

“Merry Christmas”

Luke 2:8-20

Bruce Stallings

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This not only is one of my favorite services, but this is by far my favorite crowd. I love the fact that people come to a service at 11 p.m. on Christmas Eve. This does my heart good. I just love that you come wanting to worship the Lord, take communion and hear the Word at 11:00pm on Christmas Eve. That is so encouraging and exciting to me. In this study, we're going to take just a little bit of a deep dive as we talk about the true story of Jesus' birth at Christmas as we come to the communion table.

Now, why would I emphasize the true story of Jesus birth? Amazingly, if you were to take all of the passages of Scripture that directly talk about the Christmas story, I would suggest to you that in the most direct segment, there's only 41 of them. Can you believe that? That's it. If you want to add in some of the other encounters that take place in Matthew 1, the genealogy, and other places in Scripture you can work your way up to almost 100. This is a very simple and a very clear story yet it seems to me that through the years people have decided they're going to embellish the story a little bit by adding some flavor to the story or reading into it a bit. There are those who have said that Mary rode on a donkey to Bethlehem and there is no mention of that in Scripture. So you might think, 'those people, they're uneducated, that they would put Mary on a donkey riding to Bethlehem.'

There's also really no mention of an innkeeper. It just says that there's no room in the inn, there was no place for them to stay. We immediately go to Holiday Inn and that's probably the worst possible application of that part of the passage, but it's not that there was necessarily even an innkeeper. They went to someone's place to see if they could stay there and found out there was no room for them in the inn, that dwelling, that home that they would have gone to. There was also no star over the manger. According to Scripture we know the star is over the house later, so when the wise men come looking for the star, we know that they did not come that night Jesus was born. The shepherds showed up the night that Jesus was born but they weren't told to follow a star over to where Jesus was born. That's a pet peeve of mine that people think there were wise men at the manger.

If you invite me to your house during Christmas season, my wife, Sonya will get mad at me because I will move your wise man in your manger scene Nativity to another place. My wife will always say, 'Honey, you can't do that. That's rude.' And I will say, "Honey, it's Biblical for I'm helping people embrace a Biblical understanding." There are probably a dozen nativity sets in our house and Sonya and I play this game. We don't actually talk about it. I move the wise men and she moves them back, then I move them again and she moves them back. I start swapping them from different nativity sets to try to confuse her about all the different countries around the world. We just constantly do this battle but in this study I want to dive in and look at the true story. What are we actually told in Scripture that took place on that particular night?

I'll leave you with one last one but you're not going to like this one. We are not told in Scripture that the angels sang anything. The Scriptures say that the angels 'said' not sang. Just so you know, Pastor Reeder took issue with me on this and we argued back and forth over this and this was his best answer, which is how I knew I had him. He said, "They said it in a singing way." He's too smart for an answer like that so I knew I had him on that one. I want to read a

portion of the Scriptures of the real story as we dive into a couple of the things that Mary dealt with in terms of the birth of Jesus.

In Matthew 1:18-25 it says, [18] *Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. [19] And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. [20] But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. [21] She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." [22] All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: [23] "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us). [24] When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, [25] but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.*

In Luke 1:26-38 it says, [26] *In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, [27] to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. [28] And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" [29] But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. [30] And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. [31] And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. [32] He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, [33] and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."*

[34] *And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" [35] And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. [36] And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. [37] For nothing will be impossible with God." [38] And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.*

Then it says this concerning what actually took place the night of Jesus' birth in Luke 2:7-20, [7] *And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.*

[8] *And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. [9] And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. [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 cloths and lying in a manger." [13] And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, [14] "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" [15] When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." [16] And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. [17] And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them*

*concerning this child. [18] And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. [19] But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. [20] And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.*

Mary, no matter how you look at it, was an amazing person. Mary was an incredible Godly young lady and she was young. She gave the ultimate servant response to the declaration that she was going to be a pregnant virgin. Now, that is not an easy thing to be told. It's not an easy reality to deal with, and it's certainly not an easy thing to explain to other people. "An angel told me that I would be a pregnant virgin and that I would give birth to the Son of God." That's a tough story. I don't know that many people were going to embrace that story, yet her response is one of unbelievable submission to the Lord. She says, 'Behold, I am a servant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to Your word.' That's a godly young lady. She was going to be ridiculed and judged, but she was determined to be obedient to the Lord.

I'm intrigued by her response the night that Jesus was born. There's a little phrase in that last verse I read that said 'all this had taken place' so Mary has given birth and the shepherds have shown up. Mary and Joseph had been visited by an angel. Mary had gone and had a conversation with Elizabeth. She's made her way to Bethlehem, which is the very place where it is prophesied that Jesus was to be born. Now it's come time for the birth and she gives birth and here come the shepherds rushing in to say, 'Just tonight we were visited by an angel and a multitude of angels while we were taking care of our flock.' Here is the intriguing phrase to me, for this is what it says about Mary in Luke 2:18, 'But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.'

I dove in on those words of 'treasuring up and pondering.' What is Scripture trying to tell us about Mary? What is it that Mary actually was doing that night when she was treasuring up and pondering? That word or that phrase to treasure up basically means to keep close or to keep safe, to preserve deep within yourself, to never forget. So what is it that Mary preserved deep within herself? What is it that she concluded as true and kept safe as a stake in the ground regarding the birth of Jesus? It says that she pondered them in her heart. Basically, the word that gets used for ponder is almost like the putting together of a puzzle. How does this all fit together? What does all this mean and how could all of this fit together?

It takes a long, long time of pondering to try to fit together 'pregnant Virgin.' That's a hard one to think through because all these pieces didn't quite fit together. I think when Mary was treasuring up, she was trying to figure out what was true. "What is the reality of the situation? I just gave birth to Jesus. What does that mean?" Scripture tells us, Mary pondered these things in her heart, so this is a deep, deep search for understanding and trying to put these pieces of the puzzle together. I would suggest to you that under no circumstance did Mary understand accurately that evening.

In other words, I'm going to suggest Mary couldn't have possibly gotten it right. There's no way Mary said, 'I get it. I'm going to give birth to a little baby who's going to live a perfect life, who's going to die a sacrificial death, going to be crucified, going to be placed into a grave, and on the third day, going to rise from the dead and then spend 40 days on Earth and be taken up to heaven, to be with God for all eternity, only to come back again and get everybody else that are believers and take them home, too.' There's no way Mary understood all that at the birth of Jesus. It took years for that to begin to unfold and for Mary to understand. You could read through the Scriptures and know there were plenty of occasions where you realize Mary didn't fully understand that. Mary didn't fully understand that He was going down a cross. Mary

certainly didn't fully understand that He was going to rise from the dead when she went to look at the tomb. She wasn't saying, "I'm telling you ladies, He's not going to be there." No, she went mourning. She went with spices to anoint the body. She thought that He was dead and she thought there was over.

So, what was it that Mary would have pondered, concluded, treasured up or safeguarded? Let's go back to what Mary was actually told and maybe we can try to ponder ourselves and put the puzzle together a little bit on our own. When the angel Gabriel visited Mary, he answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the most high will overshadow you. Therefore, the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God." In other words, the Spirit was a holy one sent from God. I think it would have been plausible for Mary to think 'maybe Jesus will be a great prophet, like Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah or Jeremiah. He'll come and he'll speak on behalf of God for He is a sent one from God. God has been quiet for 400 years. All of the minor prophets have ceased and there's been no prophecy for 400 years. That must be what He's trying to tell me – that Jesus is going to come as a prophet.'

Then Mary would have to ponder what the angel told Joseph. I'm sure Joseph shared with Mary that she would bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins. In Mary's connotation, who could save people from their sins? Who was it that had any ability to extend the forgiveness of sins to people? That would be a priest and so in Mary's world, she might have pondered 'well, if not a prophet, then maybe He's coming in as a priest, maybe even He's coming as the great high priest, even greater than Aaron, may be greater than the high priest of high priest. He'll be able to go into the holy of holies and extend forgiveness to other people.' The priests were the ones that would take the blood sacrifice of the animals, and they would offer them up before the Lord and then they would extend to people the forgiveness of their sins.

The angel Gabriel also told Mary that the Lord God will give to Him the throne of his father, David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever and his kingdom will have no end. Perhaps then Mary thought 'Maybe He's going to be a king. He's going to be a warrior. He's going to be one who reigns. He's not going to be a prophet or a priest, because it says that the Lord will give him the throne of his father, David. Father David was king David, so maybe this is going to be king Jesus, who fights, wins and declares that he will have victory, which means that the people will love him and some will hate him and some will want him dead and others will bow down and worship him and depend upon him.' So, this night of Jesus' birth Mary now has to add into her pondering, trying to figure out is he going to be a prophet, is he going to be a priest or maybe a king?

Now Mary's pondering what the shepherds report that the angels declared to them that night when they told them, 'Fear not for behold I bring you good news of great joy, that will be for all the people, for unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior who is Christ the Lord.' Now she has to ponder 'Is He's going to be the Christ, a Savior and in what way will he be a Savior? How would he be a Savior to different people? When you're a Savior to different people, you either reign victorious and you save them from some eminent demise, or maybe you have to sacrifice yourself for them.' She would have had to process that but He would be a Savior who is Christ the Lord.

Christ is a title. It's a title given to Jesus that means the anointed one. In the Heidelberg Catechism question 31 it says this; Q. Why is he called "Christ," meaning "anointed"? Answer; *Because he has been ordained by God the Father and has been anointed with the Holy Spirit to be our chief prophet and teacher who fully reveals to us the secret counsel and will of God*

*concerning our deliverance; our only high priest who has delivered us by the one sacrifice of his body, and who continually pleads our cause with the Father; and our eternal king who governs us by his Word and Spirit, and who guards us and keeps us in the freedom he has won for us.* At this point, Mary would eventually conclude the same thing that we now studying back on the life of Christ are able to conclude. It's not a question of will he be a prophet or will he be a priest or will he be a king, but only in Christ, He can be the Prophet, the Priest and the King all in one. Mary would have been right on all accounts. Now, she couldn't possibly have put all of that together, but she would have been right on all accounts. The Scriptures unveiled to us all the roles that Jesus played to us.

What about you? Ponder for a second; what is it that you have treasured up in your heart about Christ at Christmas? What is it that you have secured as true? What have you declared to yourself? What are you keeping safe to get you through all of the different challenges and issues of life as it relates to Christ? Have you concluded that He is a prophet, that He is someone that has been sent for you, who tells you about God? Or have you concluded that He is a priest, the one to forgive you when you mess up, make mistakes, hurt other people, do wrong things, or is he a king to you, the one that's supposed to defeat your enemies, destroy those that would come against you and reign victorious so that only good things happen to you? That would be a skewed perspective.

What we need, is the perspective of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Christ who is Prophet, Priest and King. So, as we come to the table, we celebrate Him in all of those roles. We celebrate Him as the Prophet who pointed us to God when we didn't want God in any way, shape or form. Yet He came to reveal God to us and to give us the words to understand and to give us the actual message of the Gospel. He is the great Prophet. He is our Priest, not the priest that takes the blood of animals to sacrifice them and extend forgiveness of sins. But He is our Priest that takes His own blood. Here's our Priest that takes His own body. He's our Priest that takes His own sacrifice and He offers Himself before the Lord as the only pure and perfect sacrifice for the remission of our sins. And He is our King, the King, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. As King, He's never to be our pal. He's never to be our buddy. He's never to be that One that we wish would just walk alongside of us. We serve Him as King. We bow down to Him as King. We yield to Him as King. We're loved far beyond any love we could want with a friend. We're loved far beyond any love we could want with a pal. We're loved far beyond what we could possibly imagine but He is our King.

So, as we come to this table, we come to bow down. We come to remember His birth, to celebrate His birth, and in communion we acknowledge His birth just as Scripture taught it to us. We acknowledge His perfect life, that only He could live and that He lived for our sake. We acknowledge His death, His body, His blood and His resurrection because the Scripture teaches teach us that when we come to this table to partake of communion, we proclaim His death until He comes. That means He's not dead and if we're proclaiming His death until He comes that means that we are waiting on Him to come again. And we do pray, come quickly Lord Jesus. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, I do thank You so much for Your Word. Thank You for the truth of the story of the birth of Jesus. Lord, thank You that in Jesus You did what we can't even fathom, that You made Him Prophet, Priest, and King. He is the Prophet like no other prophet. He is the Priest beyond all high priest and the King of all Kings. Lord, thank You for Jesus. Thank You for Your

Holy Spirit that draws us to Your table that we might acknowledge, declare, and proclaim the life and death of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and that we might look with anticipation, not simply for His first advent, but for His second advent. Come quickly, Lord Jesus. We do pray in His Name, Amen.