

# Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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## Christmas Broadcasts: Christmas Message (2014)

As one gets older, early memories associated with Christmastime come before the mind. When I was small, what I suppose was originally a beggar's plea was often quoted as winter nights grew longer and darker:

*Christmas is coming.  
The geese are getting fat.  
Please put a penny in the old man's hat.  
If you haven't got a penny,  
A ha'penny will do.  
If you haven't got a ha'penny  
God bless you.*

At the very least, it brought an early realisation of the very real needs of the weak and feeble and old. Recognition of material needs they could not themselves meet! Happily, much charitable work is now done to meet or at least reduce the more extreme effect of the lack of basic necessities. Very good! But of deeper significance is the fact that we all have a deep spiritual need that only God can meet. And He has indeed provided for that need. God was preparing for Christmas even before He brought creation into being. Throughout the Old Testament, written hundreds of years before Jesus was born, clear prophecies are given of the coming into the world of the Son of God.

As I begin, let me encourage you to make and take the time to read for yourself the many scriptures I shall refer to or quote. It will help you to really understand what happened, and why. In addition, it will be really helpful to read through the Matthew 1:1-2:23, and also Luke 1:1-2:52.

Bethlehem, with its role as the place where Jesus would be born, is referred to in Michah 5:2: *"But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting."* The first mention of Bethlehem is in Genesis 35:19, recording it as the place where Rachel died giving birth to her son, whom she named Benoni (Genesis 35:18), 'son of sorrow'. Father Jacob looked ahead to future prominence and called him Benjamin, 'son of my right hand' (Genesis 35:18). Both these names were fulfilled in the Lord Jesus, the True Benoni (described as 'man of sorrows' in Isaiah 53:3) and also the True Benjamin (emphasised as son of the right hand in Hebrews 1:3, 1:13; 8:1; 10:12 and 12:2).

The delicate matter concerning a baby born to a pure virgin is prophesied in Isaiah 7:14: *"The Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."*

Isaiah 9:6-7 adds: *"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this."*

In Isaiah 53, Isaiah gives intense, at times excruciatingly painful, details of the life and sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ. Ecclesiastes 9 gives us a quaint little picture of the Lord's humility, of being of no real importance in the eyes of the master builders of this world. It is well worth reading and considering. Daniel 11:37 confirms that for many centuries it had been the deep desire of all faithful, godly, Jewish women to be the mother of the long-promised Messiah of Israel. But let us move on into the New Testament. We shall concentrate initially on Joseph and Mary.

In Luke 1:26-35, we read: *"The angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to be married to a man descended from David, whose name was Joseph. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel came to her, and said, 'Don't worry, Mary. God regards you very highly. So much so that you have been chosen to have a very special, indeed, unique baby. When he is born, you are to call his name JESUS. Indeed he will be a very great person, even the Son of God. He will eventually be King of Israel. His kingdom will never be*

*superseded by any other.’ Mary said to the angel, ‘That’s impossible. I’m a virgin.’ The angel answered and said unto her, ‘The power of the Holy Ghost will come upon you, and that holy baby you will bear will be called the Son of God.’”*

Joseph himself had been visited by the angel to give him a direct message of the coming event. *“Being a fair, just man, and not willing to make a public example of Mary, he was thinking it would be more discreet to send her away to a private place. But while he was thinking about it, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, you are a descendent of David. Don’t be afraid to marry your fiancé, Mary. Her baby has been conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost. You must call her baby, JESUS, for he shall save his people from their sins.’ When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and married Mary, but they did not consummate the marriage until after the baby was born”* (Matthew 1:19-25).

Mary confided in her cousin Elizabeth, who was herself to be the mother of a baby. He would grow up to be John the Baptist. Malachi 3:1 tells us that, when the time came, John would herald the announcement of the imminent commencement of the public service of the Lord Jesus Himself. Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Ghost, told Mary that all things would indeed be fulfilled as she had been told (see Luke 1:39-45). Wonderful thing, that Elizabeth was able to address her cousin Mary as *“the mother of my Lord”* (Luke 1:43)! Joseph and Mary understandably marvelled at what they had been told about the coming baby.

The record of the actual birth of the Lord is very touching. *“In those days, there went out a decree from the emperor Caesar Augustus. A census would be held to facilitate an orderly tax system. Everyone had to go back to where their family was from. Joseph had to go from Nazareth, in Galilee, where he lived and worked, back to Bethlehem, because he was a descendent of David. As his betrothed wife, Mary, heavily pregnant, had to go with him. While they were there, the baby was due to be born. She did indeed have the baby while they were there. She wrapped him in suitable swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn”* (Luke 2:1-7). They had to make the best of very primitive circumstances.

*“Local shepherds, abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock overnight, were astounded when the angel of the Lord appeared to them to tell them the amazing news. The glory of the Lord shone round about them and upon them. Like Mary, and Joseph, and Elizabeth, they were very much afraid. ‘Don’t worry’, said the angel. ‘I have very good news for you, indeed for everybody. Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.’ And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, ‘Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.’ And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them”* (Luke 2:8-20).

Very few others were let into the secret at the time. Luke does record the fact that Anna and Simeon, two godly old souls, both recognised the child’s extraordinary, even unique, mission, blessed the parents, and gave thanks and praise unto God in the temple at Jerusalem (Luke 2:22-40).

There was also a group of wise men, of whom we read, in Matthew 2: *“Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, ‘Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him’. When Herod the king heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel”* (Matthew 2:1-6)

Herod’s enquiry was clearly a subterfuge, because he saw Jesus as a potential rival to his own position and power. He wanted to know where Jesus was so that he could have him killed (Matthew 2:7-9a). However, when they had heard the king, the wise men went away. and the star, which they saw in the east, went before them. The wise men were delighted and resumed their journey in faith. They followed the star until it came and stood over where the young Child was (Matthew 2:9b-10). They had been brought in faith to Jesus at Bethlehem. We all need to show the same simple faith, which will bring us, too, to the Lord.

*“When they were come into the house, the wise men saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country a different way”,* Matthew 2:11-12.

There is no doubt that the three gifts were very valuable in themselves, and might well have been sold to cover the cost of the lengthy journey and accommodation for Joseph and his family. Equally clear is that they are used many times in scripture as symbols. Putting it at its simplest, it means this.

1. Jesus is not only divine, He is God;
2. There were beauties and glories about Jesus in His life upon earth that only God Himself could really appreciate; and
3. Jesus was never more pleasing to His Father than when He suffered on the cross of Calvary.

That really brings us to the crux of the matter. Christmas, and what it means, may well help us to see how our spiritual need can be met. But you cannot think about Christmas without thinking about Easter. That is, you cannot think about Him coming into the world as a baby, without going on to think about the purpose for which He came.. Inevitably, that leads you on to realise that He came into the world for the express purpose of dying at Calvary to be the Saviour of the world.

The Christmas story shows how God came down to us in the incarnation of His Son. He came right down to where we were, becoming a real man, that we might receive the blessing of God, our own salvation through faith in Him. To that end, Christmas and Easter are inevitably, inextricably, linked, and quite rightly so. Some, perhaps many, would say, "Without Christmas, there would be no Easter". That is certainly true, chronologically and circumstantially. However, in reality, and certainly in spiritual terms, without Easter there would be no Christmas. That is, unless Jesus was coming into the world to die (at what we call Easter), He would not have come into the world as a baby at what we call Christmas. The death of Jesus on the cross was the fundamental reason for His coming into the world. He is, in Person, the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe.

Let us enter into the truth of 2 Corinthians 8:9; *"ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich."* Take account also of Philippians 2:7-8: *"He made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."*

Even what we commonly call Easter is not the end. Jesus is coming again! Before then, it is our responsibility to recognise our need, our deep, individual, spiritual need. Then, we must believe that Jesus the Son of God died for our sins and rose again that we might be sure that His personal sacrifice of Himself was acceptable to God and had been accepted on our behalf by God. Neither of these stupendous events could have occurred unless Jesus had been born a baby at Bethlehem.

Salvation through faith is the best gift you could ever receive at Christmas or at any other time. 1 Timothy 2:5-6 tells us, *"God desires all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time."* Hear also the words about the Lord Jesus from 1 Peter 2:24, *"Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree."*

In conclusion, on behalf of all of us who are involved in the *Truth for Today* team, I wish all our listeners the blessing of the Lord at this Christmas time.

Let the following lovely little hymn be an expression of our sincere approach to Christmas as we wait for Christmas to come.

*No room for the baby at Bethlehem's Inn,  
Only a cattle shed,  
No home on this earth for the dear Son of God,  
Nowhere to lay His head.  
Only a cross did they give to our Lord,  
Only a borrowed tomb,  
Today He is seeking a place in your heart,  
Will you say to Him "No room"?*

*O Lord, in my heart there's a welcome for Thee,  
Gladly I now would say,  
Come in, blessèd Saviour, my heart and my life  
Henceforth would own Thy sway.  
Long has Thou waited and long knocked in vain  
Outside my heart's closed door;  
O cleanse me from sin, then, dear Lord, enter in  
And dwell there forever more.*

*Hilda M. Day © 1935, 1977 Anfield Music*

Amen.

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