

Sermon Notes

Practical Lessons for Understanding the Word of God



Jesus' Birth—The Big Picture

KEY PASSAGE: Luke 2:8-18 | SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES: Micah 5:2 | John 3:16

SUMMARY

When you think of Christmas, what thoughts come to mind?

Do you immediately focus on shopping, gifts, entertaining, and cooking, or do you remember that Jesus' birth is the main event? Even if your initial thoughts are about that first Christmas, you could miss some of life's most important lessons if you don't move beyond the manger, shepherds, and wise men to the big picture.

SERMON POINTS

As we look beyond the basics, the Christmas story will teach us the following principles:

What appears to be an insignificant event can have eternal consequences.

In itself, the birth of a baby was not that special. Many babies were born at that same time in the land of Israel. Even the fact that Jesus was born in a stable wasn't that extraordinary. Babies have always arrived at inconvenient times and in strange places. Mary and Joseph weren't exceptional people, either. They were just two of many people at that time in history.

In those days, Caesar was considered the most important person in the world, not an unknown Jewish couple with a newborn baby in Bethlehem. Yet in that stable the most significant event in human history took place. This tiny baby was God in human flesh who would later die on a cross for the sins of mankind, be resurrected, and ascend to heaven to sit at the Father's right hand. Yet most of the world was unaware of the wonder and eternal ramifications of Jesus' birth.

We shouldn't always judge a situation by appearance. Sometimes what seems insignificant in our lives is very important in God's eyes. He works through all kinds of circumstances to accomplish His will, and each one plays an important role, whether we realize it or not.

Sometimes God uses the ungodly to accomplish His divine purpose.

And that's exactly what He did during that first Christmas. As emperor, Caesar had total authority to make laws that affected the Roman world. When he made a decree that a census be taken of all the known world, it required that everyone register in his own town. Joseph had to travel with Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem because he was from the family of David.

Seven hundred years before this event, the prophet Micah had predicted that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). The Lord used a pagan emperor to fulfill this prophecy. Caesar's objective was to impose a tax on the empire, but God's goal was to transport Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem for the birth of the Messiah as prophesied in the Scripture.

Oftentimes God does His greatest work through unlikely people.

Those who knew Mary probably never would have guessed that she would give birth to the Messiah. She and Joseph were ordinary people. It's likely no one thought of them as great instruments of God, but they were the ones He chose to work through to bring His Son into the world.

The Lord accomplishes His plans in His way using whomever He chooses. And it may not fit with our perception of how He ought to carry out His

will. That's why we should never think that the Lord can't use us. Our goal should be to make ourselves available, as Mary did, for whatever He may ask of us.

A person's value is not determined by his or her surroundings.

Although Jesus was God's Son, He was born in a humble setting—a stable, complete with all the smells and sounds of animals. His bed was a manger, and He was wrapped in swaddling clothes. A stranger who walked into that stable could not have recognized the significance of this baby based on the environment.

We can't determine someone's value in God's eyes by his or her origin or status. Nor should we underestimate what the Lord will do in our lives if we're obedient to Him. What truly matters is not our status in the world but our relationship with Christ. There are many Christians who will be honored by God in heaven even though they were never recognized as great on earth.

God often makes His greatest revelations to people who have a low position in life.

Jesus' birth was a private event for his parents, Mary and Joseph. But in a field not far away, God chose to announce the birth of His Son to a group of lowly shepherds (Luke 2:8-20). In a divine revelation, "an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened" (v. 9). After hearing the message and seeing a multitude of angels praising God, the shepherds left immediately and hurried to find the baby.

This was the long-awaited Messiah, and many people at that time were expecting Him to come, but the shepherds were the only ones to hear of His arrival. Why would God choose to reveal this marvelous truth to some of the most inconsequential people in society? Perhaps it was because they were young and willing to believe the message. Furthermore they were eager to find the baby and had the courage to let others know what they'd seen and heard. Although the people who heard their

report wondered at the news, there is no record of any of them going out to see Jesus.

Are we like the shepherds—eager to let others know about Jesus? Christmas provides many opportunities to share what He has done in our lives. We can tell them that Christmas is the celebration of our Savior. The trees remind us of the cross on which He died so we could be forgiven. The lights point to the Light of the world who came that dark night. And the Christmas gifts remind us of God's awesome, eternal gift of His Son.

There is so much more to Christmas than many people think about. Not only can we learn valuable lessons by looking beyond the basics to the big picture, but we have also been given the responsibility to follow the shepherds' example. Once they saw the baby in the stable, it's certain their lives were never the same again. They had to tell everyone about Jesus, and so should we.

RESPONSE

- How big of a role does Jesus have in your thoughts at Christmas? If He isn't your main focus, what can you do to bring Him back into first place?
- How have you seen God work through the smaller events in your life? What was the eventual outcome?
- How have you seen the Lord work through unlikely people? Was that unlikely person you? If so, what did He do through you?
- The Christmas season provides more opportunities to talk about Jesus than are ordinarily available. How can you prepare beforehand so that you'll be ready to tell others about Jesus when opportunities arise?

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