

# UNLOCKING THE WORD

I have stored up  
your word in my  
heart, that I might  
not sin against  
you.

Psalm 119:11

LESSONS OF CHRISTMAS

STUDY GUIDE







# LESSONS OF CHRISTMAS

## WEEK 1

Genesis 1; John 1:1-3; Matthew 1:18-25; Philippians 2:5-11  
Jesus Before the Manger

## WEEK 2

Selected Text  
Honoring Christ in Christmas

## WEEK 3

Matthew 2:1-12; Luke 2:8-35  
The Joy of Christmas

## A MEANS OF STUDY

**THE FOLLOWING IS A BRIEF STUDY OVERVIEW TO HELP YOU STUDY SCRIPTURE. ALTHOUGH NOT EXHAUSTIVE, IT IS MEANT TO GUIDE YOU INTO KNOWING GOD'S WORD MORE DEEPLY.**

When the plain sense of scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, usual, ordinary, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context studied in the light of the related passages pertaining to fundamental truths indicate otherwise. Dr. David L. Cooper (1886-1965)

*The very first task of Bible study is to observe, not to interpret or apply.* The author's original intent is the main key to Bible interpretation. Just as God had a very specific reason for choosing each author, every author has purpose in what they write; seek this purpose. Example John 20:31. Try not to look at commentaries of a passage until you have taken the time to observe scripture on your own.

Consider that all of scripture is a love letter to us, and that God is not trying to hide what He has revealed in His written word. If able, buy a Bible with no helps or references and mark it up with your own notes. Above all, do not rely on one commentator or teacher. Most of us have not spent the time that these gifted individuals have invested in study, but that does not make them infallible.

The reason for a disciplined approach to Bible study is that if you know how you are studying, you can look back and see how you came to the conclusions that you did. A method allows you to evaluate (or reevaluate) your interpretation.

**Basic Steps** (not exhaustive)

**OBSERVATION:** Look for words or phrases that are repeated often. Attempt to break down passages according to the main ideas. (Remember English 101!) Make notes and charts of your observations. Resist the temptation to jump to interpretation or application before you have completed the observation phase. This is a fun stage in Bible study that will make you appreciate how God inspired the authors. See if you can determine the thought process the author is using, see the flow and transitions from one thought to the next. Look at key connective words like but, and, or, therefore, now, then.

**Who...** List the people mentioned. Look into what has happened to this person and if they are mentioned elsewhere.

**What...** has happened to cause the writer to write? What events have occurred and how are they related to what is being written? What cultural events and customs are in the passage that need to be understood that may be different from ours? God works with all cultures, throughout time. People are people after all, yet we do not all view things in the same way. Seek to understand how the intended readers would understand what the writer was saying to them.

**Why...** does the author use a word quite often? If he uses a word that is different, but similar to often repeated words, ask yourself why he does this. Why does he address certain people and not others?

## A MEANS OF STUDY CONTINUED

**When...** is the text thought to have been written? When the author is writing? What was happening around the area?

**Where...** look at locations, and the historical information about these locations.

**How...** did things happen? How did the people in the Bible arrive where they are? How did God move in their lives to shape their life?

**Word Studies.** Many scholars have spent a lot of time doing this work, and they are valuable. These are of much help in understanding what the author is saying.

**INTERPRETATION:** *There is only one interpretation, but many applications. God inspired the authors to write exactly what he intended, so therefore there can be only one interpretation.* You have heard it said that there are so many interpretations, but this is not true. What they mean is that there are many ways to apply the scripture to life. This does not mean that you or I have arrived at that interpretation, but just as His Word will not return unto him void, it also has an intended purpose.

**APPLICATION:** First see the application the original readers would have probably applied to their lives. In that context apply similar application based on our current lives. *Remember we should not try to fit the Bible into our culture, but rather fit our culture, our lives into what our God is saying to us thru His Word.*

### RESOURCES:

#### **Books on Bible Study**

Independent Bible Study. By Irving L. Jensen ISBN-13: 978-0802439819

Methodical Bible Study by Robert A. Traian ISBN-10: 9780310246022

Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation

#### **Phone Apps**

Bible Dictionary - an easy app to use, not too exhaustive like Strong's.

Bible Gateway

Bible Hub - Different Bibles, commentaries, sermons, Interlinear

Bible Map - search a passage for locations, and it shows you where it is on a map

Bible Study - from Grace Community they have it in Chinese as well

BLB - Blue Letter Bible

Logos Bible - (Faithlife) Very handy, has courses you can take, and a store as well.

Text comparison, audio, bible word study, and much more.

Moody Radio - Listen live to broadcasts.

Scofield Study Bible - has quizzes, reading plan, quotes etc.

Strong's Concordance

John MacArthur Study Bible - This is free, but they have resources you can buy.

Tecarta Bible - a ton of different Versions...however you must pay for them

# LESSONS OF CHRISTMAS

## STUDY ONE

### JESUS BEFORE THE MANGER

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**“THE SECULAR SKEPTIC MUST TRY HARD TO INSIST THAT SANTA CLAUS, THE TOOTH FAIRY, AND THE EASTER BUNNY ARE JUST AS MUCH THE MATURATIONS OF MANKIND AS JESUS CHRIST, BECAUSE THEY HAVE TO .”**

**— PASTOR DALE**

### **BIBLICAL BACKGROUND**

There have been many in history that have claimed to be, “deity”. But there is only one who needs no quotation marks with the word deity, that one is Jesus Christ. Jesus claim was that he was, is and always has been God. He was the Creator incarnate, truly God and truly man. One being in three persons, the one who came to save his people from their sin, fulfilling the promises God had made since the beginning of time. He is the creator of time itself and he himself exists outside of time.

He didn’t begin as the babe in a manger-he existed from all eternity, calling the worlds into existence, fashioning the planets and stars, speaking life into a lump of dirt, and planning his entrance into the time and space he made along with his subsequent death from before time began. We see God the Son not only as Savior but also Lord of all creation, see Colossians 1:16-20.

All three persons of the Trinity were present at creation: God the Father and the Holy Spirit, Genesis 1:1-2 as well as God the Son from John 1:1-3. God’s redemptive plan was to send a Savior is first seen in Genesis 3:15 when he promised an offspring who would bruise the head of Satan to his eternal destruction. God sovereignly worked throughout history to fulfill his plan, he appeared to people in the Old Testament in human form. These appearances of God on earth (the angel of the Lord) are called *theophanies*. *The* angel of the Lord must be distinguished from *an* angel of the Lord, which is one of God’s created beings. We see the angel of the Lord appearing to Moses and giving him his calling to lead the nation of Israel out of slavery from Egypt, (Exodus 3) and also Gideon, emboldening him for battle against the Midianites in Judges 6.

God had promised that the savior or Messiah would come from the descendants of Abraham, Genesis 22:17-18. This promise was fulfilled at the birth of Jesus, who came from the line of Abraham and David, Matthew 1. Before Jesus’ birth, God sent an angel to Mary and Joseph to tell them to name the baby-Jesus, which means, “God our Savior.” When Jesus was born, he was fully God and fully man, which is why he’s the only one to ever live a perfect life without sin. He became the final, perfect sacrifice for our sin when he willingly died on the cross. He then conquered death by rising from the dead three days later.

### JESUS BEFORE THE MANGER

#### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Mary and Joseph were not the first human beings to see Jesus Christ. That common perception reflects a deep misunderstanding of the Son of God's central role throughout history. When unbelievers think of Jesus, many think of a baby in a manger or a man who lived some 2000 years ago. Sadly many a Christian has adopted this same thinking. But when we do, we unwittingly devalue who Jesus really is.

Christ is fully man and yet fully God, see Hebrews 1, Colossians 1, John 1. He is preeminent in all things, time and space to name two, see John 1:1-3, Colossians 1:16-18. The one true God is triune in nature, eternally existing in the co-equal persons of God the Father, Jesus the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, see Isaiah 45:18, Deuteronomy 6:4, Malachi 2:10, James 2:19.

The point is that Jesus Christ has been actively involved in the world from the very beginning. This is where the question may come, "Where do we see Jesus in Genesis?" We see him in the preincarnate appearances of Christ, the theophanies. This comes from two Greek words, *phaneia* meaning appearance and *theos* meaning God. More to the point Christophanies. They are generally believed to be appearances of the Son of God prior to his coming in the flesh 2000 years ago, see 1 John 4:2.

So when in John's gospel, 1:18, he says no one has ever seen God he is referring to God the Father. This does not diminish the deity of Christ but it should be recognized that each person of the Trinity has unique form and function. Genesis employs very personal language describing God's creation of Adam and Eve. This language could indicate the Son's direct presence, especially when the Lord "brought her to the man", see Genesis 2:7-8, 2:18-22. Then after Adam and Eve sinned, "they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden." The hid only to be confronted for their sin, see Genesis 3:8-24.

Other passages throughout the Old Testament might also be Christophanies. Consider these passages in Genesis, some of which are more certain than others.

Genesis 4:4-15, 7:16, 11:5-9, 18:1-33

The Lord appeared to Abraham and Moses several times in Genesis 17:1, 18:1, Exodus 3, Numbers 12:5-8, and others.

So why did the Son of God, "take on flesh" if he could easily appear to whomever he wanted and whenever he wanted? The Apostle Peter says it best, see 1 Peter 3:18. "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit."

Christ became a man, a human like us, to take the punishment we deserve for sin against our Creator. He was the perfect sacrifice offered once for all sin, see Hebrews 10:14-24. But he did not remain dead because he was not just an ordinary human being, a man. Jesus rose from the dead, conquering death, so salvation could come to mankind. Before he returned to heaven, he promised to prepare a place for those who believe in him, and he promised to come again for his followers, see John 14:1-3. What great and glorious promises to give us faith and strength for each day as we live our lives here on earth. He is a wonderful Savior and he is coming again.

### **PREPARATION IN PRAYER**

Stop and pause before you begin by asking the Holy Spirit to reveal the truths of God's Word to you, and to quiet your mind to be focused on Him.

Heavenly Father, Let me hear the words you've spoken from your word. I want to hear what you have to say to me. You have given me life and breath, you sustain me by your mighty power. You alone are worthy of all my worship, attention and devotion. Let the noise of life fade away as seek I you. Give me ears to hear and a heart to obey. Amen.

### **KEYS TO NOTICE**

1. This study has been divided into two parts. The first looking at Jesus as eternal creator and the second as Jesus as savior.
2. The importance of these two distinctions cannot be stressed too strongly or overstated. Jesus is God and was eternal before his earthly ministry. His birth was not the beginning of his existence, only his incarnation.

### **INTRODUCTION:**

We celebrate Christmas simply as Jesus' birthday. December 25th represents the day that God inserted himself into his creation in human form to be Savior and Lord of all creation.

We therefore should reflect not only on his birth, but life, death, and resurrection. Christmas is just the beginning, we celebrate eternal life.

Christmas isn't the beginning but really the end, the fulfillment of all the promises of God to redeem a people unto himself. He has been working from before creation, he has been very real long before his birth on earth. He is—eternal God.



**OBSERVATIONS AND THOUGHTS**

Read Genesis 1:1. What three facts are revealed to us?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

So we see that the creator is God, we see what was created and we see when it happened. Why are the first three words, "in the beginning", so significant?

Note: Since we are finite beings it is very hard if not impossible to think in terms of eternity. We cannot even think about eternity past without thinking of it within the thought of time. We have to use the word, past which is an aspect of time but prior to the beginning of time was God. So without those first three words we have no point of reference. Therefore all of creation is bound up in the structure we call time. Now if God created time, he must be outside of it.

**OBSERVATIONS AND THOUGHTS**

Read John 1:1-3

What or who is the Word in this passage?

What do we learn about the Word from this passage?

What does this reveal about the nature of God?

Review Genesis 1 and 2. How is this plurality reflected in the account of creation?

In Genesis 1:26, God speaks in pluralities. Who is "us" and "our" referring to?

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## **OBSERVATIONS AND THOUGHTS**

John 1:1 explains that the Word was with God and was God. It's easy to see the significance of the second statement, "Jesus is God." Yet the first statement is just as significant. Jesus is in fact God, however he was also with God in the beginning. This indicates that he is distinct from God.

We must be diligent and careful recognize both statements are true and to be diligent and careful to maintain them. We dare not emphasize Jesus being distinct from God leading us to polytheism, but an emphasis in the other direction on Jesus being the exact same as God can lead us to modalism. Modalism is the belief that God is a single person who manifests himself in different roles. We must take these ideas as Scripture teachers: God is a single being with three distinct persons.

Both Genesis 1 and 2 reveal that God is self-existent. We refer to this characteristic as the aseity of God, (aseity—having no source other than itself). God has no origin and needs nothing to exist. He is absolutely self-sufficient and independent. This goes hand-in-hand with his eternity. He simply is.

The second person of the triune God, Jesus bears the same divine attributes as both the Father and the Holy Spirit. Therefore, Jesus has this same aseity and eternity. Although we often think of Jesus as beginning along with his human life, he already existed as the Son before time was created. The passage in John tells us that it is through Christ that all things have been created.

## OBSERVATIONS AND THOUGHTS

Preincarnation Scripture referring to Christ.

**Genesis 16:7-13.** The angel makes a personal promise that only God could accomplish. Hagar called the Lord (YHWY) who spoke to her as “a God of seeing.”

**Genesis 18:1-5.** Throughout the account, this person is simply called the Lord (YHWY), but he appeared as a man, vs 2. He displays omniscience by knowing Sarah’s laughter.

**Genesis 32:24-31.** The man refused to give his name. He also had the authority to rename Jacob. Jacob obviously perceived that the man was God because he named the place in indicate that he had seen God face to face.

**Exodus 3:1-6.** The angel of the Lord appeared in the bush, vs 2, but God called out to him from the bush, vs4. Moses was told he was standing on holy ground and that he was speaking with the God of Abraham. Moses clearly understood this was God, for he was afraid to look at God.

**Numbers 22:22-35.** Balaam bowed down to the angel of the Lord. Also, the angel speaks personally of Balaam’s ways as “perverse before me” and tells Balaam to only speak the words he gives him. In verse 38, this is confirmed when Balaam says he will speak the words God puts in his mouth.

**Joshua 5:13-15.** Joshua fell on his face in worship. Also, the commander of the Lord’s army told him to remove his sandals for he was on holy ground similarly to Moses at the burning bush.

**Judges 6:11-24.** Although introduced as the angel of the Lord vs 14, it is the Lord (YHWH) himself that speaks to Gideon. Further, the angel of the Lord allowed Gideon to present an offering to him, a sign of worship never accepted by an angel, and even consumed it visibly before Gideon. When Gideon realized who he was, he cried out in fear because he had see God and expected to die.

**Judges 13:2-22.** The angel of the Lord refused to tell Manoah his name and ascended with the flame the alter. Manoah recognized this as an indication that this was God himself, as indicated by his statement, “We shall surely die for we have seen God.”

**APPLICATION: GOD'S WILL TODAY**

Looking at the eight different accounts where God appeared to the people. How many of these were you already familiar with?

How do we know that these were appearances of God?

Think about these accounts. How did God appear to the people? What did he look like?

What is the term used to refer to appearances of God?

If God cannot be seen by man, then how does he appear to so many throughout the Bible?

**CLOSING PRAYER:**

Write a prayer for Christ's power to show up in your life.

# LESSONS OF CHRISTMAS

## STUDY ONE PART TWO

### JESUS THE SAVIOR

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#### **REVIEW**

In our first study we saw that God the Son pre-existed, was there at the moment of creation and played an active role throughout preincarnate history. If the Son already existed and he already served as a physical expression of God, why did he need to be born?

**OBSERVATION:**

Read Matthew 1:18-25.

What does the angel reveal about Mary's baby?

Why is this significant?

What did the two names given to the child mean?

Read Philippians 2:5-11

What does this passage teach about the nature of Jesus prior to his incarnation?

What does Paul say in this text the purpose for Jesus becoming human?

What happened to Jesus after he accomplished his purpose on earth?

What does Paul say is the ultimate result of the entire sequence ?

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**INTERPRETATIONS:**

**Thinking about the birth of Christ.** We typically call to mind the passages of Matthew and Luke that detail the account of his birth. These deal specifically with that event as it happened. However, there are many other passages that deal with the birth of Christ, as well as the purpose and nature of his incarnation. We must be careful not to think too narrowly about Jesus in terms of his approximately 30 years of ministry on earth as that is all there is.

How do you picture Jesus now, post-resurrection?

If Jesus existed as God from the beginning, and he appeared in human form throughout the Old Testament, why did he have to be born? Why not just come as a grown man to fulfill his earthly ministry?



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**APPLICATION: GOD'S WILL TODAY**

While the humanity of Jesus allowed him to die for mankind, his deity provided the power to defeat death. He rose from the grave and ascended to heaven. We are even told that he is sitting at the right hand of the Father, see Hebrews 10:12. If we turn our attention to the study of future things, we would see that Jesus' role continues through what we call the consummation of all things and beyond.

Jesus is eternal. As he told the Jews in John 8:58, he exists (present tense) prior to Abraham. Jesus exists at the beginning and played an active role in creation. We see manifestations of the preincarnate Christ throughout the Old Testament. Then he stepped into time, into his own creation, taking on the likeness of man and being born into the race of Adam, but not corrupted by the imputed Adamic sin. He lived a perfect life so that he could offer himself as the perfect blood sacrifices to pay the penalty for sin, once for all. Jesus came to live the life we couldn't live to die the death we deserve to die. Therefore, having satisfied required payment, he conquered death, rose from the grave and ascended to the right hand of the throne of God.

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**APPLICATION: GOD'S WILL TODAY**

How will you think about the life of Jesus differently because of something this study or discussion has brought to light?

How might viewing the account of Jesus' birth as the Christmas story keep you from seeing the bigger picture?

In what ways should you change the way you approach (read, study, teach) the nativity account?

**CLOSING PRAYER:**

Thank God for his eternal nature, for sending Jesus to live a perfect life and offer himself for your sin. Ask the Lord for opportunities for gospel conversations and a heart to sow the gospel seeds liberally in your life.

## **LESSONS OF CHRISTMAS**

### **STUDY TWO**

#### **HONORING CHRIST IN CHRISTMAS**

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**“WHY IS IT THAT THERE IS SO MUCH TALK OF KEEPING CHRIST IN CHRISTMAS? IF CHRISTIANS WOULD CONSTANTLY REMEMBER THAT CHRIST IS IN US, EVERY DAY AND ALL YEAR, CHRISTMAS WILL TAKE CARE OF ITSELF”**

**—PASTOR DALE**

#### **BIBLICAL BACKGROUND**

How should Christmas be seen and understood? Biblically, Christmas is the day that the eternal Creator, Jesus Christ, entered into his creation in human form. The reasons and purposes are many but central to it all is for God do show himself to his creation and to restore his creation to it's original glory. It is because of Jesus' birth into this fallen sinful world, his redemptive atoning work of the cross, his resurrection over death, that the sinner can be re-born into the family of God, into God's glory once again.

Therefore, the true reality of Christmas is that Jesus took on human flesh, conquered sin and Satan by his death and resurrection, fulfilling God's wrath, and now reconciles sinners who believe in the one God sent.

We often think of the Christmas story as only the biblical text of Matthew chapter 2 and Luke 2. We, in our traditions of men, have created a holiday to celebrate the birth of Jesus, however we must realize that the true story of Christmas begins in Genesis. Before time began, Jesus was God and was with God and it was through him that all things were created, see John 1:1-3. Man is part of that creation and was fashioned in God's image. Adam along with his wife Eve, rebelled against God becoming an enemy of God by disobeying his command not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, see Genesis 3:1-7. Because of that sin, all of creation was cursed in sin. Yet because of God's nature of love he made a promise to send a redeemer, see Genesis 3:15.

The whole of what we know as the Old Testament of holy Scripture then points to the coming of that redeemer. The New Testament then begins with the incarnation of God the Son, see John 1:14, and Matthew and Luke record those historical events focusing on different aspects. Matthew shows Jesus as a descendent of King David and Luke traces the lineage back to Adam.

God sends an angel to prepare both Mary and Joseph of what He is going to do through them. Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth who was pregnant with John, who would become know as John the Baptist. Joseph and Mary travel to Bethlehem because of the Roman census. She gives birth to Jesus there where more angels and shepherds proclaim the good news. After 40 days Jesus is taken to the temple as the Law Moses required. Sometime alter wisemen, led by a star, show up at their home to offer kingly gifts. Then Jesus grew up living a sinless life, to offer himself on the cross to pay our sin dept. Then conquering the grave and ascending once again to his heavenly throne at the Fathers right hand. God the Father has now exalted him above all so that every tongue will confess and every knee will bow to him, proclaiming that Jesus is Lord of all. That is the Christmas story.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

You have certainly heard the arguments about keeping Christ in Christmas and whether or not Christmas is a pagan holiday. With each passing generation there are many questions surrounding how we should celebrate Christmas or that it should be celebrated at all. The bible does not give us explicit instructions or commands on how we should or shouldn't remember that night of Christ's birth, so we must be careful how dogmatic we will be about how Christians ought to approach December 25th. We can, however, be able to use discernment between the biblical understanding of Christmas and the secular understanding.

One of the first and foundational principles is to ask, "How does God reveal himself through Scripture?" The bible should be the standard that informs our understanding of the nativity. For example, The shepherds weren't led by a star, we don't know how many wisemen were there. Jesus wasn't born in a stable, the bible doesn't say the angels sang and the wise men were not present at the same time as the shepherds.

Therefore mans traditions should never overshadow Scripture as we celebrate Christmas.

Another way we can use discernment is to be clear on where some of our traditions come from and what they are meant to honor. For a more in depth study of this aspect of Christmas, consider the book by Bodie Hodge, "The War on Christmas". This book takes an in depth look at the biblical message of Christmas and it's common misconceptions.

## LESSONS OF CHRISTMAS STUDY TWO

### HONORING CHRIST IN CHRISTMAS

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#### PREPARATION IN PRAYER

Stop and pause before you begin by asking the Holy Spirit to reveal the truths of God's Word to you and to quiet your mind to be focused on Him.

Heavenly Father, Let me hear the words you've spoken from your word. I want to hear what you have to say to me. You have given me life and breath, you sustain me by your mighty power. You alone are worthy of all my worship, attention and devotion. Let the noise of life fade away as seek I you. Give me ears to hear and a heart to obey. Amen.

#### KEYS TO NOTICE

1. **How to discern the difference between secular and biblical elements of Christmas.** What are the traditions of men? They may not be bad, but when those traditions are elevated over the revealed Word of God is when they become the issue.
2. **Knowing and explaining why the gift of Jesus matters.** One key to honoring Christ in Christmas or any other time is knowing why he matters and that there are souls hanging in the balance for eternity.

#### INTRODUCTION

From the perspective of the world, what is the purpose of Christmas?

From a biblical perspective, what is the true purpose of Christmas?

Stop to examine your own attitudes, actions and focus of Christmas. Based on those, what would someone looking at your life say the purpose of Christmas was?

**OBSERVATIONS:**

CELEBRATING AND HONORING CHRIST

Read Luke 1:46-55

What do you find interesting about this passage in light of what Elisabeth had just proclaimed to Mary?

What description does Mary use that stands out to you?

What do we learn about God from Mary's praise?

Read Luke 1:68-79

How does Zechariah's prophecy parallel Mary's praise?

According to Zechariah, why are we granted deliverance?

What role did Zechariah say John would play?

**OBSERVATIONS CONTUDED:**

CELEBRATING AND HONORING CHRIST

Read Luke 2:8-20

What forms of celebration do we see in this passage?

Read Luke 2:28-32, 36-38

How did Simeon react?

What did Simeon praise God for?

How did Anna give thanks to God?

Read Matthew 2:1-22

Why did the wise men come to Jerusalem?

How did they respond when they saw the star leading them to Bethlehem?

How did they know to look for the star in the first place?

How did they celebrate the child?

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**OBSERVATIONS CONTUDED:**

CELEBRATING AND HONORING CHRIST

We already saw how people involved in the Christmas account honored Jesus with their praise and their gifts. Now let's look at some other ways we can honor Christ in our celebration.

Read Romans 14:5-9

What are the parameters Paul gives for not honoring the Lord? And when do we honor Him?

What in vs 6 do both groups of people do? Contrast this with Romans 1:21.

Read Deuteronomy 6:7, 20-21

What are the people commanded to do in vs 7?

What are they teaching?

Why were they to teach their children so diligently?

How does this apply not only to our discussion of Christmas but to all of life?

Read Hebrews 13:15-16

What does the writer say honors Christ? How does Jesus apply this in Matthew 25:35-40 and how can we live this out not just a Christmas time?



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**INTERPRETATIONS:**

**Our celebrations should glorify God.** Jesus' birth was celebrated in various ways by many different people, family, countrymen and foreigners. His birth was heralded by heavenly hosts, a supernatural star and by prophetic announcements. The first Christmas as we have come to know it was highlighted by a family gathering, tidings of joy and wonder, evangelism, international travel and the giving of gifts.

The point to it all in those doing the celebrating was they did so with joyful praise to God, seeing his faithfulness in keeping his promise of sending a savior which the world so desperately needs.

**Christians represent Christ on earth and should speak the truth.** We should be able to lovingly correct the misconceptions about Christmas, not adding to them. We should spend this season honoring Christ and like Mary, magnify his name. This time of year gives us an incredible opportunity to share with others and to teach our children the truth about Jesus' birth and why he came to be born as a man.

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**APPLICATION: GOD'S WILL TODAY**

Looking at the first Christmas we discover a time of great joy and wonder. The long awaited arrival of the Messiah who was prophesied for the last 4000 years had finally come. The birth of Christ is truly an event to be celebrated but only in light of why he came and what he did while on earth. Jesus grew up to be a perfect man, without sin, so that he could become the atoning sacrifice for mans sin. For all who believe, repent, confess and our baptized He offers redemption and reconciliation from the wrath of God.

In what ways has this study challenged you to re-think about Christmas?

What traditions have you participated in without considering what it really means?

Are there any traditions you have upheld in the past that you may need to reconsider?

In what ways can you be more purposeful about your celebrating to point to the gospel message of Christ?

**CLOSING PRAYER:**

Lord, let me be ever mindful that you are working in me to bear much fruit. Help me keep my eyes on You and to always encourage others along the way as You bring them into my life. Give me the strength to carry out the work You have prepared for me to do during each season of my life. Humble me at all times so that I can be confident in pleasing You. Amen.

## **LESSONS OF CHRISTMAS**

### **STUDY THREE**

### **THE JOY OF CHRISTMAS**

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**“THE EXUBERANT JOY OF CHRISTMAS THAT BURST FORTH FROM HEAVEN TO EARTH CAN BE SUMMED UP BY THE ANGEL OF THE LORD. ‘A SAVIOR IS BORN’ .”**

**—PASTOR DALE**

### **BIBLICAL BACKGROUND**

Shepherds were the first to hear the announcement that a Savior, Jesus had been born. Bethlehem and the surrounding countryside was used to raise sheep for all the people who would come to bring a sacrifice to the temple as prescribed by the Law of Moses, being roughly seven miles away from Jerusalem.

After the angels appeared to them they hurriedly made their way into the small town to find the child to worship him, then returned to the work giving praise and glory to God.

The next people God brought to see Jesus were at the temple in Jerusalem, where Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to offer a sacrifice according to the law, see Leviticus 12. They brought doves or pigeons which tell us they were too poor to bring a lamb.

God told a righteous man named Simeon that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah, the Savior. While at the temple the Holy Spirit led Simeon to Joseph and taking Jesus in his arms he blessed God for sending salvation to all people. Simeon prophesied to Mary that she would be stricken with grief, referring to the sorrow felt when seeing your child die. But that this grief would be turned to joy when Jesus would rise from the dead. God also revealed the Christ to Anna, an 84 year old woman, a prophetess who gave thanks to God and began speaking of the Christ to all who were waiting for him in Jerusalem.

Wise men from the east came a year or two later following a star which signified the birth of the king of the Jews. They first went to Jerusalem to King Herod who was enraged by the prospect of another king. They found the place where Jesus was, entered the home of Joseph and worshipped Jesus there, giving him great kingly gifts before returning to their country.

Later, God warned Joseph in a dream to escape to Egypt to protect his family from King Herod who had commanded every boy, two years old and younger to be killed. This was to fulfill the Old Testament prophecies of Hosea 11:1 and Jeremiah 31:15

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

One of the questions that arises at this time is, “how does a star stand still?” There have been many who have tried to explain this ranging from a supernova, a comet, a massing of planets, or a planet and a star. Those natural events would be spectacular to see but they don’t fit with the account Matthew give us. For example, no know natural phenomenon would be able to stand still over Bethlehem since all the stars we see move due to the earth’s rotation.

God can and has altered the laws of nature to create a supernatural sign or event. However it is significant that only the wise men seem to have seen and understood what the star meant, a supernatural sign from God not a natural even to be seen by everyone. The star also guided the men directly to the house where Jesus as in Bethlehem. The point being to people of that day what they were seeing looked like a star, what other reference could they give but something they were familiar with. A normal star could not have done this and just like God guiding the Israelites out of Egypt, with a pillar of cloud and fire, he could do something similar here.

This visit of the wise men is significant for a few reasons.

1. They were all Gentiles from a foreign land. How did they know about such things? One explanation is that they were from the east, Persia who would have had access to the writings of Daniel during Israel’s captivity years.
2. They saw the star others missed or who weren’t given to see. Herod had to ask them for the details when the star appeared, see Matthew 2:7. They’re attention to the star gives the assertion that they were astrologers.
3. They recognized the star as a special sign, so much so that they took on the expense of time and money to travel to a foreign land and to bring costly gifts to Jesus in worship.
4. We assume there were three men only because of the three gifts mentioned. However, it is more reasonable that these men traveled in a large convoy including soldiers for protection. Wise men in ancient antiquity also were a means in which they would recognize the authority of a king. They were king makers of sort which is in part why king Herod and the whole of Jerusalem was in so much turmoil.

## **LESSONS OF CHRISTMAS** **STUDY THREE**

### **THE JOY OF CHRISTMAS**

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#### **PREPARATION IN PRAYER**

Stop and pause before you begin by asking the Holy Spirit to reveal the truths of God's Word to you, and to quiet your mind to be focused on Him.

Heavenly Father, Let me hear the words you've spoken from your word. I want to hear what you have to say to me. You have given me life and breath, you sustain me by your mighty power. You alone are worthy of all my worship, attention and devotion. Let the fears of life be swept away by your power bringing the peace that surpasses all worldly understanding. Amen.

#### **KEYS TO NOTICE**

1. **People of all types came to worship.** Precursor to every knee will bow.
2. **Knowing why there was so much reason to rejoice at Jesus' birth.** Try to come to terms with Jesus' compassion for you. His love for the display glory of the Father drives him to see and act on humanity's need.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

When you think of the birth of Christ, what mental picture comes to mind?

Most pictures come with Jesus being born in a barn with hay and livestock all around, warmly lit from an unknown source, maybe from the star. The shepherds are there, one with a lamb draped around his neck or nestled next to his leg. The three wise men also offering their extravagant gifts. This picture may give us those warm fussy feelings of being home for the holidays and it's a quick way to fit all the pieces into the story of the nativity, but it's not very authentic.

**INTRODUCTIN CONTINUED:**

For example, the Bible does tell us that Jesus was laid in a manger, but it does not mention a stable. The assumption is that mangers go with stables or a barn. However, ancient tradition actually held that Jesus was born in a cave. All we know from Scripture is that there was no room for them in the inn. The Greek term used here means a guest room. We could think of it today like an Airbnb or someone's house with an extra guest room. Homes in those days would have an upper guest chamber, like the one Jesus celebrated the Passover in, the upper room. The room below would be where the owner and his family lived and at the ground level is where the animals were brought in at night for safety. Jesus was likely born there because the upper guest room was full, not to mention it would have been more private than to have a room full of strangers looking on as you're giving birth.

**OBSERVATIONS:**

Read Luke 2:8-17

Where did this take place?

What message did the angel bring?

Where is the city of David?

What sign did the angel give the shepherds?

When did the multitude appear?

What was the purpose of the multitude?

How did the shepherds respond?

What did they do when they found the Christ child?

Read Luke 2:22-35

Why did Mary and Joseph take Jesus to the temple? (Leviticus 12:1-9)

What does it mean that they 'present him to the Lord?' (Exodus 13:2, 9-16)

**OBSERVATIONS:**

What prophetic message do we see from Simeon's words?

What does this message refer to?

Read Matthew 2:1-12

When does this account take place?

How old was Jesus during this encounter?

Who were the wise men and why did they come to Jerusalem?

What is interesting about this star that they followed?

Did Herod know about Jesus prior to the wise men arriving?



**INTERPRETATIONS:**

**Wise men still seek, sacrifice, submit to the king of the Jews.** The significance of Gentiles, foreign men, who know the Lord and that he is the promise Messiah cannot be underestimated. They sacrificed much to visit and worship the baby, Jesus. The irony that foreigners eagerly followed the sign they were given, but to the very Jews Jesus was sent to, he was a stumbling block a sign of opposition.

Consider how you seek the Lord?

In what ways have you had to sacrifice but did so in the joy of Christmas in all of it's meaning?

How do you submit to the Word of Life with joy?

**APPLICATION: GOD'S WILL TODAY**

The angels burst forth in singing the first Christmas carol. How might you use Christmas carols in initiate a gospel conversation?

What misconceptions regarding the account of Jesus' birth have you had cleared up during this study?

What details pertain to the birth of Christ are most fascinating to you? Why?

In what ways can you or do you express the joy of Christmas in your life? What about in July?





BELONG. GROW. REACH.