

The Birth of Christ: The Story We Thought We Knew

Pastor Guy Gray

Slow Down

For the next two Sunday's in December (16th & 23rd) and on Christmas Eve, we are focusing on the birth of Christ. This is a story we think we know. Wise men, shepherds, stable, manger, Joseph, Mary, baby Jesus—got it! Or do we?

Slow down...Think carefully...Open your heart. There are things in this story that are huge and hopeful, deep and beautiful. If you really “get it” this story is going to have a major impact in your heart. But where do we start?

Start with People!

Start with people! That's where Luke starts in his account. The majesty and the mystery of Christ's birth can't be seen just by looking at the baby Jesus. Sometimes Christian artists have tried to depict the glory of the baby Jesus by painting a halo over His head or raising His little baby arm to bless those who approach Him. Luke shows the glory of Jesus, not by describing the glowing glory of the infant Christ, but by showing the glory of Jesus birth. Luke paints a word picture of the transformation of those who surrounded Jesus—a picture of lives changed. Zachariah, Elizabeth, Mary, Shepherds, Simeon, Anna—all these lives are deeply touched and transformed as the Christmas story unfolds (Luke 1-2.) If we truly want to feel the impact of the Christmas story, we need to look closely at these lives. How did God work in their lives? How did they respond? What does it mean? The truth of the gospel is here for our lives as well.

Start with the Promise of Scripture...

...or, you could start with the promise of scripture and marvel to see the Word of God fulfilled exactly as He said it would. Both Matthew and Luke highlight this theme in their Gospels (Matthew 1-2; Luke 1-2.) We are reminded that the birth of Christ is the moment of destiny orchestrated by God Himself. In Bethlehem, City of David, the Son of David, the Christ—the Messiah is born. Do you get it? Do you believe it? What power and majesty! Ages upon ages of time, history and scripture promises are all wrapped up in this moment, this birth. God did this. This is God's mission, revealed in Scripture and fulfilled in time according to His promise. This is the gospel and it is for you and for me.

Start Before Time Itself

The mystery is greater still. John's Gospel starts before time itself, “In the beginning was the Word” (John 1:1.) The wonder of Christmas morning is set against the background of eternity, even the infinite power and majesty of God. Then John says “the Word became flesh and lived among us and we beheld His glory” (John 1:14.) Look again at the manger scene and think it through. Jesus came to redeem. Jesus came to pay for sin at the Cross. Jesus came to rescue guilty broken lives, according to the promise of scripture. But there is more...Jesus came to reveal as well as rescue. He came to reveal the glory of God. “No man has seen God at any time, but the only begotten son has revealed Him” (John 1:18.) Wow! Now we hear the story of Jesus with eager hearts. From birth through the Cross and on to resurrection victory—all of it, every step, every action, every word, every deed is a revelation of the true glory of God. Even the crib in the stable is the glory of God revealed. Do we get it? Maybe just a little!

May God, give us each the grace to open our hearts fully to Christ this Christmas. May we be touched and thrilled by the wonder of Christ and the power of the Gospel. May we, like the shepherds, run quickly and tell all who will listen to this marvelous story!

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

This week, read Luke's account of the birth of Christ (Luke 1:26-2:20) As you read, focus specifically on the "characters" involved.

How did God work in their lives? How did they respond? What can we learn from each person who is impacted by the birth of the Savior? How do their experiences shed light on the truth of the Gospel?

As you pray, read and meditate on the birth of Jesus Christ this week, ask the Lord to reveal to you the areas in your life that need to be impacted by this profound message.

Upcoming:

TODAY

12/16 SUNDAY

WOMAN'S RETREAT SIGN-UPS

Sign up today in the Fellowship Hall

12/16 SUNDAY

WOMEN'S MINISTRY BAKE SALE

Today after each service there will be a bake sale in the Fellowship Hall. Proceeds from the sale will be put in a scholarship fund for the Women's Retreat.

MONDAY 12/24

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICES, 6:00pm, 7:30pm & 9:00pm

Come and join us for a special night of worship, prayer and fellowship as we celebrate the birth of Christ. There will childcare available for birth-3rd grade at the 6pm and 7:30pm services only.

END OF YEAR DONATIONS

This is the time of year when many people consider giving year-end donations. If you are considering giving a year-end donation, please note that all donations must be received at the church or office or postmarked by December 31st to be included in your 2007 giving statement. If you are considering giving a gift of stock, please contact Julie Messenger at 699.2226 Julie@riverwest.org for more details.