

Christmas: The Wonder of It All

By Jeff Noblit

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Anchored in Truth Ministries

1915 Avalon Ave.
Muscle Shoals, AL 35661

Website: www.anchoredintruth.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/anchoredintruth

Luke 2. Let's go there this morning. Luke 2. We do not have nearly enough time to unpack all the glories and the wonders revealed in this Gospel narrative but we will look at three specific things. I've entitled the exposition this morning "Christmas: The Wonder of It All." It calls us, perhaps in this busy, frantic season when, goodness, we're tempted to let our hearts and minds go a thousand different directions, to stop and contemplate the wonder of it all.

Luke 2. We'll read verses 1 through 11.

1 Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. 2 This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city. 4 Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, 5 in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child. 6 While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. 8 In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; 11 for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

The wonder of it all. First of all, let's talk about the wonder of his condescension, how he came down from his throne of glory to dwell among us.

The Bible here calls him Jesus Christ the Lord or the Lord Jesus Christ and we remind ourselves that the Lord came to earth. The Bible speaks of him as the Lord who is a Savior, that the Savior has come to earth. You see, the Lord did not send a Savior, the Lord came and became our Savior. Just stop there for a moment. You just rushed past

that. Stop for a moment. The Lord of heaven, the King of the ages, the God who holds the universe in check came to us. A condescension. God came to dwell among us and how did he come? In a wonder of humiliation and condescension. A wonder of all wonders.

That's what we worship and that's what we celebrate on Christmas, and actually everything about his coming speaks of humility. Notice, first of all, subpoint A, notice the place of his coming. The place of his coming. The Bible text says that he was born in Bethlehem, Bethlehem of all places. Bethlehem was an insignificant town, sparsely populated, surrounded by fertile fields, fig and olive orchards, vineyards. Actually that region around Bethlehem is where Jesse lived. Jesse was the father of David. It's where David pastured and shepherded his father's sheep. It's the very same region. Remember how the prophet came to Jesse's household many years before this event and he announced to Jesse that, "One of your sons is going to be anointed king of Israel," and they went through all the prominent, upstanding and most prominent boys in the family, the ones that had the most promise, at least to the human eye, and the prophet kept saying, "That's not the one. That's not the one." Finally they got down to, "Do you have any more?" And Jesse says, "Well, I've got one little runt son, he just keeps the sheep out there." The prophet said, "Bring him in." There in this unpretentious, informal ceremony, the prophet anoints David, the little boy who just kept the sheep, as king of Israel and he became Israel's greatest king. So it shouldn't shock us that when God comes to earth as the promised Savior Messiah, that he comes to this insignificant place. God just has a pattern – now listen to me – a pattern of doing his greatest work through, humanly speaking, the most insignificant people and places.

Bethlehem. It speaks of humility. It speaks of his condescension. So God chose this sleepy little hamlet surrounded by hills with the faint sound of sheep baying in the atmosphere that night as the place for the birth of Christ. Micah prophesied of this very thing and when you read this prophecy out of Micah, you can't help but understand a divine hand wrote the Scriptures. Who else could have done this so many many years before Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem and Mary gave birth to Jesus? Micah 5:2, "But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Too little to be among the clans of Judah," in other words, you're so insignificant, you're not even mentioned as one of the main clans that makes up the nation of Israel, but "From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago." Now wait a minute, that's not human being, no human mortal, "His goings are from long ago, even from the days of eternity." That's the prophecy that's being fulfilled here. This place, Bethlehem, speaks of our Lord's humility of this condescension.

Notice, secondly, B in our outline, the position of his coming. The Scripture simply says "there has been born." Mary gave birth. We've told ourselves many times, you've heard it said many times but let's say it again, he comes not as a king; he comes not as a ruler; he had no outward splendor or majesty about his coming; he did not even have the appearance of strength or might; he didn't even come as an adult man. He comes to the world as a baby. Here he is, the Lord of glory, and he's a baby and everything essential to life must be provided for him. We know he's the bread of life and the bread of heaven, yet he must survive by suckling from his mother's breast. This is one who upholds all

things by the word of his power. The very universe is held together by him yet Joseph and Mary must hold him and protect him and care for him. Seven hundred years before this event, Isaiah the prophet prophesied of this very thing. Isaiah 7:14 reminds us, "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and shall bear a son, and we shall call His name Immanuel." My God just does things we do not predict or expect.

Can I just pause for a moment outside of my notes here and challenge you, church friend, challenge you, brothers and sisters in Christ, maybe your lot in life is not working like you wanted, maybe things are not turning out as you hoped, and maybe your heart is broken but God's not finished. If you had polled the spiritual elitists of the day centered in Jerusalem and said, "What's the great thing God's going to do next?" Last on their list would have been, "Well, God's gonna do something great in Bethlehem." It would have been the last person or the last place on their list and certainly they wouldn't have said, "God's gonna send a baby." The Messiah was supposed to be a mighty warrior and a conqueror and a deliverer and usher in this era of great peace and tranquility for the people, but here he comes born of the virgin. A baby. The wonder of his condescension.

Not only the place speaks of his humility and condescension, and not only the position he comes in, a little baby, but thirdly, the parents. The parents to whom he came, Joseph and Mary. There's nothing special about them at all. Joseph and Mary are from the little town of Nazareth, Joseph born as a carpenter by his father's trade and so he passes on the trade to Jesus. By the way as a side note here, don't listen to the world's contemplations of Jesus being this mild and weak, effeminate kind of guy, I'm going to tell you Jesus was a man's man. Jesus had rough hands. He wrestled and handled heavy timbers. He knew what a hard day's labor was. Jesus was a man's man. That's probably one of the reasons why the religious authorities of the day had a hard time receiving him as this great promised man from God because they were rather soft men. He was a rugged, hard-working, blue collar guy. They didn't expect God to send a guy like that.

But Joseph and Mary are just unassuming common folks. Joseph, of course, as the Old Testament prophesied, was of the line of David. He came from a poor family and of humble means, just like Mary did. She also a descendant of David so that the prophesy would be fulfilled. As a further note to the humility of this couple, Jewish law, Brother Matt told us this Wednesday night, but Jewish law required that on the 40th day after the firstborn male child, you had to take him to the temple and offer a sacrifice of purification, a lamb and a turtledove, but there was an exception: if you were the poorest of the poor, they would accept just two turtledoves and that's the offering Joseph and Mary brought with baby Jesus when they presented him at the temple because they were that poor, they couldn't afford a lamb and a turtledove.

The biblical text does show us something, though, of Joseph and Mary's godly character and humility before the Lord. Remember when Joseph heard about Mary being pregnant and knew the pregnancy wasn't by himself, he decided that he would put her away privately. Again as a side note of application, we are a church that strives to exercise biblical accountability and discipline in the church body and I know some people say, "I don't want to be a part of a church that really practices biblical accountability and

discipline," well, what you're saying is that you don't want to be a part of a church. If you're in a congregation that has no efforts there, you're just a group of religious people that meet on Sunday, that's not what a church is. But we ought to be like Joseph, and that is cover sin as best we can and deal with sin in the utmost confidentiality unless something is just so open and scandalous and brazen that we can't deal with it in confidentiality.

So Joseph does his very best. He decides, "I'm not going to shame Mary. She's pregnant out of wedlock, not pregnant by myself, I'll just put her away quietly." Then, of course, the angel spoke to Joseph and said, "Joseph, she's with child of the Holy Spirit. You continue on with your plans." Mary shows her godliness in that when the angel appeared to her and shared with her that she would conceive of the Holy Spirit, she quoted Scripture and she praised God and she yielded herself and had a good biblical knowledge of what God was doing. She understood the biblical prophecies.

So here we have this King of glory, this Savior of the world who comes to this insignificant, lowly place, Bethlehem, born in a livestock, a shed as such, and laid in a feed trough and his mom and dad, Joseph and Mary, there's nothing special about them in any way. The pathos of this thing is just overwhelming, such a humility, such a condescension. Think on that this Christmas. God just does things different than we would think and aren't you glad when the Lord became man that first Christmas he didn't come to a major city, he came to Bethlehem. He didn't come as a mighty king, he first came as a baby. He didn't come to royalty, just regular, blue collard, poor folks, Joseph and Mary. The infinite entered into the finite. The eternal entered into the temporal. The spiritual took on the physical and the holy one came to dwell among unholiness. It's what I like to call a condescension beyond comprehension. The wonder of his condescension.

Secondly, let's notice in our text the wonder of the culmination or the consummation, I believe is the term I use more often. The consummation. Something has come to its end. Something has come to its final point, its culminating point. First of all, this is a great culmination for the nation of Israel. That's A in our outline. I mean, for thousands of years, think about it, thousands of years, now listen, for thousands of years and in all the types and in all the symbols of the prophets and the priests and the tabernacle and then of the temple, of the ordinances, of the rituals, it all pointed and the prophets clearly proclaimed this coming Messiah. That's the Hebrew word, the Greek word is Christ. This coming Savior for Israel. It had just been building and building, so much so that historians tell us that in ancient Israel every time a Jewish woman was pregnant her hope was, "Could this be Israel's Messiah? Could I be the one that would give birth to the one who will be Israel's great Champion?"

So the fulfillment is here. He is born. Now they knew from their prophecies that this Messiah would come and he would be one of unmatched power and might, but they didn't see that the wisdom of God is greater than the might of men. They didn't see the power of God in this humble coming. Most of Israel missed it completely but it was the fulfillment, it was the culmination.

I couldn't help thinking on this about how Christmas morning is something of a culmination for children and even for us adults in a lot of ways. Remember when you were a child, all the anticipation? I mean, weeks before Christmas you would lose sleep thinking about what Christmas morning might hold for you. And then Christmas Eve night, remember that? How many of you sneaked out of your bed in the night and sneaked into, in my house it was the living room and we had a silver Christmas tree with lights on it and it was just a magical setting. And you crept in there very carefully and very quietly. I'm not sure who I was afraid of, mom and dad for sure, Santa Claus maybe, but I just had to see and I was just so, boy, it's like the boy with his hand in the candy, the cookie jar and he hasn't got one yet. His mom says, "What are you doing?" He said, "I'm fighting the temptation."

Well, that's kind of Christmas Eve, the anticipation and you see there are things there for you and you might just go and touch one, but hurriedly you got back into bed until finally Christmas morning came. At my house, that would mean my grandparents would be there about sunrise and they would wake us up. We were already awake but we acted like we weren't because they loved to wake us up. Then we got to run in there and at that moment on Christmas morning, the anticipation transformed over into consummation. That's what happened for Israel this morning. Their Messiah had come. He was here.

So it was for those shepherds as they're keeping their flocks out on the hillside. I just have to believe that among those shepherds was a remnant of godly true believers and when the angels appeared to them, though frightened at the first, the moment the angel spoke, they knew what it was and they knew, "It's over now! It's finished now! The waiting is over now! The Savior and Lord of Israel has come!"

But not only was this a consummation or culmination for Israel, it's a culmination for the whole world. The text says it will be for, he's coming for, verse 10, "all the peoples." All the peoples. Now again, to an ancient Jewish mindset, that was a radical thought. They could not conceive of the Messiah coming for anyone other than elect Israel but the Bible unfolds in progressive revelation showing us that God, indeed, has his elect but the elect are from every people, tongue, tribe and nation, Jew and Gentiles are among the people of God. It's for all the people. What this tells us is that he can be found by all men. Most Jews missed it but those of us who live in this age of grace, we have found him and we've found the favor of God and the favor of God was at hand from this point onward all the way through to our day and all through until he returns. The way of peace and pardon before God is now thrown open to all men. The spiritual darkness that had covered the earth for 4,000 years has now been rolled back and the good news, the mighty truth is that God could be just and justify the ungodly through this Savior Jesus Christ.

So salvation is no longer seen in sacrifices at the temple, salvation is no longer pictured as a priest performs a sacrifice on behalf of the people, salvation is no longer prophesied by Old Testament prophets. Now he's not only spoken about, he can be spoken to. He's no longer just looked forward to, he can be looked upon. The consummation, the culmination, the first stone, even the cornerstone of God's true kingdom is now set up. Indeed it's good news, it's glorious good news of great joy as the angel said to the

shepherds. To save the world God didn't send a helping hand or an angel band, he did not send a new teaching or a new philosophy, he did not establish a new religion to save man, God sent himself. He sent his Son. The angel said, "For today the Savior is born." Because he came and because he died for our sins, today you can be saved. I can be saved by him.

2 Corinthians 6:2 reminds us, "Behold, now is 'The acceptable time.'" Why is now the acceptable time? Because he's come. He came. He's not promised to come, it's done, it's finished. He grew up. He went to the cross. So now is the time. If you're hearing this this morning, now's the time. You must, I beg you, you must turn to Christ and say, "I take you also as my Savior. I receive you as my Lord and Savior." The writer of Hebrews, Hebrews 4:7, reminds us, "Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts." What a glorious and wondrous truth this is.

Tommy, put up my last outline up there.

The commission. We are to wonder over the commission that he was given in his coming. In this, let's look at subpoint A, he came to us. The text simply says, "for you is born this day in the city of David." For you. He didn't come as an angel or some spirit-being, he became a man to become one of us and he did this for us.

Notice the very first ones that were aware that he came to them were the shepherds. They were not sovereigns, they were shepherds. They were not prophets or priests or presidents, they were just peasants. They were not the popular of the day. Shepherds were kind of the low end of the culture. They were the unpopular. They were not powerful, they were un-powerful. But they know he came to us. He came not just for Jews, he came for Gentiles also. He came to man. He came to all men. He came to be Savior of all men.

Now you have to wonder, why were these shepherds the ones revealed to them? Was it because these shepherds need a Savior more than most? Oh, absolutely not. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. All need a Savior. Perhaps it was because they were more likely to realize their need for a Savior. He leaves the throne of heaven to come to us.

B. Not only in his commission did he come to us, he came to save us. "There has been born for you a Savior who is Christ the Lord." Matthew 1:21 as Joseph is wrestling with the fact that he's found out Mary is pregnant, he's deciding that he's not going to shame her publicly, he's going to put her away privately, but then the angel speaks to Joseph and the angel says, "Joseph, Mary is pregnant by the Holy Spirit," and in Matthew 1:21 he says the baby Mary will give birth to "will save His people from their sins." He came to save us. G. Campbell Morgan says in his commentary it was the most stupendous event in all the running decades and centuries and millenniums of the history of man, there is a born a Savior. He came to us.

He came to save us and, my, do we need saving. We now walk under the penalty of sin, eternal wrath and judgment. He came to save us from the penalty of sin. We now function

under the power of sin. We have to slave on this earth with the ever-present lust of disobeying and dishonoring God. The power of sin still deals with us in this unredeemed humanity that we walk in down here. He came to save us from the penalty of sin, the power of sin, and one day he'll take us on to glory and he'll save us from the presence of sin because we're all sinners. Sin is something we are, sin is something we do, and sin are those things we fail to do. We are sinners. We do sinful things. We fail to do good and righteous things. We need a Savior. All are guilty. All are condemned. All are lost. All are wondering. Man needs a Savior.

Now we're not like the world. The world takes the Christmas holiday and they take the birth of Jesus and they twist it into whatever form or fashion they want to, but listen to me, he was born to die to save us. I was listening to Ben Haden preach on the radio this morning as I drove to church before most of you were out of bed, and Ben Haden made this little statement, he said, "I wouldn't walk across the street to celebrate Christmas if there was not Easter." Amen? He can't save if he stayed a baby. He can't save if he was just born to be a new example, a new beginning point for mankind, as the liberals might say; a new example of sacrifice or unselfishness. No, to be the Savior, he was born with his heart set on a little altar that God made outside the gates of Jerusalem called Golgotha and there he would save his people from their sins.

He came to us. He came to save us. And C in our outline, he came with power and authority to save us. In other words, he's got what it takes to get the job done to fulfill the commission. This text says he is the Christ. That means the anointed one. In the Old Testament Hebrew it would be translated Messiah, but in the New Testament Koine Greek, it's Christ, the anointed one. He's God's anointed one. God says, "I've got a special one that I'm giving a special assignment. He's the only one that's the anointed one, he's the Christ."

But he didn't just say he's the Christ, he's the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord, the word *kyrios* comes straight out of the Greek culture of the day. In that day you would call a slave's master your lord. There was a lord of the harvest the Bible speaks of, the lord of a vineyard. The emperor was called *kyrios*, the lord, and even God is referred to as *Kyrios*, the Lord, but the Holy Spirit of God took a practical common word out of the Greek culture of the day and says, "There's one who finally and ultimately gives this word its definition, it's the baby born to Mary in Bethlehem. He is the Anointed One and He is the Lord." That means he has the authority and the power to get the commission accomplished to save the children from their sins.

So the Christmas message is that the God-appointed, God-empowered one has come to save us. Now I'll just make you sit there for 30 minutes and think about that. The God-anointed, God-empowered one was sent to save us. Romans 5:20 says, "Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more." Why? Why does this grace, this concept of God's goodness and favor toward those who don't deserve it, why is it so powerful? Why is it so great? Because Christ is powerful and Christ is great. He is the God-anointed and God-empowered one. And by the way, he grew up, he became a man, and he fulfilled his commission to perfection. He went to the cross – now listen to me – and there when he

hung on the cross, poured upon him and extinguished in his flesh was every single ounce of guilt and condemnation and retribution the children deserve. He fulfilled his commission perfectly.

Now what's interesting is when the Old Testament prophets prophesied of the coming Messiah, the Christ, the Savior, they would often picture all of it in one piece. Now in the New Testament we have what we call progressive revelation, we progress in deeper understanding of how it unfolds, but to most of the Old Testament prophets, they saw it all as one package. We see this so powerfully in Isaiah. Isaiah 9:6-7. He begins by saying, "For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us." Whoa, then he jumps to adulthood, "And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor," you could say he's a wonder of a counselor. Everyone who goes to him in his kingdom and says, "Lord, what about this?" he gives the perfect answer every time. You walk away and say, "He's a wonder of a Counselor. I used to go and counsel with Brother Jeff, he's nothing compared to this guy."

He is a wonder of a Counselor. More than that, he's "Mighty God," he's "Eternal Father," he's the "Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace." It has no end. Is your heart troubled this morning? I tell you, child of God, you're coming into a kingdom where the peace will never end. You'll never wake up, look, I'm looking forward to this, you'll never wake up in the night worried about something. I joined the 3:30 club a few years ago and I want to get out of it so bad, where you wake up at 3:30 and you can't go back to sleep until about 6 and then you've got to get up at 6:30 anyway.

No end to his government or his peace, "On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this." God's anointed and empowered one will get it done. He's going to get it done.

Now when we contemplate all that we're trying to wonder about this Christmas, the wonder of his condescension, the wonder of the consummation in his coming, and the wonder of his commission to save his children, you're just overwhelmed how this one came and gave up everything, denied himself in every way to do what his Father's will was. Can I charge you, family of God, this Christmas season, all of you moms out there that are doing far more than you ought to do, stressed and burdened, to you daddies perhaps who spent far more than you should have spent, and all the stuff and the stress that of all things, some of you have to eat Christmas dinner with a liberal around the table, it would make me want to go and jump in a lake somewhere, there is just stressful stuff around the holidays sometimes, but can I charge you, now don't fidget too much, you make me nervous, can I charge you before we leave, be like Jesus. Just say, "You know, it's not about me. It's not about me. It's about them and it's about my Lord this year." That's the way my Lord celebrated Christmas, by coming into the world and saying, "It's not about me. It's about my Father's will to save the children. It's about my Father's glory and the children's good." So can we all just re-commit ourselves this Christmas to say, "It's not about me"?

I found this little quote. Go ahead and put it on the screen, Tommy. "If you serve to be recognized, you will eventually become bitter." Don't you serve your family this Christmas with some ulterior expectation in the background. Do you know what we call it in biblical counseling? We call it an idol of unmet expectation. You go into this Christmas and you crucify all of those idols and you say, "I'm going to serve my family and serve my Lord this year with no expectation for me. I'm going to be like Jesus this year." Do you know how many millions of church members leave the congregation they're in because of that right there? They join the church with some expectation to be recognized, get something, be in something, get a position, whatever, it doesn't work out so "God" leads them away to another congregation where they can be the big dog.

Now we're vastly beyond that at Grace Life but it's taken us 38 years to get there, but as we go into Christmas this year, let's think about his condescension, his lowliness, and his humility, and let's forget ourselves and let's enjoy giving ourselves for the blessing of others and the glory of our God. Oh, dear friend, if you're here this morning and he's not your Lord and he's not your Savior, listen to this pastor this morning and then I'm going to let you go, you must turn to him now in faith, repenting of your sins and saying, "Christ, I take you. I claim you. I want you as my Savior and as my Lord." I'm telling you, he's God's empowered and God's anointed and he will save you. The Bible promises whoever believes in him will not be disappointed, and you will not be.

Oh, the wonder. Christmas, the wonder of it all.