

Proclaim Good News of Great Joy

A little boy returned from Sunday school with a new perspective on the Christmas story. He had learned all about the wise men from the East who brought gifts to the baby Jesus. He was so excited he just had to tell his neighborhood friends. This is how he told it. He said, “I learned in Sunday school today all about the very first Christmas. You see, there was no Santa way back then, so three skinny guys on camels had to deliver all the toys. Rudolph the reindeer with his nose so bright was not there yet, and so they had to have this big spotlight in the sky to find their way around.”

That was his story. It is funny because it is told by a child with a child’s perspective. I always enjoy children’s perspectives on adult matters. They often get things confused. It is like my understanding of the very first verse of Psalm 23 which says, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” As a child I used to wonder, “Why do you not want Jesus?” I totally misunderstood what

the verse was about. It was not until later in life that I realized my understanding as a child had been wrong. But this little boy did the right thing. He might have had the facts wrong, but he had the right desire. He demonstrated that he was an evangelist. He wanted to go and tell his friends all about Jesus.

Luke tells us that Joseph took Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem. If you read the passage in Luke 2, it says that they went up. Verses 4-7 read,

Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, and in order to register with Mary, who was engaged to him, and she was with child. And while they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. She gave birth to her first-born son. She wrapped him in clothes and laid Him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn. Luke 2:4-7 (NASB)

I suspect that many of us understand exactly the words that we just read, but did you know that there are many people who do not understand what Christmas is all about? Fifty

years ago almost everybody, even non-Christians, understood what happened at Christmas. But we live in a time now where that is not taught in our schools even as part of our historic culture. Nativity scenes are no longer in our schools. You rarely see a nativity scene in



the public square. You do not read about it in the news, the story is not being told.

One of the questions that people are really interested in at NeverThirsty.org is what is the real meaning of Christmas? Or why was Christ born into the world? Those two questions with the answers are posted on our website. People are finding the answers at our website and they are reading them. People want to know what the real meaning of Christmas is. That tells you that many people do not know; they have no

idea. That little boy in our story did the best thing. He did not have it right, but he had a great heart. As I was thinking about that little boy, I realized he was not the first one that told other people that Jesus had been born.

What do you think of when you think of the Gospel? Do you think of the fact that Jesus did miracles, that He did signs and wonders? He multiplied food. He fed both the 5,000 and then a second time He fed 4,000 people. He died on a cross; He came back to life and then ascended into heaven. Is that the Gospel? What do you think of when you think of the Gospel? The little boy actually gave good news—he actually was giving the Gospel. What is the Gospel? Let us keep reading in Luke 2. Verse 8 says,

In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. Luke 2:8 (NASB)

We are familiar with the story and we then remember, “This is when some angels showed up!” Verse 9:

And an angel of the Lord suddenly [appeared] before them, and the glory of the Lord shown around them, and they were terribly frightened. But the angel said to them, Do not be afraid, for behold I bring you good news of great joy, which will be for all the people. Luke 2:9 (NASB)

When I was reading that, it dawned on me that in verse 10 the angel said,

Do not be afraid, for behold I bring you good news. Luke 2:10 (NASB)

Do you understand what good news is? In the Greek it is the same Greek word that is used for “Gospel.” It is good news. The angel did not say, “I just came to bring you good news.” It is “good news of great joy!” It is *me gas kara*. *Mega* is great! *Kara* is “joy.” So it is “great joy.” So it is good news of great joy! As I read I realized, “The Gospel starts with this verse!” The Gospel is not just that He taught, did miracles, signs and wonders, and then died and came back to

life and ascended into heaven. The Gospel starts with His birth. Then what are these angels doing? The angels were the first ones to announce the birth of Christ. They were giving or announcing the good news or the gospel. What is the gospel? Luke 2:11 tells us,

For today, in the city of David, there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. Luke 2:11 (NASB)

The title, Christ, also can be translated as the Messiah, who is their Savior, and that has to be a foreign thought to them. Probably many of the Jews would have thought the angels were talking about a military savior, someone who would rescue them from the Romans. But if you were to read what Zachariah said about John the Baptist, Zachariah said that his son was going to give his people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins. Zachariah knew that the coming Messiah was going to be the Savior of the world and would bring forgiveness of sins. So when the angels announced that the Savior had been born, their announcement is the beginning of the Gospel. I thought when I read that, “The angels are evangelists!” The boy in our opening story was an evangelist and the angels are evangelists. They are telling the story about Jesus. I should say not just a story; it is the historical account that actually happened. Verse 12 says as the angel continues to speak,

This will be a sign for you. You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. Luke 2:12 (NASB)

Now I have a question for you: Why did the angel say that? Let me make my question a little clearer. Why did the angel not tell the shepherds more precisely the location where they could find Jesus? What could the angels have done for the shepherds, to help them find Jesus? They could have led them to the exact place. Or they could have provided precise directions to Jesus’ location. It is interesting the angels did not give them any more information. It is interesting that the angels told them only that the baby was wrapped in cloths. Now you might ask, “Why is that a sign?” Have you ever asked yourself why is it a sign that the baby was wrapped in

cloths? The reason it was a sign is because only the wealthy wrapped their babies in cloths. Cloths were expensive. So to find a baby in a manger, wrapped in cloths that only wealthy people would have, is inconsistent. It is definitely a sign. So how did the shepherds find Jesus? They had to go door to door to find Him, from house to house. They had to search for Him. What would happen in the process of searching? People would ask questions as to why they were looking for a baby. What would the shepherds have said? "We were just visited by some angels!" Can you imagine the stir that would create in the community, to be told that some angels had just appeared to these shepherds?! Imagine! We do not think about the "what if?" We just read the story and we often do not stop to think about the serious implications in this account.

Do you realize what the angels did, by only giving them the sign that the baby was wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger? That caused these shepherds to become evangelists, because then they were able to share the Gospel, the good news, about the birth of Jesus, the Messiah! It was amazing what happened. They were evangelists going house to house! I realized that is the way God has always worked.

When Adam and Eve sinned, God responded in Genesis 3:15 with a prophecy about the coming Messiah - the Messiah who had just been born in Bethlehem. God has not always just given us a sign; but He has also been an evangelist with good news. That is what He did for Adam and Eve after they sinned. Genesis 3:15 was good news of the coming Messiah! God continued to give us good news about the Messiah. He repeatedly gave us good news in the Old Testament that the Messiah was coming. Now when Jesus was born, the angels said "We have good news, you can find Him, here is the sign."

God is continuing to give us a sign. Some might ask, "Why is the sign important?" When you find someone who fulfills all of the Old Testament prophecies about Messiah's coming, then you know that He is the one God about whom God has been prophesying. For example, Isaiah 7:14 says that the child would be virgin born. Jesus was virgin born. Micah 5:2 tells us that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem Ephrathah. If you go to Matthew 2, you find out that

when the magi arrived in Jerusalem, they asked, "Where is the king of the Jews?" King Herod asked, "Where is the king of the Jews going to be born?" The answer was, "Bethlehem," the fulfillment of Micah 5:2.

Interestingly enough, if we go back to the ancient rabbinic writings, the rabbis interpreted Micah 5:2 as being a prophecy related to the coming of the Messiah. They said that it would be fulfilled during the time that Rome controlled Israel. That is exactly when the Messiah came. But today, the Jews have stumbled over Christ. They were looking for a military savior, not one who saves us from our sins. So they have changed their interpretation of Micah 5:2 to fit their view of Jesus Christ. But the ancient rabbinic writings at the time of Christ said the Messiah would come at the time that Rome was in control of Israel. Is that not interesting?!

Daniel 9:24-25 pinpoints the time when Christ would die, A.D. 33. So if He is going to die in A.D. 33, He had to be born before that date. God has always been in the business of giving us signs, and here is a sign: the baby will be wrapped in cloths. Then we are told in verse 13,

And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased. Luke 2:13 (NASB)

I will not read the rest of the verses from verse 15 through verse 20, but we know what the shepherds did. They were so excited they then told everybody they met about the birth of Christ. They were evangelists. Do you see where I am going? I am talking about the fact that the angels were actually evangelists. God the Father was the first evangelist, but at the time of the birth of Christ, the angels were the first ones, and then the shepherds were the next evangelists. What has Jesus told us to do? To go and to share the Gospel. We are to go into the entire world and to share the Gospel. We are to go and make disciples of all men. We are to go and to be evangelists. It is easy for us as Christians to rejoice in the fact that our Savior came and was born, but I think we need to do one more thing. We need to tell other people about Jesus. We need to be evangelists, just like the little boy who gave

an inaccurate message but had the right heart.

But we are to tell the good story. What is the ultimate end of the good story? It is one thing to tell them that Jesus was born into the world, did miracles and taught the people. He died, came back to life, and ascended into heaven. But do not leave the story there. What is the really important part of the story? That “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” Then the next thing is to tell them that Jesus is God, who took on human flesh and died in our place. He was the Holy Lamb of God who died for our sins. By repenting of our sins and believing in Him, we can have our sins forgiven. Do you know what true faith is? True faith includes repentance from our sins. True faith believes the truths about Jesus including that He is God, and true faith is a willingness to yield one’s life to Christ. The person who truly believes those things will be true to them.

Christmas is all about the birth of Jesus who is our Savior, and it is an opportunity for us to share the good news. I suspect if you went to a neighbor and you asked them, “What is Christmas all about?” they would probably tell you it is family, getting together with friends, having a party, drinking, having fun. It is amazing what people think Christmas is about. For far too many, it has become totally secular, and they have lost the meaning of Christmas.

So, what can we do at Christmastime? That is what I want

to close with and make you think about. I am not going to give you a lot of suggestions, but one suggestion you might think about is taking a plate of goodies to your neighbors, and wishing them Merry Christmas. Include a message about the true meaning of Christmas. If they are upset that you said, “Merry Christmas,” remember Jesus told us we will be persecuted, but at least you tried and may have opened the door for later conversation about the gospel. I encourage you to share the Good News about Jesus Christ.

Be an evangelist and tell others that Christmas is about God taking on human flesh so that He could die on the cross for your sins and my sins! God took on human flesh so that He could be our Savior who saves us from sin. Only by believing in Jesus Christ can we be saved from suffering for our own sins. Only those who recognize their need to have their sins forgiven and trust Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins, will go to heaven. Christmas is about the gift called Jesus. Later He gave us another gift called eternal life.

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:23 (NASB)

Christmas is about the most valuable gift — the gift of Christ.