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# A Savior Is Born

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Today's Treasure  
***"Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord"***  
***(Luke 2:11).***

As long as I live I will treasure the Christmas of 1981. Amanda was two years old and totally enraptured by the lights, ornaments, wrapping paper, and bows celebrating the season. Strangely, she also was swept up in the wonder of the story. She could have understood only the tiniest fragment, but true to her nature, she received what she knew with tender contemplation.

Melissa was tucked secretly inside me. The timing of the pregnancy was just right for a Christmas surprise. For Keith's grand finale a pair of booties lay strategically under the tree. My parent's small home bulged with excitement. Most of my family members share my personality. We are not small on enthusiasm ... or volume. The swirling scents of baking turkey and sweet potatoes bathed in cinnamon, butter, and brown sugar filled the air. Someone announced, "It's time!" and all of us made our gleeful way to the living room and gathered around the tree to hear the old, old story.

I've heard the questions thousands of times: Why do we celebrate this time of year? How do we know when the birth of Christ took place? Why celebrate Christmas at a time originally set for ancient pagan celebrations?

The scrooges are right. We don't know when Christ was born, but I happen to think His is a birth worthy of celebrating at some time of year. God did not just tolerate celebrations and festivals commemorating His faithfulness—He commanded them. His idea! Some were solemn; others were for the pure purpose of rejoicing before the Lord.

On one such occasion Nehemiah said: "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength" (Neh. 8:10). The Book of Esther also speaks of an annual day set aside "for joy and feasting, a day for giving presents to each other" (Esth. 9:19).


Before we return to Christmas 1981, take a look at the most concentrated list of feasts and celebrations provided in the Old Testament. Glance at Leviticus 23. If your Bible has segment captions, you might see the chapter organized into seven different feasts. Take a look at the section on the Passover.

**R**ead verses 4-5. What day was the Passover? \_\_\_\_\_

God chose the season of the Passover to be the first month on His own sacred calendar pertaining to planet Earth. The first month falls according to the new moon over the last half of March and first half of April. Look again at the wording in Leviticus 23:5. The timing God assigned to the Passover has significance to all of us who have carried children in our wombs. The 14th day of the first month is the day of conception. If by any chance our God, the God of perfect planning and gloriously significant order, happened to overshadow Mary on the 14th day of the first month of His calendar, our Savior would have been born toward the end of our December. We have absolutely no way of knowing whether or not He did, but I would not be the least bit surprised for God to have sparked His Son's human life on one Passover and ended it on another.

No, I don't believe in Easter bunnies, and I don't have much of an opinion on Santa Clauses, but I'm a hopeless romantic when it comes to celebrating Christmas, the birth of my Savior. Until a further "Hear ye! Hear ye!" from heaven, December 25 works mighty fine for me.

Back to 1981. It was my brother's turn to read the Christmas story. He was a college boy with a deep, passionate voice. Scarcely before he could say, "And it came to pass in those days," Amanda rustled to her knees, shut her eyes, and cupped her plump little toddler hands together as if praying a bedside prayer. She remained frozen in that position throughout the entire Christmas story, her eyes never opening, but her face changing expressions with every event. The tears streamed down our cheeks as we listened to the story as if for the very first time through her ears. Oh, yes, it's a wonderful story! Read the words with a fresh dose of wonder—Luke 2:1-20.

 **OK, I've had a chance to be nostalgic. What about you? What is your favorite part of this precious story? Use the margin if you need more room.**

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Factual to its finest detail, Luke's narrative places the dot on the time line. Caesar Augustus was the ruler of the Roman Empire. From Matthew we learned that Herod the Great was king of Palestine. Herod's reign ended in 4 B.C., so Jesus had to have been born prior to that time.

**Why did Joseph leave Galilee at this time?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Look up the following Scriptures and comment on how they seem significant to the setting of our story.**

**Micah 5:2** \_\_\_\_\_

**1 Samuel 16:1,13** \_\_\_\_\_

**Jeremiah 33:14-16** \_\_\_\_\_

**Luke 1:31-33** \_\_\_\_\_

Fulfilled prophecy demonstrates the incredible veracity of the Word of God. In the specific promises fulfilled by Jesus' birth, we have enough fact to build our faith from now till Christ returns. God purposed that His Son would come out of Nazareth but be born in Bethlehem. So He caused a census to require everyone in the Roman world to return to the place of his or her family's origin. Probably the timing was too close to the birth of the child for Joseph to leave Mary behind. One commentary tenderly suggested that Joseph may not have wanted Mary left behind and subjected to gossip. Remember, he was chosen, too. God looked upon his heart and saw a man who could fill a distinct and difficult role with integrity.

Bethlehem is about five miles south of Jerusalem. If you have a Bible map you'll see that Bethlehem is quite a distance from Nazareth, with chains of hills and mountains in between. Theirs was no easy trip.

We women could be tempted to picket the *New International Version* for leaving out one little detail that had a profound influence on Mary's trip: "Mary ... being great with child" (v. 5, KJV). You and I have to appreciate the fact that the verb tense indicates a continuous action. We might say she was getting greater by the minute.

I certainly remember feeling that way. I'll never forget catching a glimpse of myself, great with child, in the distorted reflection of the stainless-steel faucet on the tub. My stomach looked huge, and my head and arms appeared like nubs. From then on I took showers. Taking "great with child" on the road is no easy task. Mary sounds like many of us. How many of our doctors told us to limit travel and certainly not to relocate during a pregnancy? Have you ever noticed how every cataclysmic transition seems to schedule itself strategically during those nine months?

Whether or not Mary and Joseph planned Christ's birth this way, God certainly did. One of my favorite phrases in the birth narrative is humbly tucked in verse 6: "The time came for the baby to be born." The time. The time toward which all "time" had been ticking since the kingdom clock struck one.

Time—the very first thing God ever created. All of Scripture unfolds from the words, "In the beginning, God created . . ." Since eternity has no beginning, to what did the "beginning" refer if not to "time"? The words in Luke 2:6 refer to the most important segment of time since the first tick of the clock. The second hand circled tens of thousands of times for thousands of years, then finally, miraculously, majestically—the time came. God's voice broke through the barrier of the natural realm through the cries of an infant, startled by life on the outside. The Son of God had come to earth, wrapped in a tiny cloak of human flesh. "She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn" (Luke 2:7).

**R**ead again Luke 2:8-19. Who were the first to receive the glorious birth announcement?

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Why do you think God first proclaimed the good news to a motley crew of sheepherders in a nearby field? We can't be certain, but in Scripture God consistently seems to enjoy revealing Himself to common people rather than those who feel most worthy. He often uses the foolish things of this world to confound the wise (see 1 Cor. 1:28). Maybe God had a soft place in His heart for the shepherds watching over their flocks.

**R**ead Ezekiel 34:11-16. What significance do you see?

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Until I researched Luke 2, I always pictured the shepherds in the fields as older men who leaned on their staffs. Maybe because of the shepherds in our Christmas programs when I was young. I definitely had the wrong picture. The youngest boy in the family usually became the shepherd. As a son grew up, he took on more and more of the farming responsibilities and passed the shepherding duties to the younger brother. This job transfer continued until the youngest son became the official family shepherd. The shepherds out in the field were old enough to brave the night with the sheep and young enough to make haste and find the One of whom the angels spoke.

Don't miss the fact that the announcement came to them while they were watching over their flocks at night. Sometimes in the contrast of the night, we can best see the glory of God. Verse 9 tells us that "the glory of the Lord shone around them." Notice the Scripture does not say that the glory of the Lord shone around the angel but around

them, the shepherds. Compare verses 9 and 13. As you picture the scene, keep in mind that only one angel, an angel of the Lord, appeared to them first. The other heavenly hosts did not join the scene until after the birth announcement. Most definitely, the glory shone around the shepherds.

**T**ry to imagine for a moment what happened. How do you think the glory of the Lord looked around the shepherds? We don't know for sure; I'm just asking you to express how you're picturing it in your mind right now.

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I am convinced that God wants us to get involved in our Scripture reading. Using our imaginations and picturing the events as eyewitnesses can make black ink on a white page spring into living color. No matter how the glory of God appeared, it scared the shepherds half to death. The words of the angel that followed are so reminiscent of my Savior. Often He told those nearly slain by His glory not to be afraid.

Oh, how I love Him. The untouchable hand of God reaching down to touch the fallen hand of man. "I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people." I am convinced our witness would be far more effective if we brought our good news with great joy. Notice the shepherds wasted no time before embracing the news.

The angel then proclaimed the special delivery: "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord" (v. 11). In other words, He is the *Christos*, the *Anointed One*, the *Messiah*!

**W**hat was the sign? \_\_\_\_\_

I think you will cherish the meaning of the word *sign*. The Greek word *semeion* means the finger-marks of God, valuable not so much for what they are as for what they indicate of the grace and power of the Doer. You see, a sign is a fingerprint of God, given not so that we will be consumed by the sign itself but by the invisible hand that left the visible print. The angel sent the shepherds to embrace the Baby, not the sign.

The Scriptures tell us that suddenly a great company of heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests" (v. 14). Look carefully at those words and behold the awesome proclamation: Through this precious Child, the God of the highest heaven has graced the earth.

**C**arefully read verses 15-20. Beside each application below, write the portion of the verses that suggests the particular idea.  
**People who truly encounter Christ in their lives can hardly keep news of Him to themselves.**

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**God does not mislead His children. If a message is from Him, it will undoubtedly bear true.**

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ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/BOB SCHATZ



A modern-day Arab shepherd with his flock.

**Authentic belief in the Word of God is best demonstrated by our actions. As James 2:17 says, “faith ... not accompanied by action, is dead.”**

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**Our authentic testimonies about Jesus Christ can have a tremendous impact on those we tell.**

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At first glance, God seems to give more attention to the shepherds' responses to the birth of Christ than to Mary herself. On a more probing look, however, we discover that verse 19 describes what would have taken volumes to record.

**I**n what two ways did Mary respond to all of the events following Christ's birth?

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The Greek word *treasured up* is *suntereo*, meaning “to preserve.” The concept embodies the idea of keeping treasure preserved or safe by holding it close. The word for *pondered* is particularly wonderful. *Sumballo* means “to throw or put together.” It is the practice of casting many things together, combining them and considering them as one.

A host of memories must have been dancing in her [Mary's] head: The angel's appearance. His words. Her flight to the hill country of Judea. Elizabeth's greeting. Their late night conversations. The first time she noticed her tummy was rounding. Joseph's face when he saw her. The way she felt when he believed. The whispers of neighbors. The doubts of her parents. The first time she felt the baby move inside of her. The dread of the long trip. The reality of being full term, bouncing on the back of a beast. The first pain. The fear of having no place to bear a child. The horror of the nursery. The way it looked. The way it smelled. The way He looked. God so frail. So tiny. So perfect. Love so abounding. Grace so amazing. Wise men bowed down. Shepherds made haste—each memory like treasures in a box. She gathered the jewels, held them to her breast, and engraved them on her heart forever.<sup>4</sup>

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only” (John 1:1,14).

<sup>1</sup>Ronald F. Youngblood, ed., *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), 883.

<sup>2</sup>Beth Moore, *Things Pondered* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 7.

<sup>3</sup>Youngblood, *Bible Dictionary*, 687.

<sup>4</sup>Moore, *Things Pondered*, 9.