

The Story of Christmas

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Luke 2:10-13:

¹⁰ And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.” (English Standard Version)

Birth Announcement: *How do you announce the birth of a baby in your country?*

- In *Romania*, where I am from, we simply call our families to let them know about the birth.
- In *America*, families sometimes send pictures of the baby, (with measurements and sizes), on birth announcement cards, letting families and relatives know of the new cuddly addition. In recent days though, Facebook does the announcement more.
- In *China*, families hold a one-month party, or a 100-days after birth party where family and friends come and see momma and baby, eat and celebrate together.
- *When Jesus was born*, God announced the birth in a most animated and glorious way! His birth announcement was like no other! The night Jesus was born, **angels** appeared in glorious light and burst into singing high praise. The audience was a group of **shepherds** keeping their sheep. A **shining star** appeared in the sky and guided some **wise men** from the East who traveled right to the place where Mary delivered Jesus. The heaven, the sky, and the earth participated in celebrating his birth!

The Ordinary Event with An Extraordinary Purpose

The actual birth of Jesus, the Bible says, is to “cause joy for ALL the people.” Now, *when mommas give birth to our precious babies, there is no doubt that a special joy comes in our hearts at the sight of our precious newborn. We know our baby is the most beautiful of all, and*

that if only everyone would see our baby, everyone would feel the same way!!! (until the baby cries or needs new diapers 😊)

But the birth of Jesus is to cause **a joy that is special for all people and set apart**. Not just for men, or women. Not just for one culture, but for all cultures. Not just for one time, but for all times. For ALL. Everyone in the world is invited to receive not just joy, but GREAT JOY from this birth. This birth has a tremendous effect on all nations. It is more than just an ordinary birth, and yet, it has a lot in common with all the births around the world.

- (1) On the one hand, to be able to offer such tremendous joy, the birth of Jesus must be special.
- (2) On the other hand, it must be also relatable, ordinary so people can receive this great joy.

So, what makes baby Jesus so special? And what makes Jesus so open to all peoples?

1. Baby Jesus is Unlike Any Other

a) The Names of Jesus:

- The birth announcement of Jesus describes him with all the meaningful names that meant a lot to the people hearing it. *You and I come from cultures where names have meanings. We value the names our children receive. Some cultures take a long time even after the birth to make sure they choose the right name for the baby. For all of our children, my husband and I consulted baby name books to find meaningful names for all of our children. Clarissa Hope, our oldest daughter, means “bright, shining hope”. Julianna Eve, our middle daughter, means “youthful life”, Annesse Maria, our youngest daughter, means “pure, holy beloved one”, and Levi, our son, means “joined, hero”.*
- When the angels announced the names of Jesus to the shepherds, they list about three other names that detail the mission of Jesus on earth. **Savior, Christ, and Lord**. Baby Jesus was born with a purpose. More than to be loved and raised in a Middle Eastern family, he had a mission from God, his very Father.

- i. SAVIOR means “the one who saves.” Even his first name, Jesus, means “God saves.”
 - ii. CHRIST means “anointed one” or “chosen one,” “a promised king.”
 - iii. LORD means “master”, “owner of things.”
- The baby boy Jesus is born in special circumstances, and has a special mission on earth. The names imply divine HOLINESS (Lord), AUTHORITY (Christ), and a CALLING (Savior) on life that is uniquely his.
 - HOLINESS (Lord): Though born of a woman, Jesus was not the son of an earthly man, but the son of God—conceived through a miraculous touch of the Holy Spirit on a virgin woman, named Mary.
 - AUTHORITY (Christ): He was God’s sent, having the authority and power of God in him. Jesus remained holy and perfect even as he grew up on earth.
 - CALLING (Savior): And finally, as his name points out, his birth has a mission to accomplish. A purpose. A role.

b) The Name “Savior”:

- From all the names in the world, why this name, **Savior**? In his very name, there is something to be saved from, and the actual act of salvation. Savior is someone who saves people from danger. It is a mighty, worthy, and courageous name. It must have been hard for the shepherds, or even for Mary, to see all this courage and might in a tiny baby, with little hands and feet, swaddled up in baby cloth.
- But what was the **danger** looming on all the world?
 - When God created people, he made them to be in fellowship with God. They lived in peace and harmony with God, each other, and the world.
 - But one day, the Bible says, the people decided to listen to God’s enemy who cleverly pulled them away from God. In doing so, the people lost their perfect relationship with God, turned against one another, began to argue and fight, and lost their privilege as God’s friends. They became God’s enemies by their own doing.

- Grieved by their choice, God has never stopped loving them. In his heart, God retained love for the humanity, but in his holiness and perfection, God wouldn't live and be together with the sinful people.
 - The world needed someone to save them from brokenness and evil, and reconcile them with fullness and God. And **God planned this solution to be his very own son - Jesus, the One who saves and reconciles and brings unity between people and God.** A mediator who is able to live up to the task before, like no other person could or ever can.
- How is Jesus, the Son of God, a Savior? Well, in his love for people, God had Jesus, his son, to be born from a virgin, live without sin, and die on a cross to pay for the price of disobedience for people. Jesus' mission was to save anyone who believes and desires a reconciliation with God, to save them from eternal death and separation from God. Jesus is God's solution for humanity. The Savior has the power to save people from sin, back into fellowship with God.

2. Baby Jesus is Like All Others

In the birth of Jesus, God created the most hopeful news for all people. We talked about what makes baby Jesus set apart, like no other. But in the birth of Jesus, the miraculous and the **ordinary** mingled together. What was ordinary about the birth of Jesus?

- a. The Bible talks about baby Jesus being “*swaddled in cloths, lying in a manger.*”
- b. The great news for all people came in a small bundle of a baby born to *simple*, faithful parents, swaddled in *simple* cloth, into a *simple* place—a manger, a place where animals feed from. She didn't have cribs or Pack and Plays but she made use of what she had around. He was born in very simple circumstances to simple and hard-working people.
- c. Though his conception was miraculous, *his birth* was like any mother's. In fact, the Bible records how Mary was not even in her own city and surrounded by her own family when Jesus was born. She was nine months pregnant and had to travel to another city on a donkey. She must have been very tired and scared. When they got

to this city, there were no rooms, everything was booked. But an innkeeper said there was a stable down the road. Why don't you just go in there and be safe? Her mother was not there, no midwife, no sisters. She wasn't in a hospital so she probably was concerned about the sanitation around. Instead, there were animals all around. Some of us, moms, can relate to her being nervous to give birth away from our homes, can't we? As an immigrant, I gave birth to my children away from home. I think Mary must have felt nervous, scared, in pain, but also excited and in love with her baby, Jesus.

- d. Birth-days say a lot about families and relationships. *When our first daughter was born, my husband and I invited our family and friends to meet her at our home. We did the same when our second daughter was born; the same when our third daughter was born; and when we brought Levi, our son, home from China where we adopted him from. We served our guests cookies, and allowed them to hold the baby.* In a similar way, God invited shepherds and wisemen to celebrate and see baby Jesus. God invited poor and rich, animals and angels, men and women, foreigners like the wise men and citizens like the shepherds. It was an open birth announcement because everyone is welcomed to Jesus.

So, every time Christians celebrate Christmas, we are reminded of some very powerful and true things:

1. In the story of Christmas, God proclaimed his love for all people at all times.
2. In Jesus' birth, God planned his mission to make a way for God and people to be in a beautiful, united relationship again. Jesus was born to live and die and resurrect so all who believe in God can have eternal life with Him forever in Heaven.
3. The ordinary details of Christmas are part of the extraordinary plan of God for all people regardless of their nationality, race, gender, economic status, or workplace. God invites all people to accept the extraordinary son of God, Jesus, who was born to bring people together with God forever.
4. God planned Jesus' birth with extreme care, gentleness, and love. With joy. With people. With angels and stars. With gifts and animals in a manger. But the same

care he showed at the first Christmas is the care he offers to every single person who turns to Jesus and accept his gift of salvation.

Thank you for allowing me to share with you my joy and delight at the story of Christmas. In the midst of all these times in 2020, from my family to yours and from our Friendship International friends to your friends and family, we want to wish you a very Merry Christmas and a blessed Happy New Year.