

Where do we begin? Every Christmas, the faithful in Christ set out nativity sets and recall the tale of Mary, Joseph, the shepherds tending their flocks by night, the multitude of heaven announcing the birth of the Savior in the humble manger, and the gifts of the wise men. Speaking of wise men, most of us are familiar with Linus' charming recounting of the meaning of Christmas in "A Charlie Brown Christmas", telling us exactly what Christmas is all about. Most of us who study the Bible know that the wise men didn't actually show up at the manger but visited Jesus around the time of the Feast of the Epiphany before Jesus turned two years old. That doesn't diminish our enthusiasm for the Magi's place in the story of Christ. In fact, I personally find their zeal to travel so far (at least 500 miles) to see the Savior with their own eyes.

If you wonder why I call myself the "Lead Disciple" and not the "Lead Pastor" of [walkthroughscripture.com](http://walkthroughscripture.com) and the Nevada County Servants of Christ, it's because of my studies of Pauline theology which teaches that women were not allowed to teach men in the early Christian churches. I won't presume to debate theology with an apostle, but I'm hoping that God's cool with me being eager to share what I learn about the Bible not as a professed teacher but as someone walking the path of lifelong discipleship trying to learn all I can about the Lord. I began pursuing my degrees in Biblical Theology out of a hunger to understand the Bible better so that I could understand God better so that I might know how to serve Him better. What I've learned after years of studying is that a lifetime will not be long enough for me to discover every layer, glean every piece of wisdom, or fully comprehend the magnitude of God the Father, Christ Jesus the Son and Savior, or the Holy Spirit. Every time I learn something new, every time new dots are connected that illuminate the Scriptures for me, I am not only thrilled but also anxious to share it with others, not as a teacher but as a believer who wants to put that same thrill of knowing Jesus a little better into the hearts of others.

Which brings me here tonight, writing my second Christmas message since beginning my new ministry. Tonight, brothers and sisters, I don't intend to rehash the nativity story. As wonderful as it is, I have nothing to contribute that other theologians haven't covered probably a lot more skillfully than I ever could. I want to instead share what I learned about the moments of biblical history that led up to that one pivotal event, the story behind the nativity story.

Here's the reason why: Over the last few years, I've paid attention to the news like never before. It's impossible to ignore what is happening in our world right now, especially if you're a believer. Scientists are warning us of catastrophic climate change, which some accept and some discount. We see migrants fleeing countries steeped in violence, poverty, illness, suffering, and death, making their way by the thousands to lands where they will be foreigners facing an uncertain reception and praying to be received into a new home and a life of peace and hope. We see people who cannot flee from the terrors of their lands

or will not abandon the land they call home as they struggle to survive. We see wars between nations that stretch back to the beginnings of biblical history itself. There are people homeless on the streets, and people searching for a solution as the situation seems to grow more hopeless with every passing year. The small ripple of a war in one country reaches around the world, with the repercussions of food shortages in one nation and in other nations crippling inflation that leaves families on the brink of financial ruin or pushes them over the edge. Children cannot attend school and people cannot attend public events without the potential of random gun violence lurking like a nearby shadow.

Yet, we can look to this nativity story and hold to the knowledge of that infant in the manger, Jesus Christ, as the source of comfort even these millennia after His birth. When the world is in chaos around us, we can look to God's redemptive plan, which begins and ends in our Messiah to try to give us some perspective and hope that, no matter the condition of the world now, God is still in control and still leading us to fulfillment of a future of peace, life, brotherhood, and joy in the presence of that same Messiah.

That's why I want to spend this Christmas message not talking about the event of the nativity but rather the "before" and the "after" so that we can see the larger story of God's plans and why we can hold to our confident hope in the future that is being made for us through God's salvific work in Christ Jesus.

The Apostle Paul has much to say about God's purposes in Christ. I recommend checking out the books of Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians if you want to go deeper into what I'm going to touch on here. The first thing to know is that God's plans for Christ—His birth, His death on the cross to atone for man's sins, His resurrection from the dead to bring eternal life to all, and His ascension to sit at God's right hand until the time of the Second Coming (the Parousia), and the Parousia itself when God will judge mankind and establish a new creation with Christ as the King---was all conceived before God even created the heavens and earth, the animals and plants, and Adam and Eve.

God knew that there was an enemy of the perfect creation He desired in the heavens and earth. God knew that the enemy Satan would poison and corrupt all aspects of that creation with his own sinful nature. The heavens and earth were intended to be a reflection of all attributes of God (including His righteousness, His justice, His peace, His truth, His love, His wisdom, holiness, as well as His being all-powerful, all-knowing, omnipresent, and incorruptible), but Satan would desire to make it his own reflection (trapped in fleshly desires, rebellious against God, prideful, deceitful, corrupt, wicked, and doomed to death and eternal destruction).

However, so great was God's desire for that creation, including us, that rather than abandon His plans for us, He still brought us into existence...already having designed a course of history that would ensure the defeat of Satan and the restoration of the

creation he would contaminate. Paul teaches that God created it all FOR the Son, Christ Jesus, and THROUGH the Son. The heavens, the earth, and all creatures that lived would be a kingdom for the Son. What God purposes, He completes, therefore the heavens and earth WOULD indeed be formed, and, despite the schemes of the enemy, it WOULD become the creation and kingdom that God intended before time began...

...but it would be a long road to that redemption of man and the new creation kingdom, and there would be a price to be paid to purchase creation back from sin and death.

### *God promise the defeat of Satan through the Messiah*

If you've read the Bible, you know what happens next: God created Adam and Eve, man and woman, to be the caretakers and guardians of His creation, but the enemy did indeed contaminate the perfection that God had made. Satan tempted Eve with promises that if she only ate the fruit of the forbidden tree, she would be made like God, planting the first seeds of man's rebellious and sinful nature. One notes that Adam and Eve were warned that they would die if they ate the fruit of the tree. What does Satan say to them? "You will not certainly die". We know that the God of truth does not lie, but that's exactly what the enemy says to deceive the woman.

Eve ate the fruit and fed some to Adam. Being omniscient and omnipresent, God knew exactly what they had done. We just saw that God is the Lord of righteousness and justice, and the penalty for sin is death and eternal separation from God. Adam and Eve had brought death into creation with their rebellion. We know that God is faithful to forgive and be merciful if we confess and repent of our sins. If you read the account in Genesis 3, Adam and Eve confessed, but they didn't exactly repent so much as engage in passing the blame (Adam blamed Eve, who blamed the serpent).

Something else to understand about these events is Adam and Eve being banished from the Garden. It's true that a holy God cannot be in the presence of sin and corruption (that's why the priests of Israel had to go through intensive purification rituals just to enter the Holy of Holies where God dwelled in the tabernacle and the temple). That's part of the reason Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden, but it's not the whole story. God is concerned that the humans will eat of the tree of eternal life and be made immortal like Him. Don't mistake the Lord here—this was to preserve the hope of our salvation. We're meant to have eternal bodies, but it has to happen according to God's timeline. Had they eaten of the tree of eternal life in their corrupted state, Adam and Eve (and every human after them) would have been trapped in a state of eternal corruption and separation from God. The penalty for sin is death. Christ Jesus—as a human---would have to defeat death by succumbing to death. That wouldn't be possible if humans were born immortal.



God had already accounted for Satan's corruption of the man and woman. What seems to be a curse upon Eve (pains of childbearing, submission to her husband, enmity between Satan and her offspring) contains a blessing: Her offspring would crush the head of the serpent. In other words, a descendant of Eve would defeat Satan with finality. God had pronounced the inevitable end of Satan. Naturally, the enemy was just getting started in his plans to try to usurp the throne God intended for Christ. In a way, Satan DID claim a temporary throne---he became a principality and power in a world that had been corrupted by his interference. Until the day that Christ Jesus defeated Him and took His rightful throne, mankind would live in a realm of sin and wickedness, and those faithful to God and to Christ would battle to shine the light of hope and spread the message of salvation through faith to those who were perishing in this corrupted creation.

### *God preserves the line of the Messiah*

Fortunately, God is faithful to His promises, as He would demonstrate repeatedly in the history of man's redemption. From the onset, man might have perished had God not intervened. Adam and Eve were the parents of Cain and Abel. Cain was a man of a heart full of jealousy, pride, and resentment towards Abel, ultimately leading him to murder his brother. God again demonstrates mercy by allowing Cain to live, and He preserves the line of Eve's descendants by giving Adam and Eve a third son, Seth. Still, men were their own worst enemy. Corruption and wickedness filled the earth to such extent that God began to regret ever creating men. He would not break His Word that one of Eve's descendants would be the one to defeat Satan, but neither could God's holiness abide rampant, unrepentant wickedness. He set floods upon the earth, preserving a remnant of animal life and the line of Eve through her descendant Noah and his family.

(I would encourage you to read our lessons on Noah and his family, which delves a little deeper into how Noah's sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth became the patriarchs of the nations of earth. For now, what you need to know is that the line between Eve and her descendant, the Messiah, would continue through Shem as detailed in the Book of Luke.)

From Shem eventually came Abraham, another pivotal epoch in redemptive history. Abraham (born Abram until God changed his name) was a man of deep faith in the Lord, known to build altars to God wherever he travelled. Abraham obeyed God's call to leave his homeland for the land of Canaan. There, God made promises to Abraham: Abraham would be the father of a great nation (actually, He promised that Abraham would be the father of many nations, but the one great nation God had in mind was the future Israel). Though Abraham and his wife Sarah (named Sarai until God changed it) were well past childbearing age, God would give Abraham a great multitude of descendants, including kings. They would inherit the promised land, and through them all the nations of the

world would be blessed. This became known as the "Abrahamic Covenant". Abraham could do nothing to fulfill this covenant---these blessings were God's unconditional gifts to him, and they would be accomplished ONLY through God's power.

### *God's way versus Men's Way (Thy Way vs. My Way)*

There are many important lessons to learn from the story of Abraham, more that I can detail right now. Most often, people think of Abraham's unwavering faith in offering to sacrifice Isaac, the son God had promised. You can read up on some of our lessons at [walkthroughscripture.com](http://walkthroughscripture.com), but for now I want to point that Abraham and Sarah's actions after God's promise demonstrate the difference between "Thy Way" and "My Way" that really began with Adam and Eve and still plague mankind today. Abraham had no idea HOW God planned to make a nation out of him when Sarah was too old to bear children. As years ticked by without any sign of a son coming, Abraham and Sarah first tried to guess what God was up to by assuming that Abraham's servant would be his heir and the servant's descendants would be the ones God meant. God told them that their servant would be Abraham's blood son. Next, Abraham and Sarah second-guessed by trying to produce a son their way---namely by Abraham having a son with Sarah's servant Hagar.

The repercussions of the two of them trying to fulfill God's purposes by "my way" rather than "thy way" are still felt in the modern world. Hagar the slave gave birth to a son, Ishmael. For God's purposes, the Messiah had to be the descendant of a free woman (Sarah) not a slave. More importantly, God had waited until Sarah was well past childbearing age because the covenant had to be fulfilled by HIS power, not by any acts of man. The birth of Abraham and Sarah's child had to be a miracle, an act that could have only come from God.

It wasn't that God rejected Ishmael, quite the contrary: When Hagar ran away during her pregnancy because of Sarah's jealousy and cruelty, God sent her back to Abraham, where she would remain in his household for many more years. It was ultimately Ishmael's mockery of Sarah's son, Isaac, and Sarah's jealousy that Isaac alone was Abraham's rightful heir and heir to the covenant promises that led to Hagar and Ishmael being banished from Abraham's household. Even then, God preserved the boy and his mother and made Ishmael the father of many nations. Unfortunately, enmity between the descendants of both men still fuel conflicts between nations today.

What we need to remember is that Isaac's descendants became the nation of Israel; the other nations of the world would be called Gentiles and pagans in the Bible. God had selected Israel to be the nation from which the Messiah would come, but He never purposed that Israel would be the only nation with the opportunity for salvation. When He said that

all nations of the earth would be blessed through Abraham's descendants, he meant that the Messiah—descended from Eve through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, and King David--would bring salvation that would be made available to every person regardless of nationality or gender, Jewish or Gentile.

We still had a long way to go.

### *The First Exodus—a Biblical Type for the Messiah*

The promises that God made to Abraham were repeated to Isaac and to Isaac's son, Jacob (whom God renamed Israel). We will go deeper into their family history as we continue our study of Genesis next year. Jacob would have twelve sons through his two wives, Leah and Rachel, and two of their servants. Those sons would be Reuben, Simeon, Judah, Levi, Asher, Gad, Dan, Nephtali, Issachar, Zebulun, Benjamin, and Joseph. The line of the Messiah would be continued through Judah, but Joseph would be the son through whom God preserved the descendants of Abraham to become the nation of Israel. Joseph's famous trials—being sold into slavery in Egypt, wrongfully imprisoned, and ultimately elevated to great authority over Egypt so that he prepared and preserved the land during a drought that the Lord had foretold---served to save the lives of his own family. Jacob's family went into Egypt as the honored kin of Joseph.

Times change. 400 years later, Joseph's deeds were forgotten by the Egyptians, and the descendants of Abraham were enslaved in Egypt, praying for deliverance. The story of God's deliverance of the Hebrew people from bondage in Egypt foreshadows the Messiah's deliverance of all mankind from bondage to sin: 1) Liberation could only come under the power of God. The Hebrew people could do nothing to effect their own freedom save for believing in the one true God. 2) God was demonstrating His complete sovereignty and power over creation in the plagues unleashed upon Egypt, proving that other gods and goddesses worshipped by other nations were nothing but dead idols, works of men's hands with no power to save. 3) The sacrifice of perfect lambs foretells the sacrifice of the Messiah; as the blood of the lamb on the doors of the faithful spared the Hebrew people from the curse upon the firstborn, so the blood of the Messiah cleanses the faithful from their sins and spares them the penalty of eternal death for sin.

The Hebrew people were set apart by God, delivered to the land that God had promised Abraham (along the way demonstrating man's innate sinfulness and inclination towards rebellion against God, with much heartbreak). God dwelled among the people in the tabernacle, separated from all but the highest priest Aaron by a heavy curtain, for man was too sinful to stand in God's presence. Only Aaron could approach God and speak on

behalf of the people. Once in the promised land, the people became enmeshed in war with the inhabitants of the land. God had cautioned the Israelites not to make treaties with the pagan nations or marry their women, lest the Hebrews be turned to worship of false gods, but again rebelliousness and disobedience are inevitable qualities of man in our sinful condition.

We will explore the Exodus and the establishment of the nation of Israel with its Mosaic Law in depth in an upcoming lesson. What we need to remember now is that it was God's power alone that delivered the Hebrews from enslavement in Egypt, and it is God's power alone that created the Messiah to be our Savior, and it is God's power alone that was responsible for Christ's resurrection from the dead that makes possible our own rescue from death in sin to eternal life through faith in Christ.

Salvation does not come through works of men. Israel was given the Law of Moses as guidance on how to live holy lives that reflected God before the pagan nations. They were to shine God's light before these unbelievers, beckoning others to faith in the Lord. In all aspects of their daily lives, the Israelites were to magnify God and the perfection of His ways. God continued to dwell among them in the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle and in the temple that King Solomon would construct, at least until the sins of Israel became so intolerable that God's glory departed the temple. The time had not yet come for God to reunify the Gentile nations with the Jewish nation. When that time came, God's reunified people—the church—would be called to magnify God and shine the light of His perfect ways and His holiness to attract unbelievers to His salvation. God would no longer dwell separated from man in the Holy of Holies, but His Spirit would make its home in the hearts of every believer.

### *Kinsmen Redeemers and the Pagan Nations*

One such pagan was Rahab the prostitute, a resident of the city of Jericho. She had heard of God's chosen people and how the Lord had promised the land to this Hebrew nation. Even though she wasn't a member of the Israelite people, she believed in God's ability to do all He had said, and she was fearful before the Lord. For those reasons, when the time came that the Hebrew people would take the city of Jericho, Rahab sheltered their spies and begged mercy for herself and her family for fear of the Lord. A glance at the genealogy of Jesus reveals that Rahab is included in the lineage of the Messiah. She married a Hebrew man Salmon, and together they had a son named Boaz.

The story of Boaz and his wife Ruth is another biblical type/foreshadow of the work of the Messiah. A man name Elimelek from the tribe of Judah and his wife, Naomi and their two sons fled a famine in the land by settling for a time in the pagan land of Moab.



Tragically, Naomi lost her husband and sons, leaving only herself and her Moabite daughter-in-laws, Orpah and Ruth. Though her daughters intended to return with Ruth to Israel, Ruth implored them to return to their own kinsfolk, for she had no prospects of having other sons for the women to marry. Ruth, out of great love, insisted upon remaining with Naomi, even unto rejecting pagan gods for faith to the God of Israel, and worked hard to care for her mother-in-law upon their return to Israel.

By chance, Ruth ended up laboring in the fields of Elimelek's kinsman, Boaz. Having heard of Ruth's love for his relative, Naomi, Boaz blessed the young woman and watched over her. Naomi describes him as a "guardian redeemer" (the Hebrew word is *goel* or kinsman redeemer). According to Jewish tradition, a *goel* was responsible for redeeming any family land that had been sold, for marrying the widow of a family member in order to continue the family lineage, and for protecting any family member who was in danger or distress. Boaz ended up redeeming Ruth by marrying her, and they became the great-grandparents of King David.

The inclusion of the pagan women, Rahab and Ruth, in the lineage of Christ demonstrates God's mercy to those who fear Him and believe in His ability to do all that He promises and His intention that all nations would be included in the eventual eternal kingdom of the Messiah. Just as Boaz was kinsman redeemer to the Moabite woman, Ruth, bringing her into the Lord's family, so the Messiah would become the kinsman-redeemer to any who believe in Him, making them a part of His own "bride", the Christian church of believers.

### *The Once and Future Throne of the Messiah*

God's love of all people regardless of their race, culture, or social status is exemplified in David, the next in the lineage of the Messiah. When the time came that God consented to establish a human king in Israel, David was a shepherd. In Israelite cultures, shepherds held almost no status, , David was a shepherd. In Israelite cultures, shepherds held almost no status and were considered to be men of questionable character (their testimony was not even admissible in court). Yet, this humble shepherd boy David had a heart of pure devotion to God, such that he volunteered to face down the Philistine giant Goliath armed with nothing but a stone and confidence in God's ability to deliver Israel from this invader and his army.

David endured many trials and dangers with unwavering confidence and faith in God's goodness and ability to deliver him from any circumstance. God was faithful to David in return, forgiving even of David's most heinous lapse into sin in adultery and conceiving a child with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah to cover the crime. God placed David on the throne of Israel. He repeated the promises of Abraham to David and added to



them new covenants: David and Bathsheba's son, Solomon, would sit upon the throne and build the temple of Jerusalem. David's throne would be established forever. This, of course, is a reference to the eternal throne from which David's descendant through Solomon, the Messiah, will eventually reign.

Preservation of the line of the Messiah through the turbulent era of the kings of Israel and the exile to Babylon that would follow would indeed require God's intervention. The story of the kings of Israel is one of political turmoil, Israel's infidelity to their God, war against pagan nations, and a schism that would divide the nation of Israel. Under David's tyrannical grandson, Rehoboam, a man named Jeroboam I would lead a rebellion against the Davidic throne, splitting the kingdom between the two leaders. The Davidic kings would reign in the land of Judah while the rebellious Jeroboam I would take the throne of Israel. From that time forward, Israel would have a succession of kings, most of whom were wicked (and often assassinated) and led worship of pagan gods. Judah would continue under the succession of Davidic kings, most of whom remained faithful to the Lord (some notable exceptions such as the one queen, Athaliah, who attempted to assassinate the line of the Messiah and Azaiah who disobeyed God). Though many of the kings would attempt to atone for Judah's sinful people and restore proper worship of God, the crimes of Judah eventually was punished by their exile into Babylon while the people of Israel were overthrown by the Assyrians.

Through all of this—betrayal, war, exile—God remembered His promises: A remnant of Abraham's descendants was preserved, including the lineage of the Messiah through King Josiah's son Joconiah, and restored to the promised land of Israel to remain God's special people. Fourteen generations passed between the time of Abraham and the time of David. Fourteen more generations would pass before the arrival of the Messiah. David's descendant, Joseph, would become the husband of Mary, the mother of Christ whose father is the one true God. The Messiah who had been foretold at the fall of Man, descended through the family of Abraham, had finally arrived.

And here we are, back at the manger.

What does this mean for all of us?

As we have seen, it would mean the reunification of the nations of man. Those outside of Abraham's family, the Gentile nations (including the descendants of Ishmael) would have the opportunity to be "adopted" into God's new chosen people through faith in Christ. God would send the apostles to give the word about Christ to the Gentiles, telling the Apostle Peter that nothing God has made clean could be called "unclean" any longer, including the pagan people. The perfect life that Jesus led in His time as a human (and make no mistake, Jesus was fully a deity but He was also fully human during His time on earth) would make Him the one and only perfect atoning sacrifice for all of mankind. His death on the cross

would pay the penalty for all sins...once and for all. For those who believe in Christ, their sins have been blotted out, removed from God's sight, and their names have been written into the book of life. Through repentance from our sins and the choice each day to persevere in faith in Christ as our Savior, we are saved, made righteous, and justified by the blood of Christ.

Baptism is not the means of our salvation. If it were, salvation would be a "my work" not a "thy work". SALVATION IS AN UNDESERVED GIFT OF GOD'S GRACE. Period. No exceptions. We don't deserve it, but as our Father God desires our presence as part of His creation, He made a way for us to be made holy and pure. The barrier between God and Man has been removed. We can now approach God in the form of direct prayers to Him and be in His presence. Jesus is our only priest and only intercessor before the Lord.

The same is true for obeying the Law of Moses. It provides us the guidelines for holy living, but obeying its tenants does not bring salvation, otherwise salvation is a work of man (a "my work") and Jesus' death was in vain. The Law was a temporary guardian of God's people. Its system of sacrifices was meant to blot out the sins of the faithful temporarily until the sacrifice of Christ could provide the final, perfect sacrifice for sins. Jesus perfectly fulfilled the Law on behalf of all of us. To try to make ourselves righteous by following the law now is to remain in a kind of bondage called "legalism", to take salvation back into our own hands rather than trusting it to Christ.

When the Spirit comes within a believer, God's law is written onto his or her heart, and the way we live each day along with the good works that we do (the most important of which is proclaiming the gospel message of Christ) prove that we have His law on our hearts.

Baptism is the means by which we are symbolically buried with Christ and resurrected. It is an important public proclamation of faith in Christ Jesus (and make no mistake, it is important that we proclaim our faith publicly, without shame so that when the time of the eternal kingdom arrives Christ will proclaim us as His people before God). When we choose redemption in Christ and participate in his death and resurrection through baptism, we are as slaves being brought out in an exodus from sin by our Messiah, just as the Hebrew slaves were brought out of Egypt. He has become our kinsman redeemer, making us His bride, purchasing us back from the kingdom of Satan.

We now live in expectation of the "age to come", the second manifestation of Christ Jesus when He comes for the final victory over Satan. We have been given the Word of God, the Bible, to replenish ourselves in the Spirit that dwells in us, which helps mature us in our faith. The new people of God in the eternal kingdom of Christ will include people from all nations, for God has not forsaken any tribe of man so long as they will believe in the One whom He sent to redeem us.

On this day, Christmas Day, let us think back on how far God has brought His people from the first promise of the Messiah to Eve to the Messiah arriving in the flesh that day two thousand years ago. Those believers who have gone before us in death are now in heaven with Christ, awaiting the day of His return when they will be resurrected to a new kind of life. Those alive at that time will experience the same transformation as we are gathered as sheep to be with our great Shepherd. We wait now in advent, looking to the time of the second coming of Christ when God will pour His grace upon the whole creation. There will be new heavens and a new earth. The enemy who sought to corrupt God's creation, who holds us in torment to sin now, will be gone, his ways blotted from our hearts. There will be no more violence, no grief, no tears, only joy in the presence of the Messiah who came to us as a tiny infant in that manger so long ago.

Go forth with a fresh perspective on your place in God's eternal plans and confidence that your story is a part of the great story of the Messiah. Be blessed and Merry Christmas!