“Christmas Center”

12/17/2017

Matthew 1:18-25

Please find with me the first chapter of the Book of Matthew.

Has anyone here ever left Christ out of Christmas? Well, it is possible. It’s possible because it’s easy to get so busy with the tree set up, hanging the ornaments, the parties, the house decorations, the coming and the going of family members, the food, the many, many trips to the store to purchase gifts, then wrapping them, addressing the Christmas cards, helping other people, working, texting, and besides all that, the cooking and the cleaning; etc. and etc.

These things are called the trappings of Christmas. By the way, the Old English word trappings means “ornaments.” It’s possible to quote *celebrate* Christmas, feel empty, and completely miss its basic purpose. And with all the busy-ness of the season, we might find ourselves focusing on the trappings of the season instead of the One Whose birth we celebrate.

Now, try to imagine, if you can, the first Christmas. First, angels arrive from Heaven to announce to a shepherds on a Bethlehem hillside that a Savior had been born. The sign, they said, that would tell them know which baby it was, would be the cradle. His mother would use a feeding trough in a stable to lay Him in. The shepherds, then, would have to search the animal stalls in Bethlehem to find the Savior.

Now earlier, an angel had been sent from Heaven to meet with Mary to bring her the Good News. She was going to become pregnant without the involvement of a man. And she was to call her baby Jesus. And, says the angel, the Holy Ghost would implant the child in her womb.

Luke 1:31 *“And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus.” (35) And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.”*

 Then again, a man named Joseph, who had been engaged to a young lady named Mary, discovers that she’s with child, which completely overwhelms and disheartens him; so much so that he is ready to divorce her. An angel is then the dispatched from Heaven to calm his fears and he is told that she is with child by the Holy Ghost and that the child’s name would be Jesus Matthew 1:20 *“But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. (21) And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins.”*

And, later, as part of the revelation on the birth of Jesus, we read that, in the East, probably from modern day Iraq, some astronomers would see an unusual star and decide to travel for seven weeks the 540 miles to locate a child they understood from Scripture and from the heaven that He would become the King of the Jews. And they bring arrive with some very expensive gifts.

Today we can celebrate Christmas and never even mention Jesus. And, along with that, try to imagine Jesus being born today in our very, very busy, materialistic world.

Maybe here’s the reason so many people have such a difficult time keeping Christ in Christmas. It’s a great story; but, humanly speaking, for some, it’s difficult to believe. By the way, there are some who believe that the star which the Magi followed from Persia to Bethlehem was the conjunct-tion of three planets that occurred in 7 B.C.

And, as proof, they go back to an astronomer named Johannes Kepler, “in 1614, Kepler “determined that a series of three conjunctions of the planets Jupiter and Saturn occurred in the year 7 BC.” He said this was the star of Bethlehem. [Found on [www.wikepedia.org](http://www.wikepedia.org) “Star of Bethlehem.”

And, as far as the angels go, there are plenty of people who believe in angels. But, even today, if you said you believed a group of angels had appeared and spoken to you about some important child being born in a Clinton, CT, you’d very likely not be believed. And even though babies have been born in some very unusual places, it’s still difficult for many to accept that a newborn baby, especially the Son of God, would be placed in a feeding trough as his first cradle.

So, when you add the present-day trappings of Christmas to the simplicity of Christmas story, you might say we’ve already left Jesus out of Christmas. Add to this the fact that there’s still a lot of people who have rejected Christ and won’t even give Him the time of day.

Now, having given you some idea as to why Jesus may be left out of a lot of our celebrations this year, let me give you some reasons why He really is the Christmas Center. I’ve titled today’s sermon “Christmas Center.” Shall we pray?

First, can you imagine believing the story of Christmas and it not being factual? What I mean is this. Some say that faith is faith and that facts really don’t matter. That is contrary to what the Bible teaches. It is faith, for sure. But it’s faith in the facts and faith in the truth of history that makes Christmas so glorious.

Think about it like this. Nothing in the entire story of Christ’s birth would be meaningful if it’s not true. It is a nice story. But how many people over the centuries have written *nice* stories? I’ve read a lot of them and so have you. And many of those stories are extremely touching and many are very meaningful.

But if the Christmas story isn’t true; if it’s a lie, can you imagine believing anything else you read in the entire life of Jesus or anything in the lives of the Apostles or anything that Paul wrote? You see, the story of Christmas is incredible. It’s hard-to-believe. But, if it’s not true; if it’s a lie, then what else can you believe from your Bible? It would make no sense for you to believe the rest of the Bible if someone had written even one story about Jesus’ birth that was fiction. So, practically speaking, the whole story is just a great story if it’s not true.

Let me say it this way. Think about it as though you had two brothers; one named Matthew; one named Luke. Luke, a doctor turned historian. Matthew, a tax-collector turned writer.

Now both of these brothers of yours began to research the life of a man named Jesus who they called the Christ. One of them, Matthew, writes himself into the story. Your other brother, Luke, chooses to become a follower of Jesus after His crucifixion. But both of them feel it is extremely important to write about the *birth* of this Man they called Jesus.

Now, would it make any sense whatsoever for either of your brothers to write a story about the birth of someone and it not be true? Why would they even write it? And if they could write this sort of “birth” story of Jesus, why not just say, “Lots of people believe it happened this way. *I’m* not so sure. As a matter of fact, the people *I’ve* spoken with said there were no shepherds. No one ever claimed to have met with a band of angels one night while they were on a hillside watching their sheep.” You see, the story would be just that, a story.

Now, neither of your brothers were there at Christ’s birth. But couldn’t they have or wouldn’t they have checked the story out with the people who were there and part of it before they put it into their book? And, had they made up the story and then said that it was true, they’d be lying. Your brothers would be liars.

And how about the details? Good writers find a purpose for every single part of the story they write. Now let’s ask Matthew why he wrote the details that he put in his book? “Matthew, why did you list the genealogy of this Man Jesus going all the way back to King David; especially since the Jewish leaders rejected Him as their Messiah?” How in the world does that make this a good story if you just made it up? Were you looking for the Jewish leaders to crucify you too; like they did Him? Or, was Jesus Christ really descended from King David just like you said He was? Were there any records Matthew might have checked for verification?

Luke, let me ask you the same question. Why did you give so many seemingly insignificant details like the decree from Augustus about everyone being counted in the census and about everyone having to return to his ancestral home? Why give the detail that it was done during the days when Cyrenius was governor of Syria? Why tie that to the shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks at night and a group of angels appearing to them? How in the world can you reconcile the accuracy of *your* history about Caesar and Cyrenius and then make up a story about shepherds and angels? Luke, why not just tell the story as you heard it and confirmed with the people who were there that day?

Folks, you see, your two brothers have absolutely no reason to create a story, no reason to add the details of recent history, no reason to research the entire genealogy of Jesus and claim that it all took place because the Emperor Augustus Caesar had called for a census and no reason to have Joseph, by the whim of a writer, say he was living in Nazareth and had to take his pregnant wife back to Bethlehem, his ancestral home.

It’s a great story. But is it just historical fiction? Which of these details are true and which ones are false? And if it’s just a story, why not just say so? A good writer is just as good a writer whether he’s telling his own made-up story of if he’s recounting an actual account of some events.

And the details about Mary’s cousin Elizabeth; did you make them up as well, Luke?

First, the story as presented by the Bible writers is true. They had no reason whatsoever to make it up.

Second, Matthew chose some very specific details and with each detail he adds a quotation from the Old Testament passage of Scripture.

For example, look with me at Matthew 1:20 *“But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. (21) And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.*

*(22) Now all this was done,* ***that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet,*** *saying, (23) Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.”*

Did you know that Matthew makes reference to the OT no less than 67 times in his Gospel about the life of Jesus? Did you know that Brother Luke mentions the OT no less than thirty times? You see, if either of your brothers is writing something untrue, then you’d better be prepared the reject, not only the truthfulness of their Gospel, but the entire OT as well. Or, if you wanted to accept just the OT quotations in these two Gospels, and reject the rest, you’d have a significant moral conflict. How can you accept some of it as true just because it’s an OT quotation and reject the context in which the words are quoted?

First, the story as presented by the writers is true. It’s either historically accurate or it isn’t. Second, Matthew chose to mention some very specific details. And how does he deal with those details? He verifies them and quotes the only book in existence that presents the Jewish Messiah; the Old Testament.

Third, to imagine that your two brothers are saying that these things took place as a fulfillment of the OT prophecies and then not be. That would mean that both of them had to have been extremely ingenious. And both men would have had to carefully study the OT passages to try to fit them into the life of Christ. The ingenuity of these two brothers, your brothers, is astounding if this is not a true account of the birth of Jesus Christ.

Fourth, the entire character of both God, the Father and of God, the Son are impugned if the Christmas story is only a man-made story, if it’s only imaginary. But, the truth is that God’s miraculous hand is seen all over it. Look with me Matthew’s words in chapter one again, at verse twenty-two.

Matthew 1:22 *“Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, (23) Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.”*

Now let’s add the words of Brother Luke here. Luke 1:31 *“And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. (32) He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: (33) and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.*

*(34) Then said Mary unto the angel, how shall this be, seeing I know not a man? (35) And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.”*

Mary, the Mother of Jesus, is said to be a virgin and having never had a physical relationship with Joseph, her husband until after the birth of Jesus. Now, anyone any-where knows that a virgin bringing a child into the world is impossible. The only way she could have done so was through a supernatural intervention of God Himself; a miracle. And if this part of the story is in any way fictional, your two brothers, Matthew and Luke have impugned the LORD’s character. They’ve shown that both the Father and His Son and the Holy Spirit are untrustworthy. Either all three Persons of the Godhead are involved in the birth of the Savior or they weren’t. Why in the world would Matthew and Luke say these things if they weren’t true?

Folks, I know that you believe the Bible. I know you believe the Christmas story. And I know that, for you, the Christmas story is always a wonderful reminder of the grace of God and the power of God and the goodness of God in all He has done for you. But, I’d like to ask you to do something this week. Here it is: tell somebody the story. You can ask someone, family member, co-worker, friend this question, “Do you believe the story of the birth of Jesus?” If they respond with a “yes,” rejoice with them and mention that it’s impossible for it to be anything other than true. That will give you a further opportunity to tell them the Good News of the Gospel because if *this* story is true, then so is the story of Christ’s life and then His crucifixion, His death, His burial, and His resurrection.

Now, my final point is this. Can you find any part of the Christmas story that we have presented here in the Bible that is typical or ordinary? Anything from the Shepherds, to the Angels, to the Virgin Birth, to the search for the manger in Bethlehem? If you take the time to re-read the entire story this week, both in Matthew and in Luke, just look for some-thing ordinary. You’re likely to find *something*, I’m sure.

But, here’s what you will definitely find. The story, by and large, is a totally impossible story. The only way it could have occurred is if God was truly coming to dwell with us in the Person of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Here, then, is the Center. His Name shall be called Jesus. For He shall save His people from their sins. The purpose for Christ becoming a Man is that He would become the Substitute for *your* sin.

And here is why you need to fully believe that the center of Christmas is Jesus Himself. The larger story revolves around the last day of Christ’s earthly life; His crucifixion, His burial, and His resurrection. Here’s the *reason* for the Christmas story. Here’s the *reason* why He arrived here on the earth 2,000 years ago. It was for *you* and for me. It was so that He would be crucified and take upon Himself the penalty of all *your* sin. It was so that *you* would have a Substitute for your sin. *“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved.”*

What then, have you done with the Cross of Christ? What have you done with the free gift of His grace? Have you seen yourself as He sees you; a law-breaker and a sinner in need of God’s free salvation offer? If you do indeed believe the Christmas story, has it made a personal impact upon you? Can you see the Grace of God at work in your own heart because you *know* and you *believe* the story of the birth of Christ?

Grace simply means that your eternal security depends completely upon the work of Someone Else, Someone Who died, of Someone Who paid *your* sin’s penalty completely on the Cross, of Someone Who rose from the dead. If you add anything to the Cross of Christ, anything like your good works, your religion, your ability to keep the Ten Command-ments, your goodness, your morality, then you’ve taken away more than you’ve added to the message. To add anything to the work of the Cross is to make salvation *man-made* and no salvation whatsoever.

Salvation is by grace alone, through faith. And that, not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast. Ephesians 2:8 *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: (9) Not of works, lest any man should boast.”*

Now you may be here today and have never really heard the simple message of Salvation by grace. And the reason may be because you haven’t seen your life in the Light of the Ten Commandments. These ten laws were given so that you might finally admit that you are a sinner in need of God’s free salvation. All your sins are are a breaking of God’s commands. And the person who sees himself as justly condemned for his sins is the only candidate who will truly believe the that Jesus really is the Center of Christmas and that the Gospel of Grace is what you personally need.

Will you, today, admit you are a sinner and deserving of God’s judgment? Will you admit you need for God’s grace to save your soul today? The word for you is this. Believe on Christ and be saved? Here’s the message. Repent and believe.

Today is the Day of Salvation. In order to be saved, here’s what you must do.

* To repent means “to change your mind about God, Christ, your sin, and God’s free gift of salvation.”
* To believe means “to simply trust Jesus Christ alone as the One Who paid the entire penalty for your sins.”

*“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten*

*Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”*

Will you repent today and be saved? Here’s a simple, but wonderful prayer that is yours to pray. *“Father, I realize I am a sinner. I believe that Jesus died in my place on the cross. I repent of my sins. I want to be completely forgiven today. I am trusting you right now to save me. Thank you. Amen*

Video “The Birthday Of A King” by Brooklyn Tabernacle

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJFzTBqbOQc

Hymn # 284 “The Birthday Of A King”

[Kepler’s book [Opera Omnia vol. II, p. 617, as quoted by Burke Gaffney]. “While writing this book, Kepler came across a work by Laurence Suslyga of Poland that argued that Christ was born in 4 B.C. Kepler immediately noticed that this was shortly after a triple conjunction that he calculated had occurred in 7 B.C., and wondered if there was a connection. In 1614 he published his conclusions: the triple conjunction of 7 B.C. was followed by a massing of Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn in 6 B.C., and just as the conjunction and massing of 1603 4 had produced a new star, so the events of 7 6 B.C. had produced a miraculous nova, and that nova was the Star of Bethlehem.” [Found on [www.ips-planetarium.org](http://www.ips-planetarium.org) “Common Errors in the Star of Bethlehem Planetarium Shows” John Mosley 1981].