy and tenderness to the person he loved. His courage to live a life of righteousness opened the door for him to receive revelation from God.*

Our text says, “But after he had considered [divorcing Mary quietly,] an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph... do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a Son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus...’” (Matthew 1:20-21)

What we have here is divine revelation from God to his obedient servant who was enabled to die to himself for the sake of others. There are two key aspects to revelation from God that is worth grasping here. One is God’s self-revelation found in the entire Word of God. The second is the ways and means through which the Lord discloses Himself, His will and His purpose to His people. (The New International Dictionary of the Bible)

At this time in history Jesus’ birth needed another immediate intervention from God to get a person ordained for this life changing event on the right track. It is very possible that Joseph prayerfully thought on the issue of Mary being with child in the stillness of the night. It was very likely while he was alone in prayer with the Lord, being totally dependent on God and having a heart prepared for obedience, Joseph fell asleep. During this sleep the Lord gave Joseph just what he needed most in a very difficult time in life for him. (A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory; The Preacher’s Outline & Sermon Bible; Thru the Bible)

In this special revelation God had four purposes. 1.) To give assurance to Joseph. When the angel spoke, “Joseph, son of David” (Matthew 1:20) this quickened Joseph’s attention and alerted his spiritual heart to the importance of the message about to be spoken to him. This brought an awareness that he was about to receive a divine call.

2.) The purpose of this revelation from God in a dream was to give Joseph explanation. Being a righteous man and knowing what God’s word says about adultery, Joseph must have agonized over this for a few days. I believe it is probable that Mary told Joseph the whole story of the angel Gabriel’s visit.

Put yourself in Joseph's place. Your fiancée, Mary, comes to you and says, "I have some really good news, but depending upon your faith, it could sound like bad news. I am pregnant even though you and I have not had sexual relations yet. However, an angel came to me and said, '...Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus.'" (Luke 1:30-31)

If you are a really spiritual man and if you do not want to see your fiancée burst into tears and have to hear, "You, don't trust me and there needs to be trust in a relationship" you had better say, "I will take this matter to the Lord in prayer." We know that Joseph took this very serious life changing situation to heartfelt prayer.

3.) This revelation from God to Joseph was to reveal the destiny of the child born of a virgin, Mary, the woman pledged to him for lifetime marriage. The Lord revealed to Joseph that the Son to be born to them would save people from their sins and that He would be God in the flesh among them. (Matthew 1:21, 23)

4.) This revelation from God to Joseph was for comfort and guidance. He told Joseph, "...do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit... [You are] to give Him the name Jesus.

Think of the comfort that must have come to him as the Lord revealed to him that Biblical prophecy was being fulfilled. Mary was telling the truth and God had a plan for them.

Christians, as they are serving the Lord in a heart after God, will at times face situations that seem impossible to determine the Lord's will. It is in those times they must have the courage of Joseph, die to self, seek the whole counsel of God's Word and pray through expecting God to answer. He will give His revelation to them and it will bring comfort, explanation, and direction. Instead of calling a friend, Christians are better off calling upon the Lord's intervention.

Christians who have the courage of Joseph in life's tough circumstances have the same revelation about the Lord as the psalmist who wrote, "'Because he loves Me' says the Lord, 'I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my Name. He will call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him, with long life will I satisfy him and show my salvation.'"

Let the situation that you are in right now establish courage in the Lord and prepare you to be a very special part in the Christmas story that should be proclaimed today.

**Courageously protect your family**

*Joseph was an ordinary man who had the courage to live righteously and whose lifestyle enabled him receive revelation from God and courageously protect his family.* Listen carefully as I take time to read from the book of Matthew some select passages from chapter two.

“When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. ‘Get up,’ he said, ‘take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill Him.’

So he got up, took the child and His mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘Out of Egypt I called my son.’ When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: ‘A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.’ After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, ‘Get up, take the child and His mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.’ So he got up, took the child and His mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: ‘He will be called a Nazarene.’” (Matthew 2:13-23)

Having heard from the wise men that they were seeking the one who had been born to be king of the Jews, Herod commanded that all boys under the age of two be killed. An angel of the Lord commanded Joseph to take Jesus and his mother down into Egypt and then later back to northern Israel. This meant months of dangerous travel over hostile terrain. Knowing the Lord sent them and was with them gave Joseph the courage he needed to get accomplish his commission from the Lord.

Truths worth clinging to for today are, 1.) We do not need courage when things are going smooth and we are drinking in the blessings of God. However, when the enemy comes in like a flood courage in God’s protective hand is needed.

Joseph had no idea in his early days that his tranquil life would be thrown into a time requiring him to choose life according to God’s righteousness, obey the desires of the sinful flesh, or follow the expectations of those in the world around him.

2.) Courage is born in the Christian's heart by seeking the Lord in prayerful reading of God's Word and trusting in Him to reveal His truths. David learned courage to fight the Lord's battles by observing what God was doing around him, from seeing what God had done for him and the nation he ruled and from the Scriptures. This enabled David to receive revelation from God, to fight Goliath and to have confidence to fight the Lord's battles. Joseph had cultivated his own relationship with the Lord, thus he was ready to fulfill his part in the Christmas story as should all Christians.

3.) Children need dads who are courageously living for the Lord Jesus, not those who can buy the most numerous or most expensive toys. Fathers who seek the Lord and know that the children they are raising have been created for God's glory. They are maintaining a relationship with the Lord in order to understand what direction the Lord wants them take in raising the children God has given them.

4.) Wives need courageous husbands who love their wives as Christ loved the church and are willing to protect their wives from anything that would get in the way of their accomplishing God's special call on their lives.

*Because we live on this side of Christmas, Christians want to rush to the end of the story where everything turns out okay just like it did for Joseph and Mary. When Christians just focus on the announcement of the birth of Christ on that first Christmas they miss out on the work that God wants to do in their lives. The Lord wants to prepare born again Christians to courageously live out their part of proclaiming the good news of the birth of Christ.*

Very little is said about Joseph in Christian writings and in Scripture, however what is said about him the Holy Spirit wants to place deep within your spiritual heart. Joseph was a "righteous man." The Hebrew word for "righteous man" (*tsaddiys*) means that a man is known for his uncompromising obedience to the Torah, the law of Moses. The application for today is that Christians need to live uncompromising to the whole counsel of the written Word of God.

The Apostle Paul teaches in chapter five of the Book of Galatians that we can live in the Spirit's power. The fruit of the Spirit always triumphs over uncontrolled human emotion including anger and over the world's view thus enabling Christians to express supernatural love just as Joseph did to Mary.

Choose this Christmas season to live courageously for the cause of Christ and His kingdom so you can enjoy special revelations from the Lord as He speaks to your heart through the written Word as revealed by the Holy Spirit. Let us Pray!



**Title: Christmas Faith**  
**Theme: The Faith of Mary, Submission to God's Will**  
**Series: The Cast of Christmas**

"In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, 'Greetings, you who are highly favored!

The Lord is with you.' Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; His kingdom will never end.' 'How will this be,' Mary asked the angel, 'since I am a virgin?' The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God.' 'I am the Lord's servant,' Mary answered. 'May it be to me as you have said.' Then the angel left her." (Luke 1:26-38)

### **Submission to the Lord's will is an absolute essential before a Christian can grasp the truths surrounding the Christmas story**

*Little information is given about Mary in the Word of God. However, what is said is striking and sets before every Christian a Biblical example of true submissiveness to God's will. Submission to the Lord's will is an absolute essential before a Christian can grasp the truths surrounding the Christmas story.*

*I would propose to you that there are several simple truths that the Holy Spirit of Christ would like to place deep within your mind and burn deep within your spiritual heart.*

*Just what are those truths and how can they be a blessing to the children of God?*

### **Truths worth grasping this Christmas season**

*One truth worth grasping this Christmas season is that no matter where you live and no matter what circumstance you find yourself in, the Lord can reach into your life and make you a valuable part of the building of the kingdom of God. Our text says, "God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee." (Luke 1:26)*

There is much that the Holy Spirit of Christ wants you to grasp in today's message. In this first division of the message He wants you to grasp the significance of Nazareth. This city is not mentioned in the Old Testament. It was the home of Joseph and Mary (Luke 2:39) and Nazareth was where the angel announced to the virgin the birth of the Messiah. (Luke 1:26-28) Nazareth is where Jesus grew to manhood (Luke 4:16) and where He began His public ministry in the synagogue. (Matthew 13:54) (The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia: Easton's Bible Dictionary) Those are powerful truths to cling to.

Unfortunately, Nazareth around the time of the birth of Christ had established a rather poor reputation in morals and religion. (The New International Dictionary of the Bible) This why we read of Nathaniel of whom Jesus said, "...[was] a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false," saying this, "Can anything good come from [Nazareth]?" (John 1:47,46)

Many Christian historians tell us that by the time of the birth of Christ, Nazareth had become an unimportant town. (The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia) Nazareth and the people living in her were despised by Romans and Jews. Nazareth of Galilee bordered Gentile and heathen nations and those living in her were considered a conquered people. (The Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible)

Evidence of the citizen's spiritual condition in Nazareth is found in their treatment of Christ during His ministry. The Bible says that He returned to Galilee in the power of the Holy Spirit. (Luke 4:14) The Bible says after Jesus was finished teaching in the Synagogue on a Sabbath day, after reading from the Book of Isaiah, "[The people] spoke well of Him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from His lips..." But, then they begin to question, "...Isn't this Joseph's son?" (Luke 4: 16-22) After Jesus had spoken more to them they "...drove Him out of town, and took Him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw Him down the cliff." (Luke 4:29) It was because of their lack of belief that Jesus could not do many miracles in Nazareth. (Matthew 13:58)

Symbolically, the significance to all this is that Nazareth in Jesus' time represented no reputation for religion or anything significant. Jesus having His connections to Nazareth shows us symbolically that He desires to show His favor on the Gentile world. Jonah, Elijah and Elisha were very much conversant in Galilee and were known to be great prophets to the Gentiles. This shows us that God is just as able and willing to send His message to an area that is not willing to receive the message as well as to a place that is searching for God.

God had sent His messenger to Nazareth as well as He did Jerusalem, where Gabriel foretold to Zechariah of the birth of John the Baptist which came about as the result of Divine intervention. (Luke 1:5-25)

God's messenger, Gabriel was entrusted with a Divine message to Mary, to Zechariah, and also to the Prophet Daniel. The purpose of Gabriel being sent to Daniel was for the purpose of giving meaning to visions. In Daniel 9:21-23 we read of Daniel saying, "While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel and making my request to the LORD my God for His holy hill-- while I was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice. He instructed me and said to me, 'Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding. As soon as you began to pray, an answer was given, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed. Therefore, consider the message and understand the vision: (Daniel 9:21-23)

There is so much for Christians to grasp this Christmas season if they will die to self, cast off the business of this world, and meditate upon the lives of those physically involved in the life of Christ.

Gabriel means "man of God" and it can mean "the strength of God." (Who's Who in the Bible; The Complete Word Study Dictionary) Let the Holy Spirit place these truths deep within your heart. As part of Gabriel's message he told Daniel that he was highly esteemed, (Daniel 9:23) he told Mary that she had found favor with God (Luke 1:30) and Elizabeth said, "In these days [God] has shown His favor [to me]. (Luke 1:25)

No matter whether you are doing the work of a prophet like Daniel, offering worship in the house of God doing the Lord's work like Zechariah, or living a faithful life before God like Mary and Elizabeth, the Lord can get His message to you anytime and any place you are when you need it. While you are serving the Lord in the church or out in the work place where there seems to be no interest in the work of God, or even be a hostile attitude to the true works of Christ. God can still get His message to you and it will strengthen you to accomplish your part of the Great Commission and in everything the Lord has called you to do.

### **Benefits of a circumcised heart**

*Those who have the faith of Mary can enjoy the Lord meeting them right where they are and they can enjoy the benefits of a circumcised heart. Romans 2:28-29 says, "A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code..." (Romans 2:28-29)*

Mary was a virgin, representing that which is pure, that heart that is sold out to the will of God and willing to die to self for the purposes of God. She represents that heart that is hungry for God.

Circumcision of the spiritual heart has always been on the heart of God. It is not only a New Testament revelation for mankind but found in Old Testament several times. (Jeremiah 4:4; 9:25-26) The Bible is clear on what God can and will do. Deuteronomy 30:6 says, "The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love Him with all your heart and with all your soul and live." (Deuteronomy 30:6)

Mary, who is a representation of a heart after God gave birth to a Son who walked upon this guilty sod, remained sinless, and got victory over sin and death so you and I do not have to be enslaved to sin and eternal damnation, but rather eternal life in Christ.

Many do not know and have true Christmas joy because they try to live by outward circumcision, outward showing of religious acts. They listen to the Word of God, they try to obey God's Word while punishing everyone with their attitudes and religious piety. Still, they are unable to get a joyous victory over sin, the world and the lies of the devil. Christians who have true Christmas joy have revelation and illumination of what the Apostle Paul wrote in Colossians 2:11, "In [Christ they are] circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ. (Colossians 2:11)

This circumcision allows them to have spiritual fellowship with the Holy Spirit of Christ. Romans 8:10 tells us, "But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit, who lives in you." (Romans 8:10) The Holy Spirit takes the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, (Ephesians 6:17) and washes the heart with the written Word. (Ephesians 5:25b) Jesus Christ was born to die so that we may have life abundantly. This is enjoyed by accepting Jesus Christ to be both Savior and Lord and by allowing Him to sanctify us as the Holy Spirit brings life to the Written Word of God in our hearts.

The Bible is a better cleanser than that which is advertised on the radio or television. It takes out and can keep out the soiled spots in the heart.

I taught my sons, Derek, Caleb and Josiah how to properly clean a horse stall. They had to dig down deep to find that spot where urine lays deep and hard to find, but if left alone will work its way to the surface with a terrible acid smell that makes your eyes water, burns the skin of horse flesh, and causes hoof disease. All national champions have someone who properly cleans their stall, keeping out those impurities that can prevent a horse from achieving all it can.

I have done farrier work in some the best horse barns in the world, and no matter how well they clean the stall one day, it begins to get a nasty smell and needs to be cleaned the next day.

When Christians become born again it is like having our hearts all cleaned up, but because of the sinful nature that is in all of us, we need a constant cleaning so we can remain in a healthy condition, thus becoming champions in and for Christ. Just as a dedicated horseman does what it takes to enable a horse to achieve the goals set before it, the Holy Spirit of Christ remains in the child of God, constantly cleaning the spiritual heart with the Word of God. The child of God that has the faith of Mary becomes all the Lord desires for him to be. Their heart cry is like the Psalmist who wrote, "How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your Word. I seek you with all my heart: do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your Word in my heart that I might not sin against you." (Psalm 119:9-11)

Just as Christ was humble enough to be born in a stinky stable and I can tell you all stables have a smell, no matter how well they are cleaned every day. The Holy Spirit of Christ takes up residence in the stable of our hearts and contends with the smell of the flesh that daily needs to be cleansed.

His purpose is to circumcise our hearts and make us like Christ, to become useful in proclaiming the truths of Christmas all year round. Christians who have the faith of Mary know this truth of being in Christ, "Such a confidence as this is ours through Christ before God... He made us competent as ministers of the new covenant – not of the letter but of the Spirit..." (2 Corinthians 3:6) The second greatest benefit of a circumcised heart is to be found competent in our service to the Son of the living God, the first and most important benefit being a pure heart in God's sight. That it may be said of us as the Bible says about Zechariah and Elizabeth, "Both of them were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly.

### **"Highly favored" with God**

*Mary was the physical mother of Jesus Christ the Son of God who enables us to enjoy the new covenant found through the shedding of His blood on the Cross of Calvary. Another truth worth grasping this Christmas season is that her faith enabled her to enjoy being "highly favored" with God. Our text says, "The angel went to her and said, 'Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.'" (Luke 1:28)*

This spoken blessing into her life did not come from abroad, but from the very throne room of God and the term "highly favored" (*kecharitomene*) is an active verb meaning to have shown kindness to. This is a divine grace freely given to whom the Lord wants to give favor to. Great Greek scholars tell us that the perfect passive participle of the verb (*charitoo*) is only used here in Luke 1:28 and again in Ephesians 1:6 where it is wonderfully translated in the King James Bible as "made us accepted in the beloved."

Abbott-Smith defines this Greek word as "...endued with divine grace to the full..." or in other words cause us to find favor. (Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament; The Complete Word Study, New Testament; The Greeks-English Dictionary: Word Meanings in the New Testament)

Let's bring this theological teaching down to earth. Just as Mary was highly favored to be the natural mother of Jesus Christ, Christians through being born again are highly favored by God to have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit of Christ living in them. Having Christ as Savior and Lord is the greatest Christmas present that anyone can ever have. Ephesians 1:5-7 in the King James Bible says, "Having predestined us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will. To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." (Ephesians 1:5-7)

The idea worth grasping here is that God has extended His favor or grace to all born again Christians in Christ just as He did Mary. (Word Meanings in the New Testament; The Complete Word Study, New Testament) Mary was the bearer of the physical Son of God, He being God in the flesh - Christians have the Holy Spirit of Christ living in them. Romans 8:9 says, "And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ." (Romans 8:9) The same chapter says if you have Christ living in you, you have eternal life.

It is imperative that we understand that it was not Mary's faith that caused God to move on her behalf, it was whom she had faith in, God. She had to believe the Word of God spoken to her was truth worth grasping. Her heart after God enabled her to receive divine revelation that was full of explanation and promise. The truth that was worth grasping for Mary was and is for us, "The Lord is with you." (Luke 1:28)

These are the very words that came from the angel of the Lord who appeared to Gideon who said, "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior." (Judges 6:12) This is the very promise made to soldiers of Christ we read about in the Book of Matthew in the giving of the Great Commission. Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20) The word "always" (pantos) means continually and forever with us in our work with the Lord and in everything involved in our lives. Jesus will not leave us to do the work of God or to live out our lives down here all alone depending only on man's flesh. He is literally involved in everything that affects our human lives and souls. (The Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament) What greater truth is worth meditating upon this Christmas season?

Christians who grasp this truth live a life like that of Mary, believing the Word of the Lord, enquiring for revelation through the written Word and walking in the favor of God.

### **Walk in submission to the Lord's will for them**

*The last truth worth grasping this Christmas season is that those who have the faith of Mary walk in submission to the Lord's will for them. The Bible records these words of Mary, "I am the Lord's servant... May it be to me as you have said." (Luke 1:38)*

The first desire in the child of God who wants to enjoy the favor of God in his life is to die to self and surrender to the will of God in his life. The key word here is "servant." The New American Standard Bible has a great translation by using the word "bondslave."

Being a true bondslave (*doule*) meant Mary belonged totally to the Lord and gave Him full permission to work His will in and through her life. This heart attitude enabled Mary to worship the Lord in soul and spirit. Mary said, "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." (Luke 1:46-47) Her submissiveness enabled her to gain understanding and direction from the Lord.

Christians can choose to have understanding of God's will for them as well as Mary did. Romans 12:1-2 says, "offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--His good, pleasing and perfect will." (Romans 12:1-2)

Christians who get the most out of what the first Christmas opened up for the children of God grasp the truth of servant-hood. Servant-hood frequently appears in the Gospels, especially in the parables. (Matthew 18:23-35; 21:33-44) For Jesus, the concept of servant-hood is the way of expressing a right relationship with God. Jesus says no one can serve two masters, (Matthew 6:24) nor is anyone above the plan Christ has for those who follow Him. (Matthew 10:24) A faithful servant of Christ does as the will of Christ directs him. (Matthew 24:45-46)

Jesus presented Himself as a servant when He washed His disciples' feet at the Last Supper. (John 13:1-20) He told His disciples that He did, "not come to be served but to serve." (Mark 10:45) The Apostle Paul tells us that Jesus was in the form of God, He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant. (Philippians 2:7) On the basis of His own example as well as throughout Scripture, Jesus encouraged His disciples to be servants to each other. (Mark 10:44; John 13:14)

Based on the truth of Mary's statement to Gabriel, "May it be to me as you have said" and that she was a surrendered servant, Christians are to live in a way that says to everyone who sees or reads about their lives that they are servants of God and Christ. (1 Peter 2:16; 1 Corinthians 7:22; Ephesians 6:6) The Apostle Paul, James, Peter and Jude describe themselves as being servants of God. (Romans 1:1; Galatians 1:10; Philippians 1:1; James 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1; Jude 1:1)

Christians who have the faith of Mary have changed their allegiance. Rather than serving the flesh and the world, as before, they are becoming servants and bondslaves to God and Christ. There is no greater gift of love that Christians can express to the Lord than to become a bondservant to the Lord and His will.

Christians who have the faith of Mary will receive Holy Spirit revelation to what the Lord is calling them to do. These revelations of God often come in times when so few people are seeking or even caring to see God do a real work. Just like the people who lived in Nazareth. Christians live a life of true faith and they seek the Lord, expecting Him to meet them right where they are.

Christians who have the faith that was found in Mary allow the Lord to circumcise their hearts. Those who have a heart after God find themselves highly favored by God, not only in receiving salvation but in proclaiming the Name of the Savior of the world to all who observe their lives. Lastly, those who have the faith that Mary had in the Lord express a life that is in full submission to the Lord's will. They express a life that says "Let it be to me as you have ordained for me to fulfill my part of the Great Commission, in proclaiming the truths of Christ.

I think of the life of Missionary Don Nelson, one of our missionaries who had received divine revelation from God to build a radio station in Alaska. At that time so few people were hearing the call to go to Alaska and many who lived there showed little interest in having a Christian radio station. In the wilderness he heard God's call and he prayed through to completion that vision. Even though so many stood against him, the Lord planted a Christian radio station that is still proclaiming the Gospel, not only in Alaska, but in Russia as well.

Don Nelson knew the Word of the Lord had spoken to him, he expected and experienced some opposition, yet he prayed through saying, "I am submitted to the will of God." He was able to stay steadfast because he knew that the Lord was with him, the favor of God was upon him.

Christians are highly favored with God and they need only to be submissive to the will of God in all seasons of their lives and they will enjoy the blessing of having God with them.

Let us pray!!!!



**Title: Christmas Hope**  
**Theme: The Hope of the Wise Men**  
**Series: The Cast of Christmas**

“After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, ‘Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.’ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. ‘In Bethlehem in Judea,’ they replied, ‘for this is what the prophet has written:’ ‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.’ Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, ‘Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find Him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship Him.’ After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with His mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped Him. Then they opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.” (Matthew 2:1-11)

## Hope

*Hope as it is used in the Word of God has a much different meaning than the word hope used in this world.* Children hope they will get a certain type of Christmas gift.

Some people hope they will graduate from high school and go on to college or hope they can find that certain job or career that will make them the amount of money they want to earn or that fame they hope to gain. Others hope that they can do whatever will bring satisfaction for themselves and to others. Others hope that they can beat their cancer this year, be with loved ones just one more year, one more Christmas.

The word hope as the world sees it is a tool to keep you going when you lose your health or job and even when you lose someone you love. Hope is a word that can spark life inside your heart and tell you tomorrow, next week, next month or next year you will reach your goals. It is an anchor word that points to the future.

The problem with the world's view on hope is it is all based on uncertainty. Hope in all the things I have just mentioned is good, but there is no guarantee you will graduate from high school, go to college, or get that job or career that will bring fame and riches or fulfillment. Hope from this world's perspective gives no guarantee that you are going to enjoy good health tomorrow, no guarantee you will be with family next week, next year or next Christmas. In fact all the hopes I have mentioned so far are, in reality, only wishes.

*I would propose to you that hope promised in the Word of God is a unique hope that is far beyond a wish, it is an absolute certainty. It is the kind of hope found in the life of the Magi.*

*Just what is this hope and how do we express a life that says, "My hope is in Christ?"*

*There is much that the Holy Spirit of Christ wants you to grasp this Christmas season as we take time to look at the Biblical accounts of the lives of those who were physically involved in the life of Christ that first Christmas. Our text says, "After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea... Magi from the east came to Jerusalem..." (Matthew 2:1)*

### **Who were these "Magi?"**

Who were these "Magi?" Some translations say, "wise men." Although the Bible does not say much about these worshipers of Christ, extra-Biblical evidence found through Christian historians offers us clues that shed some light about these men who were around about the time of Christ. These men were "Magi" (*magos*) who could very likely have been Persian priests. By the time of Christ's birth these Persian priests became almost exactly what the Levites were in Israel. They became teachers and instructors of the Persian kings and at this time period they were good men, who sought truth and great wisdom. These wise men were skilled in philosophy, medicine, and natural science. They were able to combine secular and religious aspects of knowledge and understanding. (William Barclay; The Complete Word Study Dictionary; Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament; Dictionary of Biblical Languages; Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains: Tyndale reference library)

The wise men's interest in the Messiah may have arisen from contact with Jewish travelers in the east and from knowledge of the Old Testament. (The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia) What we do know is that the Prophet Daniel had been taken to Babylon as a prisoner of war and as the results of his faithfulness to the Lord, God raised him and his friends to high political positions. The Bible says, "Then the king [Nebuchadnezzar] placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on him. He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men.

Moreover, at Daniel's request the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego administrators over the province of Babylon, while Daniel himself remained at the royal court." (Daniel 4:48-49) We do know that Daniel was also raised to a place of political influence under the King of Persia after the Persians conquered Babylon. (Daniel 6:1-3)

The point is this, a Godly man like Daniel and his friends was used by God in a place of captivity for 70 plus years to influence kings and other political positions and God still uses the life of Daniel and his friends to give guidance to the lives of Bible readers today. It is very possible that Godly influences had carried on down throughout the Eastern world and their lives along with the Old Testament teachings had a guiding affect on the Magi. It is the Bible that says, "so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." (Isaiah 55:11) This is why in the Great Commission we are told to "[teach] them to obey everything [Jesus has] commanded [us]..." (Matthew 28:20) and the charge to the soldier of Christ is to "Preach the Word..." (2 Timothy 4:2) The Word of God and its effects on how we live will affect all who see our lives.

Let the Holy Spirit place this truth in your spiritual hearts this Christmas season. The Magi may be regarded as the representation of the Gentile world. Their homage from the East sets the heartbeat for all who want to be worshipers of Christ. You can be a kingdom seeker who desires to worship the King of kings and the life you live for the Lord will have an affect on someone for generations to come. (The Life and Times of Jesus)

### **The Word of God can lead you to fear or believe in the Christ of Christmas**

*Another truth worth grasping this Christmas season is that the Word of God can lead you to fear or believe in the Christ of Christmas. When the Magi arrived in Jerusalem they asked, "...Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him."* (Matthew 2:2)

These brilliant men were serious scholars and it would not surprise me if they were led to look for the Lord because of God meeting them right where they were in what they believed and how they sought out truth. They were interested in astrology and they studied everything they could find about the stars. There were is no doubt they were very much aware of the Jewish nation and most likely at some time got their hands on some Hebrew writings. If they had they would have read Numbers 24:17, "...A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel..." (Numbers 24:17)

This message was spoken by Balaam who came from the Eastern Mountains. (Numbers 23:7) It is also interesting that many Jews around the time of Christ had moved into the Eastern areas taking with them their sacred writings along with their hope of a king whom would once again make Israel free from bondage. A Roman historian (Suetonius) writing of this time period wrote, "An ancient and settled persuasion prevailed throughout the East that the Fates had decreed someone to proceed from Judea who should attain a universal empire." A second Roman historian (Tacitus) wrote, "Many were persuaded that it was contained in the ancient books of their priest that at that very time the East should prevail, and that someone should proceed from Judah and possess the dominion."

Two of the most respected Jewish historians in the world (Josephus and Phelio) wrote about the time period of Christ being born and they make mention in their writings of the expectation of the people looking for a king to arise who would set them free. (Barnes Notes)

With the number of Hebrew writings being carried into the East and the common knowledge of the Jews expecting their forthcoming king, it was no real surprise that someone would begin to ask questions. As always when Bible prophecy begins to be fulfilled and God begins a new work people become disturbed. The Bible says, "When King Herod heard this he was disturbed and all Jerusalem with him." (Matthew 2:3)

Any child of God who has illumination of having Christ born within their spiritual hearts had come to that time in their lives that the Word of God disturbed them. All Christians who walk in the hope of Christmas have been in that same battle as King Herod and those in Jerusalem. There is a battle for the throne of the heart. Those who fight to keep on that throne will find themselves like Herod, doing everything possible to keep Jesus from His rightful place. If you do not know the story, Herod sent his soldiers out to kill the babes in Bethlehem and its vicinity in effort to keep Jesus off his throne. Anyone who wants to keep the Lord Jesus Christ off the throne of their heart becomes very disturbed with the truths of Christ and fear what is spoken or done in Christ name.

Those who have the hope of Christmas joyfully surrender the throne room of their hearts over to the Lordship of Christ by inviting Jesus to be born within them by the power of the Holy Spirit of Christ.

The diligent seeking of the wise men led them to more guiding of God's Word and what is even more interesting is that it was God's enemy who helped seek out the place where the Magi could find the Christ child. Even in the midst of the Lord's enemies God can get directions to those who truly seek him.

Through seeking counsel from men who knew the Old Testament, King Herod found insight on where to find the child who was to be born as God's Messiah,

the Christ. He was as much aware of the Biblical promise as most Jews were at the time of Jesus' early childhood.

The Bible says, "When he [Herod] had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. 'In Bethlehem in Judea,' they replied, 'for this is what the prophet has written: But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.' Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He [Herod] sent them to Bethlehem and said, 'Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.' After they had heard... king [Herod], they went on their way," (Matthew 2:4-9)

Symbolically, Herod represents that which stands against the will of God and that which opposes the works of God. Herod did not ask the chief priest and teachers where this so called king of the Jews was to be born. In every accurate translation of the Bible we read of King Herod asking where is the "Christ" or the "Messiah" to be born. Herod was a tool of Satan being an adversary to the workings of God in this time of history. Satan often works through man's wicked heart to accomplish his evil plans.

In the New Testament we read that the devil can take man captive to do his will. (2 Timothy 2:26) The Hebrew word for "Satan" (*satan*) means to act as an adversary, one who hinders or opposes God and His people. (Who's Who in the Bible; The Complete Word Study of the Old Testament)

At a time when David was giving in to his sinful flesh, Israel needed chastised as well. We read, "Satan rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel. So David said to Joab and the commanders of the troops, 'Go and count the Israelites from Beersheba to Dan...' But Joab replied, 'May the LORD multiply his troops a hundred times over. My lord the king, are they not all my lord's subjects? Why does my lord want to do this? Why should he bring guilt on Israel?'" (1 Chronicles 21:1-3)

What the Holy Spirit wants you to grasp this Christmas season is that in the midst of your adversaries, if you are seeking to live a life of worship to Christ, the Lord can give you direction and that direction can be trusted as long as it is in line with the truths of the whole of Scripture. You will find enemies in the midst of raising your children, in your work place, in political affairs of this nation and in the church structure. In the midst of adversaries there is always guidance in the written Word of God.

Obedience to the counsel of God's Word, when need be, leads to supernatural leading which brings joy. The Bible says, "After they had heard... king [Herod], they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed." (Matthew 2:9-10)

This was a supernatural star and it was God's leading that took them to the place where Jesus lived with His parents. (Thru the Bible; The Expositors Bible Commentary; Matthew Henry Commentary; The Bible Exposition Commentary) The star first appeared to them while they were in the East and caused them to start searching for answers. It most likely disappeared and they took the usual method in seeking answers. The Wise Men were in Jerusalem, no doubt thinking this would be the place for a king of the Jews to be born, decided to enquire as anyone with any common sense would to find direction.

Let the Holy Spirit place this truth within your heart, extraordinary helps are not to be expected where ordinary means have already been provided. For example, Christians do not need a visit from an angel or supernatural experience to get involved in a local church when God has already provided in His Word that Christians are to be about the Great Commission and they are to exercise their gifts for edifying the Body of Christ. Simple obedience to what God has spoken to Christians in the written Word will bring supernatural direction when it is needed.

The Wise Men had received direction and it would not be a surprise to me that Herod shared with them what the chief priest said about the prophet Micah's teaching, out of Bethlehem a ruler would arise for the people of Israel. (Micah 5:2) I am fully persuaded that those Magi had in their minds and heart to make a direct trip to Bethlehem. It would not be wrong to think that they were wondering where they should go upon their arrival.

It was at this time God intervened again with regard to the proclamation of the birth of Christ to a world in great need. The star most likely was gone for a season and was back, because the Bible says the Magi were overjoyed when they saw the star and it led them to the place where the child was. (Matthew 2:9)

Let the Holy Spirit place this truth within your heart. When Christians have done their duty in seeking Him with all their hearts, God will give divine intervention and lead them to that place where He wants them to be and they will be overjoyed in the faithfulness of God. Just as sure as the Magi had confirmation that the Lord was with them Christians can experience the joy of the Lord with them.

Just as the Magi had a sure hope they were going to fulfill their mission, Christians have the same sure hope the Lord is with them on their missions. They are illuminated with the truth that was placed in the psalmist who wrote, "...let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice." (Psalm 105:3) The Lord has this promise for those who express their hope in Him, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you." (Psalm 32:8) That Christmas truth is worth grasping and clinging to.

## True hope leads to practical sacrificial worship

*The last truth to grasp this Christmas season in regard to the hope of the Magi is that true hope leads to practical sacrificial worship.* “On coming to the house, they saw the child with His mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped Him. Then they opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.” (Matthew 2:11) God through these Magi is showing the attitude of the heart He longs to see in those who approach Christ.

All who have hope in Christ will fall before Him in their hearts, they adore Him and submit to His authority. The worship offered by the Magi gives us the three stages of becoming a joyful Christian. One is vision, a heart seeking after God’s Messiah. Two is submission to what the Word of the Lord tells Christians to do. Three is consecration, giving all that God has given to Christians for the work of God in their lives. Christians who have true hope give property and service unto the Lord.

All three of these gifts honor Christ and it would do us good to try to understand the purpose of these gifts and then invite the Holy Spirit to burn these truths deep into our minds and illuminate them into our hearts. Christian Historian and Bible teacher William Barclay gives some ideas that are worth our consideration.

Gold is the gift for a king – Seneca tells us that in Parthia it was a custom that no one entered into the king’s presence without a gift. Gold at that time period was considered to be a metal of kings. Jesus is the King of kings who serves and reigns through sacrificial love and full authority over everything in heaven and earth. Christians must meet His terms for service.

The story of Admiral Nelson is worth considering as we strive to understand how to approach Jesus with a gift worth giving. Admiral Nelson was known for his kindness, compassion and courtesy. After one of his naval victories, the defeated admiral, knowing of Admiral Nelson’s reputation made his way across the deck of the ship and reached out his hand to shake Admiral Nelson’s hand. Admiral Nelson kept his hand in his pocket and said, “Your sword first, then your hand.”

Before they approach Christ, Christians need to lay down their weapons of the flesh, their love for the world and their ears for the lies of the devil before they may join hands with Christ. This is the greatest gift Christians can offer Christ.

Frankincense is the gift for a priest – It was in the Temple worship and at the Temple sacrifices that the sweet perfume of frankincense was used. The function of a priest is to open the way to God for man through the sacrifice being offered. The Latin word for priest (*pontifex*) means bridge builder.

This is what Christ did for us. His sacrificial death on the cross built a bridge so repentant mankind can have a way for getting back to God, have fellowship with God, know God's will, and be empowered for service to the King of kings.

Myrrh is the gift for one who is to die – Myrrh was used to embalm the bodies of the dead. Jesus came to reveal God to man and He came to die. Holman Hunt has a famous picture of Jesus. It shows Jesus at the door of the carpenter shop in Nazareth. He is still only a boy and had come to the door to stretch out his arms so to give them a break from working over a bench. In this picture He stands at the doorway with arms outstretched and on the wall behind him, the setting sun throws his shadow in the form of a cross. In the back ground there stands Mary, and as she sees the shadow there is concern on her face of the coming tragedy that awaits the sinless Christ, all because of the wickedness of man's heart.

Jesus came from the abode of God, walked this sin trodden earth to face death and then enjoyed victory over that sin. That first Christmas God gave the greatest Christmas gift, Christ gave of Himself and the Holy Spirit beckons all to come and bow as the Wise Men did.

Gold for a king, frankincense for a priest, myrrh for the one who was to give His life foretold that Jesus was the King of kings, the perfect High Priest and in the end the Supreme Savior of men.

*Christians have the sure hope expressed by the Wise Men that enables them to seek the Lord.* God guiding the Magi to where Christ lived is a sure hope that God can bring all who seek Jesus to a place in their lives where they can enjoy worshipping the Lord.

This is only enjoyed if a person is willing to go the distance, seek the counsel of God's Word and pay the homage that is due to Christ.

This Christmas are you expressing Christmas hope? Can you be seen as a Gentile worshiper who has gone the distance to worship Jesus Christ as king of your heart and life? Do you search the Scriptures to find the truths of life, are you ready to respond to what the Lord reveals to you about Christ? Do you offer to the King of kings your greatest gift, your heart? Is your life an aroma pleasing to God? Have you died to the flesh, the lures of the world and can you discern the lies of the devil as the Wise Men did?

This year find your place in the Christmas story and proclaim the truths of Christmas for all to hear!

Let us pray!



**Title: Christmas Love**  
**Theme: The Love of God, Christ Given**  
**Series: The Cast of Christmas**

“In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.)

And everyone went to his own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.” (Luke 2:1-7)

### **Grasp Christmas joy**

*There is so much that comes at us especially this time of the year. Before we know it Christmas day is here and it seems that we just did not get prepared to celebrate it as we had hoped. The world’s way of celebrating Christmas sometimes has a way of keeping us from enjoying the Lord Jesus’ birthday in spirit and truth. One of the best ways to grasp Christmas joy is to consider the lives of those who are closely connected with the physical birth of Christ.*

I would propose to you if you want to grasp true joy during the Christmas season it is imperative that you catch the significance in how God showed love by giving Christ. God gave His Son and Christ came willingly—true expressions of sacrificial love.

*Just what is the significance in how God and Christ showed their love to us? John 3:16 says, “God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. The Greek word for “believes” (*pisteuo*) means to put complete trust in, to have no doubt about or to be certain of. The application of this word as applied in John 3:16 is to have such a belief in Jesus Christ that how He lived and what He taught has a continued effect on how you live. (Practical Word Studies in the New Testament; The Complete Word Study of the New Testament; Dictionary of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains; The Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament) Through this message, if you let Him, the Holy Spirit could help you find trust in the love of God and Christ and be certain about that love.*

### **The conditions into which God sent His Son**

*The first truth that the Holy Spirit wants you to grasp from the written Word of God is the conditions into which God sent His Son, Jesus.* The people who are the most blessed by the expression of love given by someone else are the people who understand the sacrifice made by the person showing that act of love.

Jesus' birth was the fulfillment of much Biblical prophecy, one incidence being what was spoken by Jacob. In Genesis 49:10 in the New American Standard Bible we read, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet until Shiloh comes, and to Him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

Jacob foresees and foretells. When he is dying God gives Jacob a look into the future and he gives support from his deathbed that not only is a blessing to his sons, but to all who become sons of God through adoption by faith in Jesus Christ.

When Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem Israel was once again in need of a sign that the Great Deliverer, the child to be born according to what is written about Him had arrived. In keeping with the truth to be grasped today we must understand the spiritual condition of the people during the time when Christ was born. We must also understand the application it has for us today.

Judah was no longer ruled by one of its own kings. Judea was under the rule of a descendant of Esau, Herod the Great. The promised land was no longer in the hands of Israel; it was in the hands of a heathen power. The ruler was no longer God's perfect plan for a ruler, but rather a bad ruler appointed by men who held the Jews captive.

Even the Temple was no longer cared for by ministers of God who could grasp the will of God, rather servants who were governed by fear of Roman oppressors.

According to Who' Who in the Bible, Esau, represented that heart that is not serious about its relationship with God. He made frivolous decisions that had irreversible consequences. When Esau understood that it would be displeasing to his parents to marry girls from certain family lines he deliberately went off and found a girl that his parents would not like and added her to his wives. (Genesis 28:6-9) In Hebrews 12:16 we read that he was a godless man and the Bible says that Esau lived a purposely rebellious life and there was no place in his heart for repentance. (Hebrews 12:17)

Herod was like Esau a man who lived only for self and in rebellion to truth. He ordered the massacre of the innocent male children in Bethlehem and its vicinity all because he wanted to protect his throne from the One born to be King of the Jews and the Savior of the world.

Consider with me the written Word of God that says, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind...” (Jeremiah 17:9, 10)

The truth that the Holy Spirit wants you to grasp in this portion of the message is that mankind left to himself will do whatever it takes to remain on the throne of his own heart. What is scary about that is this heart that is clearly against Christ being truly Lord and Savior makes the human mind think it is doing right, when in truth it is acting in full rebellion. This heart brings justification in its actions while it makes frivolous decisions and produces irreversible consequences. Only Jesus Christ can turn a heart around that is set against God, only He can intervene and put a stop to irreversible consequences of rebellion.

The great news is that in the middle of a sin sick world at the time of Jesus’ birth there were people who sought God and were looking for the coming of the Messiah. God made sure that those seeking Him were made aware that the Savior of the world had arrived. Not only did the Lord make it known, He used those who responded to the good news to tell others.

Listen carefully as I read about the proclamation of the birth of Christ in the midst of a world hostile to God and His people on that first Christmas eve, “And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.’ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests.’ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.’ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.” (Luke 2:8-19)

God supernaturally made a way for those with ears who are hungry for the things of God to get the message of Christ being born in Bethlehem. He works supernaturally through the Holy Spirit of Christ to draw people with ears wanting to hear to consider Jesus Christ today.

Spiritually, Christians, by the power of the Holy Spirit are given supernatural revelations of Christ, God's will through the written Word and they are empowered to live out the will of God as they live in a world that is not a friend of Grace. Even in this day, the world as a whole stands against the work of God.

Law suits are brought against those who want to publicly express their faith in Christ during the Christmas season. Instead of "Merry Christmas" those in this world are wanting have people say "Happy Holiday." Christians in public service are more and more attacked by the media when they express their faith in Christ and prayer.

Even in the church the purity of the pulpit is threatened by those who serve in it and the church is embracing that which breaks the heart of God. In the midst of this offense, God still sends the Holy Spirit of Christ to those who love Him so they can have fellowship with the Lord.

Our natural response to someone who rejects any act of kindness or love we show to them is to shut them out of our lives and make it impossible for them to enjoy our presence. God out of sacrificial love gave His one and only Son and Jesus came willingly so that those with hard hearts may turn and accept the love of God. While natural man wants to cast out those who reject him, God now sends His Holy Spirit to bring revelation of the written Word so people who have hard hearts may be drawn to Christ.

**God has always and still does express His love to people in this  
sin trodden world and the sending of His one and only Son is  
expression of true love**

*God has always and still does express His love to people in this sin trodden world and the sending of His one and only Son is expression of true love. 1 John 4:9-12 says, "This is how God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and His love is made complete in us." (1 John 4:9-12)*

Jesus being born in Bethlehem is the Shiloh who was to come. "Shiloh" (siyloh) means "the peaceful one." (The Complete Word Study; Trough the Bible)

In Christ there is reconciliation between God and those who truly have Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. This peace comes to us not because we showed love to God, but because God loved us first. This is a truth that must be grasped this Christmas season if we are going to walk in a joyous Christmas spirit.

1 John 2:2 in the New American Standard Bible tells that Jesus "...is the propitiation of our sins, and not just ours, but also for those of the whole world." Propitiation is something God does to make it possible for men to be forgiven. God's Word is revelation and His holiness requires Him to uphold that law of God. He is also love and therefore He forgives sinners. He sent His Son to make a way for mankind to receive forgiveness of sin. God did this because He is love. We did not or can not do anything to cause Him to love us.

God did not give us His Son because we were attractive, or because we were good or because we make promises to do things for Him. He does not give us eternal life because He can gain something from us.

I was reading some material written by J.A. Clarks about a Jewish legend. As I consider the legend these thoughts came to my mind. Suppose at creation of mankind some angels were listening in as God and Christ talked about the creation of man. Suppose that there was angel of Justice. What would he say? He would say "Don't create man for he will do all kinds of wickedness against his fellow man, be hard, cruel, dishonest, and unrighteous." If there would be an angel of truth, would he not say, "Do not create man for he will be full of falsehood and deceitfulness." If there was angel of Holiness would he not say, "Do not create mankind he will be impure in heart and dishonor the name of God and Christ."

At the end of this deliberation considering the character of God being love, I could believe Him saying, "Let us create man in our image and when he sins and turns from the path of true righteousness, from truth and a hunger for holiness, I will gather him from out of the world and tenderly through love bring him back unto Myself." Romans 5:8 proclaims a powerful truth, "But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Anyone who has ever had children knows that sometimes an expression of love is what is needed even when the feeling of love is not present. Children at times make poor decisions when they are engaging in sin that hurt themselves, others, and the God who created them. These sins grieve the heart of a parent. It is at this time that the child needs to be shown an expression of love even though the feeling of love is not present. This expression can come as parents trust in Christ who paid the price for those sins.

Christians slip into sins that grieve the heart of the Lord and yet while that act of sin is bringing about its consequences, Christ will make sure that we enjoy His love as we turn to Him for forgiveness and direction.

**The last truth to grasp in this message is the unusual place  
where the King of the Jews was born and the significance that  
has to us**

*God's love is available to Christians only because God is love. He has shown that love by giving us His one and only son.* The last truth to grasp in this message is the unusual place where the King of the Jews was born and the significance that has to us. Our text says, "While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a Son. She wrapped Him in cloths and placed Him in the manger..." (Luke 2:6-7)

The irony of the most important event in history taking place in a stable should not be lost. There are some significances worth noting because it reveals how God resides in the lowliest of hearts and rejects the proud and mighty things of this world.

The Magi very likely went to Jerusalem to find the newborn King of the Jews because they thought that would be the likely place to find him. While there they received a new fresh vision, a spiritual one birthed from God's Word on where to find him. The Pharisees and Sadducees had absolutely no clue of what was going on the night Christ was born because they were no longer hungry for that which was spiritual. Don't miss the significance of the humility of Christ.

Being the King of the Jews, Jesus was worthy of being born in a palace with the best that could be offered in His day for the delivery of a baby. Being the last and final High Priest, the priests who were only about six miles away in Jerusalem surely could have found at least one home in Bethlehem that would open their doors for Mary to give birth to God's Messiah. If someone rich or influential had been supporting Mary and Joseph a place would have been made for them.

Christ lowered Himself to be born a man, taking on human flesh and by age 33 taking on the sins of the world. He showed His humility by being born in a lowly stable. Symbolically, a stable can be a representation of a place of sin. Sin is an unpleasing aroma to God and all stables have an unpleasant aroma. The Savior of the world was born into a place of uncleanness so He can someday make a way for those under the curse of sin to be made clean by accepting Him as personal Savior and Lord.

Just as Christ was born in a stinky stable, the Holy Spirit of Christ is born in the man or woman who, in repentance, turns to Christ for forgiveness. The heart of man is often chasing after self-will and the things of this world as he amazingly listens to the lies of the devil. All this is an unpleasing aroma to the Lord, The Lord, however, remains within the heart of the believer to do His spiritual work. The love of God is expressed as He sends the Holy Spirit of Christ into the spiritual heart of Christians.

In Romans 8:9 the Holy Spirit is referred to as the Spirit of Christ. In John 14:17 and He is called the “Spirit of truth.” The Bible says Christians will know Him and that He lives in them. (John 14:17) God’s amazing love is always demonstrated by action. It is never complacent but continually working in Christians. The Spirit of Christ dwelling within the spiritual heart of Christians cleans them up and makes new people out of them. Romans 8:9-11 says, “You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the [Holy] Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ... And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit, who lives in you.”

The true mark of a born-again believer and a genuine Christian is that he has the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The child of God who knows the love of God, sent into their lives by Christ says as the Apostle Paul, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

If you are not conscious of the presence of the Spirit of God in your life and there is not a heartfelt desire to exercise your Spiritual gifts, talents, and abilities for the glory of God, then grasp Christ this Christmas and receive Him as personal Savior and Lord.

**In Closing:** *There are three truths in today’s message that must be grasped if you are going to walk in Christmas joy.* 1.) Just as Christ was born in conditions that were hostile to the work of God, Christ can be revealed in the spiritual heart that wants to rebel against God. 2.) God sending Christ into the sin trodden world and Jesus being revealed to you are expressions of God’s love. 3.) To respond to God’s love means to have accepted Christ as personal Savior and Lord and to have the Holy Spirit of Christ indwelling you.

This Christmas season the Holy Spirit calls your attention to the exhortation of the Apostle Paul, “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you--unless, of course, you fail the test? (2 Corinthians 13:5)

The true believer who has accepted God’s love, Christ given, is a new creation. Do you love the Lord Jesus? Do you serve Him? Are the things of the Lord constantly on your mind and heart? These three truths must be settled in your mind and heart before you partake in communion this Christmas Eve day.

Let us pray!

## *Grasping Your Place in Christmas*

There are many revelations from God connected with the birth of Christ. The best way of overcoming the world's view of Christmas is to have a Biblical understanding of the miraculous events that took place at the first Christmas. Many Christians remember the first Christmas after they had invited Christ into their heart and life to be both Savior and Lord. The Holy Spirit of Christ illuminated them with a fresh excitement and understanding that was pleasing to God.

Over time, however, like most things in life the joy that should be expressed this Christmas season can be snatched away by holiday busyness, life's trials, the loss of loved ones, poor health and especially by the lures of this world. Each of these distractions can be easily overcome by meditating upon what the Word of God says about the lives of those who were closely involved with the earthly life of Jesus Christ.

There are two people whom God ordained to be a very important part in Jesus' life that first Christmas. Listen to what the Bible says about Joseph and Mary. In Matthew 1:18-24 we read in the New International Version, "This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins.' All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel' --which means, 'God with us.' When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave Him the name Jesus."

In Luke 1:26-38 we read of Mary, "In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, 'Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.' Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the throne of his father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; His kingdom will never end.' 'How will this be,' Mary asked the angel, 'since I am a virgin?' The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God...' 'I am the Lord's servant,' Mary answered. 'May it be to me as you have said...'"

The Biblical accounts of the lives of Joseph and Mary hold truths that the Holy Spirit of Christ wants you to grasp this Christmas season. Many know the accounts of Christ's birth but have little Biblical revelation or understanding of the lives of Joseph and Mary. However, Christians who live a life expressing that the birth of Christ is an event worth celebrating take time to invite the Holy Spirit to illuminate Biblical truth into their hearts.

The first truth worth grasping is that the Lord takes ordinary men and women and makes useful vessels of them. Joseph was a man doing ordinary common work and who, to our knowledge, held no place of authority or worldly fame. Mary was an ordinary but godly woman who lived a faithful life before God. Joseph and Mary were earthly parents of Jesus and they expressed the type of character that should be found in all Christian parents who claim to believe in God.

This is great news! Most people who believe in Christ are not going to be rich and famous in this world's eyes, yet the Lord has a very special place for them in proclaiming the truths of Christmas. It has been well said, "God takes ordinary people and does extraordinary things through them."

The second truth worth grasping about Joseph and Mary is that they were willing to seek out and do God's will for them. In Luke chapter two we read of them doing as the Book of Leviticus instructed regarding the presentation their first born son to the Lord. Their obedience to the law of the Lord sets the example for everyone whom God would make ready to find their place in the telling of the Christmas story. Believers in Christ who want to enjoy all that this Christmas has for them will be prayerfully reading and studying the Word of God and asking the Lord to give them wisdom and the strength to obey it.

The third truth worth grasping this Christmas is what the Bible reveals about Joseph. Very little is actually said about Joseph in Christian writings or in Scripture; however what is said about him the Holy Spirit wants to place deep within your spiritual heart. The Bible says that Joseph was a "righteous man." The Hebrew word for "righteous man" (*tsaddiys*) means that a man is known for his uncompromising obedience to the Torah, the law of Moses. The application for today is that Christians need to live uncompromisingly to the whole counsel of the written Word of God. Everyone who knew Joseph considered him to be a man who knew the written Word. In his natural man, Joseph's response at Mary's revelation that she was pregnant "by the Holy Spirit" would have been doubt and shock. His expectations of having a pure and godly wife and raising children in God's perfect will was now shattered. He would have been angry and felt betrayed. No one would have blamed him if he would have laid the full brunt of the written law upon Mary and done all he could to save face in the community. Not only was Mary subject to accusations of giving in to sin, but Joseph as well. In the natural it takes two to bring about pregnancy. Instead of living in the natural Joseph decided to live out the righteousness he had seen in his God. The word "righteous" (*dikaio*) in Matthew 1:19 means to be merciful, kind and tender. The application is that Joseph was not a man given to passionate vengeance; rather he had a right relationship with God. Joseph lived in accordance with God's compelling standard, listened carefully to God's

revelations that he was to be the earthly father to the Messiah and then obeyed God's instructions implicitly.

Children blessed to be raised in a true godly home have fathers who know their place in the Christmas story. They are fathers who seek out the will of the Lord Jesus for them and who love their wives as Christ loved the church. They trust in the power of the Holy Spirit of Christ to help them be merciful, kind and tender. They desire to be like Joseph, men who live in accordance with the full counsel of the written Word of God.

The fourth truth worth grasping this Christmas is what the Bible says about Mary. Again, little information is given about Mary in the Bible, yet what is said illuminates the character trait that is needed if someone is going to find his or her place in the Christmas story. Mary was submissive to the Lord's will for her. The key words that reflect her heart are "I am the Lord's servant..." The Greek word (*doûle*) translated "servant" here means Mary considered herself to be a bond slave of and owned by the Lord. She was giving Him full permission to work His will in and through her life no matter what that meant to her reputation or physical safety. This attitude allowed her to live and express what God desires in all who want to know Him and to worship Him in spirit and truth. Mary said, "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." (Luke 1:46-47)

Mothers who find their places in the Christmas story have submissive hearts to the Lord, and God intercedes for them just as He did Mary. Mary no doubt faced gossip, accusations of immorality and could have been stoned to death under the law. What she found was strength to face her fears and the misunderstandings of those that did not comprehend what God was doing in the world. She could find rest in the protective hand of God and in the care of her husband, Joseph.

The last truth to grasp this Christmas season is that those who find their place in proclaiming the realities of Christ have the Lord with them. The words of Gabriel to Mary were, "The Lord is with you." This was not the first time this promise was proclaimed. When the Angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon He proclaimed, "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior." (Judges 6:12) This is the very same promise given by Jesus to all soldiers of Christ who participate in the Great Commission. The Christ of Christmas said, "...surely I am with you always." The definition for "always" (*pantos*) here means to continually and forever be with us in our work with the Lord and in everything affecting our lives. There is no greater truth worth meditating on this Christmas season than the Lord being with us in every part of our lives.

Have you grasped your place in the proclaiming of the birth of Christ? Do you understand how much you mean to the Lord? Prayerfully cling to these truths and invite Jesus Christ to become Savior and Lord of your life and enjoy your God-ordained purpose in this world.