

Finding Christ in Present Times

It is Christmas day! We are concluding our series on Advent with finding Christ in present times.

Introduction

Merry Christmas! For the last month, we have been celebrating Advent, leading up to today, when we celebrate the first coming of Christ. Each week we lit a candle representing what the coming of the Messiah brought to humankind. We looked first at hope and how the coming of Jesus brought hope of salvation and hope of eternity spent with God in heaven. Then we lit the second candle and discovered how Jesus is our peace. He brings peace to our hearts even when the world is in turmoil. Next, we celebrated joy knowing that Jesus was fully God and fully man when he came to earth. Jesus was the fulfillment of prophecy, the long-awaited King of Kings. Last week, we looked at how Jesus is the illustration of God's love for us. God's only son, who was sent in the form of a baby who grew up, walked among us and died a sinless life to be resurrected three days later conquering death, hell, and the grave so that we can be reconciled back to God.

Today, as we celebrate Christmas, we are going to talk about how Christ is still relevant today. We will discuss the people surrounding Jesus' birth, those whom we see in Nativity; Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, and the Magi. Each person had an encounter with the son of God 2000 years ago, and we too can have an encounter with Christ in present times. Let's look at how God worked in each person's life leading up to the birth of his son.

Mary

We will start by looking at Mary, the mother of Jesus. In nativity scenes, she is usually standing next to her husband Joseph looking upon the baby Jesus. Understanding Jewish tradition, we would realize that Mary was around 15 years old when she became pregnant with Jesus. She was betrothed or engaged to Joseph at the time.

Let us start by reading about her in Luke 1:26-35:

Luke 1:26-35

(26) In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, (27) to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. (28) The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." (29) Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. (30) But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. (31) You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. (32) He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, (33) and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end." (34) "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" (35) The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

It would be easy to read this passage of scripture and assume that God randomly picked a Jewish girl to bear his son. That is not the case. God prepares each one of us for what he is asking us to do. We know



that God would have prepared her for this very moment, just as he prepares each one of us when he calls us to do something.

Mary was devoted to God. She loved him and was obedient to him. Although she was not married, Mary trusted that God would take care of her and be with her. Mary had faith that what the angel said would take place, she believed. This faith would only be possible if she spent time in scripture and knew the heart of God. Mary's encounter with Jesus started with devotion to God and an encounter with the Holy Spirit.

Joseph

Every healthy relationship requires communication, openness, and honesty. The Bible does not record the conversation Mary had when she announced to Joseph that she was going to have a baby which was conceived by the Holy Spirit. But we do know that Joseph was skeptical and loved Mary deeply and that he did not want her to be disgraced.

An angel of the Lord appears to Joseph and puts his mind at ease. Let us read Matthew 1:18-21

Matthew 1:18-21

(18) This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. (19) Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. (20) But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. (21) She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

Joseph was a righteous man who wanted to do what was right; he had integrity and did not want to publicly humiliate his fiancé. He knew God and was devoted to him. He did not doubt when the angel of the Lord spoke to him, he had faith because he knew the character of God. Once the Lord appeared to him, he understood what Mary had told him was true, that she was carrying the son of God. Joseph was obedient, had integrity, and did what was right for his family.

The Shepherds

Let us talk about the shepherds. In modern-day nativity scenes, there are usually two or three standing off from the manger surrounded by Mary and Joseph. In reality, these first visitors would have come inside the cave where the manger was and stood among the animals in the midst of the baby Jesus.

The shepherds were most likely around 14 or 15 years old. They would have been male and female and the youngest in their families. Shepherds were looked down upon as they lived with the sheep, and they smelled like the sheep as they would be out with the herds for weeks at a time.

Being raised in Jewish custom, they would have grown up hearing the law and Pentateuch read in the synagogue. They would know the prophets and how the coming Messiah was foretold. We do not know much more about these individuals but we know that God had an amazing encounter in store for them.

Let us read about the shepherds in Luke 2:8-20:



Luke 2:8-20

(8) And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. (9) An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. (10) But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. (11) Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. (12) This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." (13) Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, (14) "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." (15) When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." (16) So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. (17) When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, (18) and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. (19) But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. (20) The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

This is whom God chose to be the first visitors of his son. These lowly shepherds who were the outcasts, the youngest, and oftentimes the weakest in their families, were chosen to be the first worshipers. These young people were the first to have an encounter with Jesus outside of his parents. These shepherds were valued by God to carry out his message of the newborn king.

The Magi

Let us conclude by looking at the Magi. Traditionally, nativity scenes show three Wisemen, each carrying a gift of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. However, we do not know how many Magi were present, we just know that they brought three gifts.

They also were not present at the birth of Jesus; they arrived about the time Jesus was 2 years old. The magi were the wisest men in the land who had learned about the birth of this Messiah. They were astronomers and studied the stars they also studied the prophecies that pointed to a Messiah being born. We read about them in Matthew 2:1-12. Let us read their story together.

Matthew 2:1-12

(1) After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem (2) and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." (3) When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. (4) When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. (5) "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: (6) "'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'" (7) Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. (8) He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him." (9) After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and



the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. (10) When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. (11) On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. (12) And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

These Wisemen brought gifts to offer to the Messiah. They had not only studied the stars but they had studied scripture. Since they had spent time in scripture, they were open to the things of God so when they were warned in a dream to not return to Herod, they obeyed.

Conclusion

Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, and the Magi all played an important role in the birth of Jesus Christ. We can have hope by whom God chose to reveal himself. We see in every case that there is a common theme of devotion. Each individual knew God and was open to his ways. Each one had an understanding of what was promised to come. Their paths to the Messiah were much different; a few were young, some were highly educated, while others were uneducated. Some were respected in their communities, yet others were outcasts.

We can learn about the character of God through these people and know that he can use us in similar ways. Whatever God has called you to or asked you to do, he will prepare you.

Mary was devoted to God and was quick to accept the calling he placed on her life. We too can spend time in God's word so that when he asks us to do something, we know it is from him and we do not doubt so we are quick to obey.

Joseph was unsure about what was happening with Mary. Once he was reassured he was devoted. He was not only devoted to God but he was devoted to his family. As fathers, mothers, grandparents, aunts, and uncles, we too can be devoted to God and our families.

The shepherds were looked down upon by their families and society, yet God esteemed and honored them by showing them their value. You too are valued by God. You too can accomplish amazing things and be used by God.

The magi used their knowledge and faith to find the Messiah. They undertook a journey of discovery. If you are questioning whether Jesus is the son of God and came to bring you salvation, look at the Magi. They studied the Word of God and found truth in scripture and were rewarded with a face-to-face encounter with the Savior of the world.

We too can find Christ in present times. He is no longer a baby but our Savior who lived a sinless life and died taking our sin upon himself, was resurrected, and now sits at the right hand of God waiting to return to us.

As you celebrate Christmas with your friends and family, seek Jesus for he will be found. He came to bring salvation, hope, peace, joy, and love.

