

12.27.20 ~ Different Responses to the Birth of God's Son...

Last week we studied in **Matthew 1; Luke 2**, how God had announced the coming of His Son (through Angels) to Joseph and Mary, and to the shepherds who were in the fields around Bethlehem.

Even so, the majority of people in and around Bethlehem, some 2,000 years ago, missed the advent of God's Son; just like most of those who live in and around Waldport, missed the true meaning of Christmas this year: the advent of God's Son Jesus, *God's Salvation; Immanuel, God with us*.

Read Matthew 2:1-12... Herod was in a panic over the birth of this Child (King of the Jews), who was being sought by some prominent men [Magi] from the east. Herod called together all of the chief priests and scribes asking them where the Child was to be born. The religious leaders quoted **Micah 5:2**, telling Herod the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, and He would become the Ruler over Israel.

Herod sent the Magi to search out and find this Child, saying that he wanted to go and worship Him. When the Magi found Jesus, they worshipped Him, presenting to Him their treasures of gold, frankincense, and myrrh; but they did not report back to Herod, instead they returned to their home (most likely Persia) bypassing Jerusalem.

Read Matthew 2:13-16, 19-21...

Herod was jealous of the Christ Child, not only was he unwilling to honor God's Son as King, but he sought to kill Him, so that there would be no competition for the title of "King of the Jews," which he applied to himself.

The world is full of self proclaimed kings who are unwilling to bow down to Jesus, not because they are ignorant of Him, but because they reject His sovereign authority as Lord and Savior of the world.

Even the religious leaders in this narrative knew what the Scriptures said concerning the birthplace of Christ; they would also have known that He was born to a virgin, as a sign of God's power and purpose; yet, it would seem that they didn't bother to go look for themselves, to see whether or not the prophecy had come true. Evidently, they were comfortable with their own religious rituals, rules, and traditions, and they had no need for a Savior.

The religious leaders were so full of pride, they didn't have any room for Jesus; foolishly thinking they were acceptable to God just as they were.

Rabbis, during their daily prayer times, gave thanks to God for having not created them as a Gentile, a woman, or a slave. This is found in the Mishnah, the first part of the Talmud's exegetical commentaries/teachings on the Torah (Pentateuch), that form the basis for Jewish Law.

In **Luke 18:10-14**, Jesus told this parable to people who trusted in their own righteousness, and viewed others with contempt: "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. "The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Most the world's people are unwilling to admit that they are sinners in need of the forgiveness that God alone provides, only through Jesus Christ.

Jesus said (**Mark 2:17**), "*It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.*"

Jesus came to offer forgiveness and eternal life to those who would recognize and receive God's salvation; the truth is, we are all sinners in need of the Savior.

Isn't it amazing, Christ was born in Bethlehem, just 6 miles SW of Jerusalem where the Temple was located, and where most of Israel's religious activity took place.

The birth of Jesus fulfilled many OT prophecies, and yet, it would appear that at His arrival He was given no more attention than any other baby born that night.

Most of people who were in or near Bethlehem missed the opportunity to witness the birth of Immanuel and to worship God's Son. Perhaps they were busy with rituals and ceremonies; as religion allows people to feel spiritual even when they are not, and to believe that they have spiritual life, even though they are spiritually dead!

Religious activity cannot produce God's righteousness or provide God's salvation, but it can promote a false sense of security spiritually. Religion that doesn't include a personal relationship with God through Christ, leaves a person guilty of sin and unacceptable to the Holy and Righteous God of Creation.

Many people are religious, but only a small percentage of people are saved. (See **Romans 3:10-12, 21-23; 5:8; 6:23; 10:9-10, 13; 8:1; 10:13.**)

Most of the people in the world miss the advent of Jesus because they are either ignorant of Him, indifferent toward Him, or they are very religious, trying to justify themselves before Him through rituals, ceremonies, and good deeds. Religion may very well damn more people to hell than anything else.

We have already considered how various people, in and around Bethlehem, responded to the news of Christ's birth; but there are two important people we have not yet considered, and so, I'm going to focus on their story.

Please turn to **Luke 2:25-26...** Simeon appears only here in the Scripture, and no where else. We know from the narrative that he is a **righteous** [*right with God, acceptable to God, justified in the eyes of God*] and **devout** [*one who is reverent toward God, careful to obey and honor God in word, deed, and thought*] man.

We are told that Simeon is looking [waiting] for the **consolation** of Israel [the consolation is not a thing, it is a Person: the Messiah, the Holy One who will bring God's comfort and deliver them from their oppression].

Notice, it tells us that the Holy Spirit is upon Simeon, having revealed to him that he will not die until he has seen the Lord's Christ, the Messiah, the Comforter. **Jeremiah 29:11-13**, "'For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.' Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart."

Jeremiah 31:31-33, "'Behold, days are coming,' declares the Lord, 'when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,' declares the Lord. 'But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,' declares the Lord, 'I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.'"

Isaiah 61:1-2, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners; to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn."

This is in reference to the Messiah (cf. **Luke 4:14-30**), Jesus quoted this while teaching in the synagogue in Nazareth, at the end of which He said, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing," i.e., I Am the Messiah, I am the Consolation of Israel!

Rabbis sometimes referred to the Messiah [Hebrew] as Menachem, meaning "Comforter" or "Consoler."

See **John 14:16**, "I will ask the Father, and He will give you **another** [*allos*, meaning another of the same kind] **Helper** [*Parakletos*, meaning one called alongside to help, comfort, counsel, exhort, encourage] that He may be with you

forever.” **26**, “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.”

Please turn back to **Luke 2:27-35**... Simeon came into the Temple at the same time as Joseph and Mary are bringing Jesus to be dedicated; Simeon takes Jesus into his arms and thanks God, saying (**verses 29-32**), “Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, According to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation, Which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, A Light of revelation to the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel.”

Mary and Joseph are amazed at what Simeon says about Jesus, and then Simeon says to Mary (**verses 34-35**), “Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed— and a sword will pierce even your own soul—to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”

Mary’s agony will reach its peak when she watches her son suffer and die on the cross, and then be placed in a tomb; but He comes out alive on the third day and over the next 40 days He shows Himself to those who believe in Him, after which, He returns too the Father in heaven.

Jesus is the sovereign Lord, Savior, and Judge, and He will acquit or condemn every person who has ever lived on this earth (cf. **John 3:18-21, 35-36**).

Please turn to **Luke 2:36-38**... Here we are told about Anna, a prophetess, a widow, who is eighty-four years old; she has been serving at the temple night and day since she became a widow.

So, on the heels of Simeon’s interaction with Joseph, Mary, and Jesus; while he is proclaiming praise to God for allowing him to see God’s Salvation [Jesus, the Messiah]; at that moment, Anna comes up to this little group of people (Jesus, Mary, Joseph, Simeon) and she begins giving thanks to God for God’s Son.

It would seem that Anna continued to proclaim, from inside the temple, the good news as it is foretold by God’s prophets, concerning the One who was to come, the Savior, the only source of hope, forgiveness, and eternal life, now being fulfilled in this Son who was given, this Child who was born to a virgin, in Bethlehem, in Judea, who was called Immanuel, which means, God with us: He is Christ the Lord!

The simplest yet the greatest truth of all, is this:

**Jesus loves me this I know,
for the Bible tells me so.**

Little ones to Him belong
They are weak, but He is strong
Yes, Jesus loves me

Yes, Jesus loves me
Yes, Jesus loves me
The Bible tells me so
Jesus loves me, He who died
Heaven's gate to open wide
He will wash away my sin
Let His little child come in
Yes, Jesus loves me
Yes, Jesus loves me
Yes, Jesus loves me
The Bible tells me so

God loves you so much that He gave His One and Only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him receives eternal forgiveness and eternal life.

If you have never asked Jesus Christ to forgive you sins and save your soul, do it today, right here, right now. Only then will you understand the incomprehensible excitement and the overwhelming joy expressed by Simeon and Anna that day at the temple; by the Magi's fervent and quiet worship when they found Jesus, Mary, and Joseph at the house; the exuberant declaration of the shepherds as they went through the streets of Bethlehem telling everyone about the One who had been born: Christ the Lord; and then Joseph and Mary who considered all the angels had told them, and all the things that had happened.

Listen! Jesus Christ is God in the flesh. He lived among us, died for our sins, rose from the grave, just like He said that He would.

As you begin this new year, don't forget how Joseph, Mary, the shepherds, the Magi, Simeon, and Anna, all pondered the wonders of God, praising Him for the Savior who has come: Jesus Christ, God's Son, Lord and Savior.

1John 5:11-13 And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

Knowing God's Son as Savior puts the "Merry" in Christmas and gives us Hope for the New Year, and so, to all of you Believers and Followers of Jesus Christ the Lord, I say, **Merry Christmas and a Hopeful New Year!**

Pastor Mike
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