

Luke 2:1-20 "Born to be Our Savior!" 12/24/24

One year there was a family whose decorations told the story of Christmas well - Their large picture window displayed a lighted nativity scene - Above was a star - And there were lighted angels around

One day, two small boys were overheard discussing it - One boy observed the beautifully arranged scene, but noticed the absence of a very important character - "I don't think these guys believe in Santa Claus," he cautioned his friend

"No, I guess not," the other conceded, then added, "but they're nice people anyway."¹ - Sometimes there is quite a difference in the Christmas that the world enjoys - And the Christmas that the Church joyfully celebrates

Yet, even within the Church, our information is sometimes a little confused - Once upon a time, a little girl came home from Sunday School waving a paper for her mother to see - "Look Mommy," she exclaimed, "Teacher says I drew the most unusual Christmas picture she had ever seen!"

Her mother took one look and had to agree with the teacher - Hoping her daughter could explain her creation, the mother asked, "Why are all these people riding in an airplane?"

"Well, Mommy, that's the flight to Egypt." - Accepting that, mother asked another question: "Who is this mean-looking man in the front?"

Her daughter answered quickly and knowingly: "That's Pontius, the Pilot." - Looking at the picture even more closely, the mother said, "I see you have Mary and Joseph and the Baby. But who is this large man sitting behind Mary?"

¹ Adapted from an illustration by Fran McMahon, Rochester, WA, Christian Reader, "Lite Fare," as quoted by Bible Illustrator for Windows, © 1990-1998, (Parsons Technology, Hiawatha, IA)

“Can’t you tell?” the little girl asked, beginning to shake her head in disappointment - “That’s Round John Virgin.”²

If you are here today thinking that Santa is the reason for the season - Or if your theology is about as well developed as the child who drew that picture - Hopefully you can leave here with a little better understanding of the real meaning of Christmas

This past year we saw the 80th anniversary of the invasion of Normandy on D-Day, June 6, 1944 - D-Day was the largest seaborne landing in history - More than 150,000 U.S. troops were committed to the initial invasion, employing 6,900 vessels, 4,100 landing craft, and 12,000 airplanes

Within two weeks, the British and Americans had added an additional 629,000 men to the battle - There was a huge cost in life too - In the first hours of D-Day, more than 2,400 died - Over the next few weeks, tens of thousands were wounded or killed³

Most of the people in the Holy Land, at the time of Jesus’ birth, were expecting a Messianic invasion like the world saw on D-Day - They knew the Messiah was coming - And they were expecting conquerors in armor bringing a sword to set the people free from Roman oppression

However, what happened on that first Christmas day was not a huge army chasing the Romans out of the land - But it was truly an invasion

God, in the great cosmic struggle between good and evil, chose to deal with Satan’s rule over the earth - God invaded - But not the way the people expected - Rather, God came in a way that challenged the wisdom of humanity - God arrived as a tiny baby we call Jesus

It was a quiet invasion - There were very few people who understood what was happening - And many of them needed angels to open their eyes to the incredible event that was unfolding

² www.preachingtoday.com, Submitted by John Beukema, Chambersburg, Pennsylvania

³ Chuck Colson, The Faith, © 2008, (Zondervan Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI)

Mary, the mother of Jesus, knew that she was with child - And she also knew that she had never been with a man, not even Joseph, to whom she was betrothed - She had learned that she was to be pregnant with the Son of God when an angel told her of God's plan

For many, including Joseph, the doctrine of the Virgin Birth is hard to accept - Perhaps even unbelievable in Joseph's case, because he was about to send away Mary, this girl he dearly loved

But then an angel visited him too, and explained that "the God who could speak the universe into being, who could create human life, could certainly choose to make Himself known by the power of the Holy Spirit through a young virgin woman"⁴

Even the shepherds, who were incredibly close to scene of this birth that changed our world forever - Might have completely missed it if it were not for a choir of angels announcing the wonderful news

Luke 2:10-12 record the angel's message - "Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."⁵

Philip Yancey, in his book, "The Jesus I Never Knew" tells of a visit that Queen Elizabeth II made to the United States a decade or so ago - At that time, reporters delighted in spelling out the logistics involved

Her four thousand pounds of luggage included two outfits for every occasion, and even a mourning outfit in case someone died - She brought along her own hairdresser, two valets, and a host of other attendants

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ Scripture quoted has been taken from The Holy Bible, New King James Version, © 1979, 1980, 1982, (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN)

A brief visit of British royalty to a foreign country can easily cost twenty million dollars⁶ - It is quite a contrast to consider God's visit to earth - Jesus arrived in an animal stable with no attendants present except Mary and Joseph

There was not even a proper crib for the newborn King - He had to be placed in a manger, which is an animals' feeding trough - This incredible event which divided history, and even our calendars, may have had more animal than human witnesses

The story is told of a family who was enjoying Christmas Eve - They had a great dinner, a warm fire in their fireplace, and plans to worship in their Church - It was snowing that evening, not the kind of snowstorm that stops everything, but just enough to guarantee a white Christmas

As the time approached for the Church service, the father realized that the fire was still too strong to be left alone - So he stayed behind while mom, children, and grandparents headed off to Church

Shortly after the family left, Dad noticed some little birds in the farmyard - They seemed to be suffering in the snow - But he got a great idea - Dad would open the door to the barn, and the little birds could find shelter there

However, when he opened the door, the little birds would not go in - As bad as the weather was treating them - Their fear of the unknown barn was greater than their discomfort from the snowstorm

Next Dad found some birdseed - He spread some outside the barn door - And made a trail leading into the safety and comfort of the barn - As he watched, some of the little birds pecked at the seed - But they still would not go into the barn

⁶ Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, © 1995, (Zondervan Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI)

Finally, Dad began to realize that he was not going to be able to coax the little creatures to the warmth of the barn - He thought, "If I could just be one of them for a short time, I could lead them to safety"

Just then the Church bell in the village rang, and Dad remembered it was Christmas Eve - And he instantly understood the significance of Christmas⁷

Like that farmer's desire to become a little bird to lead the flock to safety - God became a human being to lead humankind to safety - God chose to take on human form to bring us salvation

The real significance of Christmas is found in John 3:16-17 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."

Jesus may have come as a tiny baby, probably a cute baby too - But we should be careful not leave Him there in the stable - Because Jesus also grew into a man who taught us many things, but He was not just a great teacher either

Jesus came to be our Savior - Jesus came to take the punishment we deserve for our sins - Jesus came to bring us forgiveness and eternal life

This Christmas you may open many gifts - Do not overlook the best gift of all - God's free gift to you of His son, Who came to be your Savior - Claim that gift for yourself by inviting Jesus into your life to bring you forgiveness - To bring you salvation

⁷ many variations of this Christmas illustration exists, original author unknown