

## **The Wonder of Jesus' Birth Announcements**

### **Series: Rediscovering the Wonder of Christmas, Part 3**

Luke 2; Matthew 1:18-25; Matthew 2

If I were to ask if you've ever experienced a miracle, I'm guessing that, depending on your definition, some of you would say "no."

By the end of this sermon, you will have inhaled and exhaled approximately 500 times. Is that a miracle? You decide as you consider that:

The journey of an oxygen atom begins when air passes through your nose, where unwanted dust and debris is filtered out. The average person moves about 440 cubic feet of air per day through the nose and trachea and into the lungs. The surface area of your lungs is 40 times greater than the surface area of your body. Once in the lungs, the oxygen atoms hitchhike with hemoglobin and travels throughout the entire human body via blood vessels. If those blood vessels were laid end to end, they would be approximately 100,000 miles long. That means the blood vessels in your body could wrap around the equator four times. At the end of its journey, the oxygen atom enters individual cells, bonds with the food we eat, and releases energy.

In his article "The Miracle of Breath," James Robinson writes:

Webster's Dictionary defines a miracle as 'an extraordinary, unusual wonder or marvel.' Isn't a bloodstream 100,000 miles long, in a small body, an unusual wonder? Isn't the journey of an oxygen atom a true marvel? We don't always need supernatural events to experience a miracle. All we need is breath. The human breath is sacred: it is the miraculous gift of life.

Acts 17:25 says that God "**gives all men life and breath.**" Job 34:14–15 says, ***"If it were his intention and he withdrew his spirit and breath, all humanity would perish together, and mankind would return to the dust."***

The average person takes approximately 23,000 breaths per day. That means you experience about 23,000 little miracles every day!

Albert Einstein said, "There are only two ways to live your life. One is as if nothing is a miracle. The other is as if everything is."

**The Christmas story is a wondrous, miraculous story.**

We talked last week about the wonder of HIS BIRTH. Any birth is a wonderful event, but the birth of Christ had been foretold by the prophets for centuries. To Abraham, God revealed the nation through which Christ would come. To Jacob, He revealed that Christ would be of the tribe of Judah. To Isaiah, God mentioned his family would be through the line of Jesse. To Micah, God whispered the name of His birth city. To Daniel, God revealed the time of His birth. The events leading up to the birth of Christ were like the gears of a fine watch that had to mesh together so that when the fullness of time had come, Jesus was born in Bethlehem. What a wonder!

Christmas is filled with wonderful announcements, announcements from prophets, announcements from heaven, and announcements from wise men. We've heard them and sung about them, but maybe we've gotten so used to them that we don't hear what they are teaching us.

And so, I want you to hear them again, like you're hearing them for the very first time. The bible does not want us to miss the significance of the birth of Christ. Today's message is about, **The Wonder of Jesus' Birth Announcements.**

### **Let's PRAY**

Back in October of this year, our oldest daughter Lisa surprised us with the announcement that she was expecting a baby in April. She knows if it will be a boy or girl but hasn't told us yet. Normally we hear 6-7 months before a baby is born. But in the bible, the first birth announcement was from Isaiah the prophet given in 734 B.C.

Isaiah 7: 14, ***"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel." (NIV)***

We're told 734 years ahead of Christ's birth.

### **Birth Announcement #1 – His name shall be Immanuel, meaning God with us.**

There are four truths this birth announcement teaches us.

1. **Jesus is God.** We looked at this in-depth last week as we talked about His virgin birth. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary.

A lot of people say, "Why does it matter that he was born of a virgin." Well, Number one: It matters because the Bible says He was born of a virgin. And if Jesus wasn't born of a virgin, then the Bible is not true.

If Jesus isn't conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin, then let me tell you something else - Jesus is not the Son of God. He's the son of Adam. He's just like you and me with two human parents. He is simply a man, and, therefore, He can't be the Savior.

**So that's the very first truth. Emmanuel means that Jesus is God.**

2. **Jesus is God with us.** We know that because we've heard "Immanuel, means God with us." Now why God with us?

We can't be with God because of sin, so God came down to us. Jesus laid aside His royal robes, He took off His crown, He stepped down from heaven, and He became a man. The Creator encompassed Himself in a virgin's womb and was *born* into this world in the same way that we are.

The beginning of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm says, ***1The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. 3He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. 4Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you (Immanuel) are with me.*** (ESV)

It's not just that Jesus is God and that He is with us, but...

3. **Jesus is God for us.**

In Genesis chapter 16, we find the story of Sarah and Hagar. Hagar was the Egyptian maid of Sarah. And you remember God had given the promise to Abraham and Sarah that they would have a promised child in their old age. They had gone on for years and no child, so Sarah says, "Well, we must have missed it somehow. Maybe God is going to give us a son through my servant, Hagar. And as soon as Hagar got pregnant by Abraham, there was friction between Hagar and Sarah, and Sarah drove Hagar away.

And here's Hagar, pregnant, out in the desert all by herself. She just sat down, prepared to die. And the angel of the LORD came to her, and God promised to look after her, because God was for her. She wasn't even a Jew. But God still loved her, and God cared for her. And in Genesis 16, Hagar gives a special name for God, **El-Roi**, "***Thou art the God who sees me.***" The God who looks after me, because when God sees, God cares, and provides.

Romans 8:31 says, "***What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?***" (ESV)

Jesus is God. Jesus is God with us. Jesus is God for us.

4. **And, lastly, Jesus wants to be God in us.** He wants to come and live inside your life. Christianity is not you gritting your teeth trying so hard to follow rules and act like a Christian. It's yielding your life and letting Jesus, by His Holy Spirit live His life through you.

Have you opened your heart to Him? Have you received Him? You can leave here today saying, "You know, I learned about Emmanuel, God with us but, more importantly, I'm leaving this church with God in me.

Jesus said in John chapter 14 that when He went away, that another was going to come, another just like Him, the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit was going to be with you and in you.

That's what happened to Mary. The Holy Spirit came upon her, and the power of the Most High overshadowed her. When she said, "May it be done to me according to your word," BAM, she was pregnant, and the offspring in her womb was God's holy Son. And everywhere she went, Jesus went, because the Lord was growing inside of her. And that's a picture of the Christian life. Christ in me and me in Christ.

So, Birth Announcement #1 – His name shall be Emmanuel, meaning God with us. Jesus is God. Jesus is God with us. Jesus is God for us, and Jesus wants to be God in us.

The second birth announcement is given by angels and is found in Luke, chapter 2, beginning with verse 8: "***And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9And an***

*angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. 10And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." 13And 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!" (ESV)*

## **Birth Announcement #2 – A Savior is Born, He is Christ the Lord**

What an announcement! Here you are and you're a shepherd, and it's business as usual. You're out in the field, watching over the flocks, and suddenly, a beautiful, majestic angel appears before you and says, ***"Do not be afraid, for, behold, I bring you good news of great joy which shall be for all the people. For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior who is Christ the Lord."***

God could have announced the birth of Jesus any way he wanted to anyone He wanted. So, have you ever wondered why God chose to announce it to lowly shepherds? Max Lucado says:

***"Had the angel gone to theologians, they would have first consulted their commentaries. Had he gone to the elite, they would have looked around to see if anyone was watching. Had he gone to the successful, they would have first looked at their calendars. So, he went to shepherds—Men who didn't have a reputation to protect or an ax to grind or a ladder to climb. Men who didn't know enough to tell God that angels don't sing, and that the Messiah can't be found wrapped in rags and sleeping in a feed trough."***

It's fascinating that God didn't reveal himself to the religious leaders who knew all about the scriptures and prophecy, but if you read the rest of the gospels, you'll find out why. Jesus healed people on the Sabbath, and instead of

celebrating the miracles, they plotted to kill him. Instead of being conformed to God's image, they tried to recreate God in their image.

In his book Rumors of Another World, Philip Yancey says there are two ways of looking at the world. "One takes the world apart, while the other seeks to connect and put it together."

You can approach God the same way. Take Him apart, make God manageable and measurable...reduce God in a way that we can define Him. If we do that, we end up with a God in a box. Or in the words of A.W. Tozer, we end up with a God who can **"never surprise us, never overwhelm us, never astonish us, and never cause us to wonder."**

The religious leaders were reductionist theologians. Jesus said in Matthew 23:23, ***"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others."* (ESV)**

They tried to pigeonhole God, but God doesn't fit in nice, neat, little categories.

In contrast to the theology of dissection, our theological starting point needs to be more like Isaiah 55:8, where the Lord says, ***"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. 9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."* (NIV)**

Astronomers have discovered galaxies 13.2 billion light years away. That means it takes light, traveling at 186,000 miles per second, more than twelve billion years to reach the outer edges of the heavens. God says that's about the distance between his thoughts and our thoughts; we underestimate God by 13.2 billion light years.

Psalms 145:3-7 says, ***"Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom. One generation commends your works to another; they tell of your mighty acts. 5 They speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty—and I will meditate on your wonderful works. (NIV)***

What I'm promoting is a theology of wonder. Saint Chrysostom said children exhibit an instinctive sensitivity to mystery and wonder.

Tell a child the story of Bethlehem, the night watch of the shepherds, angels singing in the night sky, the quest of the Magi, the babe in the manger. And a child will simply believe.

As Max Lucado says, God announced the birth to shepherds because they "didn't know enough to tell God that angels don't sing to sheep and that Messiahs aren't found wrapped in rags and sleeping in a feed trough." Mark Nepo said: "Birds don't need ornithologists to fly." God doesn't need theologians to do miracles.

God is looking for people who won't tell Him what he can't do. The shepherds took God at face value. When they heard the news, they embraced it with a simple childlike faith. Luke says they "hurried off" to see the child.

Jesus Christ came into this world for presidents and the poverty stricken, and everyone in between. Now there are three life-changing discoveries that are found in this second birth announcement, ***"A Savior has been born for you."***

### **1. The Savior came to save you from an eternal hell.**

A lot of people don't like to think about hell. A lot of churches don't like to talk about hell. But let me ask you a question. If you have cancer, and you go to the doctor, and he knows you have cancer. Do you want him to tell you everything is fine? Or do you want him to tell you, "Hey, you have a serious condition here and we need to jump on it right now or else you're going to die."

I want the truth. And here's the truth: Every single person who does not know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord is on the highway to hell.

Jesus said, "Unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." The most familiar verse we know is John 3:16. It's called the gospel in a nutshell. ***"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."***

The old hymn says, **"I was sinking deep in sin far from the peaceful shore. Very deeply stained within, sinking to rise**

**no more. But the Master of the sea heard my despairing cry and from the waters lifted me, now safe am I."**

You and I were on a collision course with hell, until Jesus came to save us.

**2. Second life-changing discovery is that the Savior came to save you from a living hell.**

I know there are lots of people, who get the idea that salvation is like life insurance. You receive Christ as Savior and Lord, and He saves you from eternal hell. Maybe you were 10, 12, or 20 years old when you received Christ. And, and you're like, "My name's written in the Lamb's Book of Life. I have my place reserved in heaven." And you live 60, 70, 80 years, and you're on your death bed and thinking now I can experience the joy of my salvation." No! No! No! Salvation has benefits for all eternity, beginning RIGHT NOW.

We sing that song, "Salvation is for the sweet by and by." No, it's also for the nasty, troubling, difficult, RIGHT NOW.

Maybe you're here today and you say, "Well, you know, I believe I've been saved from an eternal hell, but I'm experiencing a living hell right now. My life is out of control. I'm addicted to this. I'm dependent on that. There is so much misery in my life. I may not be going to hell, but I'm experiencing hell right now." Well listen to the announcement, the Savior has come; it is good news of a great joy to save you right now, to fill your life with blessings, and grace, and mercies that are new every morning.

Did you notice in the announcement from the angels, they talk about joy. It's good news of a great joy. God wants to give you joy. And He wants to give peace. And He wants to fill your heart with love.

John chapter 10 says, ***"The thief comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy. I have come that they might have life and might have it abundantly."***

The devil wants to keep you on the highway to hell. And if he can't do that, then he's going to try to make your life a living hell. But Jesus says, ***"I came that you might have life and might have it abundantly."***



Jesus saves you from an eternal hell, a living hell, and Life-changing discovery number three.

### **3. The Savior has come to save us from a meaningless life.**

Look what it says in verse 15: "*When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."*

*16So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 17When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told."* (NIV)

They started off that night as just ordinary shepherds. But they get this announcement, then they get a sign, and they check it out. And they find a baby lying in a feeding trough wrapped in pieces of cloth.

And that little baby is the Savior of the world. They went back praising and glorifying God for all that they had seen and heard. And they had a message to share with other people. They were changed and had a purpose for living that they didn't have before.

God has entrusted you and me to tell others about the same wonderful, awesome, life-changing good news of great joy which is for all the people.

God comes into our lives through the person of the Holy Spirit when we receive Christ as Savior and Lord, and He changes us. And then he says, "Now you're on mission. You shall be My witnesses. ***Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe all that I've commanded you. And, lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."***

So, Birth Announcement #1 – His name shall be Emmanuel, meaning God with us. Jesus is God. Jesus is God with us. Jesus is God for us, and Jesus wants to be God in us.

Birth Announcement #2 – A Savior is Born, He is Christ the Lord, and He saves us from an eternal hell, a living hell, and a meaningless life.

And now Birth Announcement #3 comes the wise men in Mathew 2:

*“After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, ‘Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.’ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. ‘In Bethlehem in Judea,’ they replied, ‘for this is what the prophet has written: ‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’”*

*Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, ‘Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.’”*

*After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.*

## **Birth Announcement #2 – The King of the Jews is Born**

The Jews had been waiting for their promised Messiah, and now you have wise men coming from hundreds of miles away from the East. Daniel served as one of these wise men of Babylon, under King Nebuchadnezzar. And he, no doubt, had planted in their minds the prophecies of the coming of a king.

And so, for hundreds of years these wise men, had passed down this prophecy about the star and a king. And these Persian king makers, have come to bring this news, and it should have been great news, and filled their hearts with joy.

But in Matthew chapter 2, we don't read about much excitement from the masses. What was true in Matthew chapter 2 is true today for so many people.

We see from this story, three distinct and different responses.

**1. The first response is that of Herod the king. Like Herod, some are troubled and angry with the news, "The King is Born!"**

Herod is a psycho king. Herod kills anyone that he thinks is trying to depose him, or come alongside of him, or trying to take his place. He killed three of his own sons and one of his wives

It says in verse 3: *"And when Herod the king heard it, he was troubled and all Jerusalem with him."*

Why do people get so upset about Jesus? I think it's because people don't want to submit to King Jesus. When the devil told Eve, "If you eat of this fruit, you shall be like God, knowing good and evil," and she bought into it. And people buy into that every day, and they say, "I want to be the king of my own castle. So, like Herod, some are troubled about a rival king.

**2. Second group of people are the religious leaders, and they are indifferent with the news, "The King is Born."**

Herod gathered those religious leaders together, and in verse 4, "He began to inquire of them where the Christ was to be born." Now the Magi didn't say anything about the Christ. They just said the King of the Jews. And so, Herod gets the religious leaders together and he inquires of them, "Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?" And they tell him, "The prophet Micah said in Bethlehem of Judea."

You say, "Where does it say that they were *indifferent*?" They hear the news, and they see the wise men, with a big entourage. They tell them that the Christ is to be born in Bethlehem, which is just five miles away, but have no sense of wonder to go check it out for themselves.

Just so you know, the wise men have been traveling hundreds of miles from the East. They've been traveling for months by the time they get to Jerusalem. And they find out, "You're almost there. So, they get on their camels, and they go, but no one goes with them. The chief priests and the scribes, they hear the news that the King has been born, and they don't even bother to go. They're indifferent. Too busy following their dead religion to seek out the living God. Don't you wonder about that?

What about you? Are you too busy with your agenda, with your family, with your job, with your hobbies, or whatever to find out the truth about Jesus?

So, we see that, like Herod, some are troubled and angry. Others, like the religious leaders, are indifferent to the news...

**3. And then you see the Magi. They are overjoyed with the news that "The King is Born."**

Now notice what they did. The Magi sought the Lord. They were sensitive to their surroundings, and they saw His star.

*"Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness," the Bible says, "and all these things will be added to you."*

*"And the star (verse 9), which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over where the Child was. And when they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy."*

And what did they do when they found the Lord? They worshipped Him.

Verse 11 says, *"And when they came into the house and saw the child, with Mary, his mother, and they fell down and worshipped Him. And opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, and frankincense, and myrrh."*

Now get the picture, He's not at the manger. Jesus is now in a house. Months have passed and the Scripture refers to Him as a child, not just a newborn. The wise men don't worship the holy family; they worship the Holy One. And in their worship, the Scripture says, they open their treasures.

They gave Him gifts of gold, the best gift for a king. They gave Him frankincense, which is incense that was burned at the altar before the Lord

continually. It's a picture of prayers going up before the Lord. It's the gift for a **priest**. And they gave Him myrrh. Myrrh is perfume. Myrrh was used by Nicodemus when he requested the body of Jesus from Pilate. It's a gift for one who's going to die. It's a gift of a **Savior**. Jesus is King. Jesus is Priest. Jesus is Savior. And those gifts symbolize that.

Do you want to know what worship is? Worship is giving your very best to the Lord. It's not giving leftovers. It's giving the best of your time, talent, and treasure. Matthew 6:21 and Luke 12:34 both say, ***"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*** Jesus wants to be the King of your heart.

The greatest treasure you can give the Lord, the thing that He wants more than anything is your life. Some of you need to give the Lord your best; some need to quit hanging around the fringe; jump in with both feet and give the Lord your everything. For others, you need to die to your plans because maybe dreams and desires are different from what God wants for you.

Verse 12: ***"And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their own country by another way."*** When you give your very best to the Lord, you know what happens? You're changed. When you really worship, when you really give your best, when you seek Him, you find Him, and God changes you. There's a transformation that takes place in your life. And you go home a different way.

## **CONCLUSION:**

The birth announcements tell us everything we need to know about the babe in a manger born over 2000 years ago. Jesus is the gift God wants for you this Christmas. Do you want to be clean on the inside? Do you want something that will feed your hunger and thirst, for what is real? Do you want something that will give you a new life and a new sense of wonder and purpose? Jesus will do it. He's God's gift to you. Will you receive Him and accept Him?