

The Real Christmas Story

Luke 1:26-35

26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, 27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. 28 And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" 29 But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. 30 And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." 34 And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" 35 And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. (Luke 1:26-35 (ESV))

May we begin our meditation tonight with a story? It was part of a message that I heard preached some years ago, one that I have shared with you on another occasion, but would like to share it again because it is getting to be more and more appropriate as each year goes by!

It is a Christmas story of sorts, but set within the context of an old 1950s television program entitled, "The Millionaire". In that program, a lawyer, Michael Anthony, representing a very wealthy man by the name of John Beresford Tipton, would visit in the home of a specially chosen recipient and would give them a tax-free gift of one million dollars. And from there, the remainder of the program was dedicated to observing how the sudden unforeseen wealth would affect and change a person's lifestyle and behavior. Some people did very well, but others did not. But for sure, each of their lives was changed forever from having received the gift.

But the preacher of this sermon, then went on to make up an additional scenario that was not part of the original television program, a scenario in which, over time, all the many people who had received the free gift of one million dollars agreed to set aside a special day each year on which they would gather and celebrate the birthday of the man who had given them the gift. And they called that day, "Tipton Day", after their benefactor. And in celebration of Mr. Tipton's gift, they began giving each other gifts. And they would also sing songs and greet each other on the street with the greeting, "Merry Tipton". Some went so far as to have one of their members dress up in an

ornate red suit, sit in a big chair in a shopping center or mall and let children sit on his knee and tell him the gifts they hoped to receive on “Tipton Day”.

As time went by, a very odd thing began to take place. Other people who had not received the gift from Mr. Tipton and knew little or nothing about him began to celebrate his birthday, buying each other gifts, singing songs and wishing each other a “Merry Tipton”.

The people who had actually received the gift began to wonder why so many, many other people were celebrating Mr. Tipton’s birthday. And they asked them, “When did you receive the ‘special free gift’ from Mr. Tipton.” And not knowing what they were being asked would respond back, “what free gift”?

And being unable to give a good reason for their celebrations, they said simply that they just enjoyed celebrating and buying and receiving gifts. “Merry Tipton”!

Does not that “Tipton Story” ring eerily similar to “The Real Christmas Story” that takes place each year at this time? Yes, there are many that celebrate who really have truly received the “free gift” of salvation that God has given to men. But so many, many others have not, but yet they celebrate just as if they had received “the gift”.

Their involvement mostly fits the words of a popular country song, “I’m here for the party”. The don’t really know what Christmas is really all about, but they really do like “the party”, the festivities, the drinking of Christmas cheer, the receiving of gifts and just generally having a good time. They are “here for the party.”

But before we get too hasty and begin freely casting stones at those folks, may I remind us that too often, we ourselves, those of us who truly have received the “free gift” of salvation, at this time of year, we actually look a whole lot like those folks who are just “here for the party”. Our attention, our focus, our money, our efforts become so dedicated to shopping for gifts, and gifts and more gifts that we have little time to stop and remember why we came to this “party”.

And folks, I confess to you that I really don’t like this Christmas “tread-mill” that you and I get caught running on each year! It should not be this way!

And may I remind you and me that it is us who need to do something about it, not those poor lost unbelieving souls that are, right at this moment, still clamoring to fill their shopping baskets. It is us! You and I have “The Real Christmas Story” written upon our

hearts. And we need to get about sharing it with others, both with those who already believe, but especially, with those who have never received Jesus' free gift of salvation. You and I need to dig into these scriptures, learn what they have to say about Jesus and then be prepared to tell "The Real Christmas Story" to the next person we meet. And yes, we really do need to know all the sweet and simple words that tell about Jesus' birth. But folks, we also need to go a "chapter deeper", to be able to tell people "who the Lord Jesus really is" and "why He came to earth".

And we can begin with these words in this real "Christmas Story". Listen to these words again from Luke chapter 1!

26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, 27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. 28 And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" 29 But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. 30 And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." 34 And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" 35 And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. (Luke 1:26-35 (ESV))

And then the same angel of the Lord also appeared to Joseph and said to Him,
21 She (Mary) will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21 (ESV))

Folks, these words alone give you a great place to begin as you tell others "The Real "Christmas Story". Here in these words we are told "who Jesus is" and "why He came to earth".

May we be sure to begin by knowing that Jesus Himself did not begin His existence there in that manger in Bethlehem! No! Not at all! Jesus has no beginning and He has no end! He was and is forever, eternally existent! He was and is forever One of the Three-In-One Trinity of God. He was and is forever the Son of God!

But in order to come among us and be One with us so that He could be our Christ, our sacrifice Lamb, He needed to take on human flesh. As we read in Philippians 2,

6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God,
7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and
coming in the likeness of men. (Philippians 2:6-7 (NKJV))

Folks, we are not told in these scriptures the exact way that it took place, but in my imagination, I imagine that there was a moment in God's time when God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit looked upon the wretched existence of mankind, lost and dying in their sins, and took pity upon our souls. And with great mercy and grace, much in the manner of the story that we read about the Prophet Isaiah, the Lord Jesus stepped forward and said "here am I, send Me", "I'll go! And with great grief, God the Father said, "So be it!

And so, in the fullness of time, God the Father sent His angel Gabriel to Mary and to Joseph to tell them all that was to take place. To Mary, the angel said that she had been especially chosen by God to bear Him a Son. Her Son would have no earthly father but would be formed by God's Holy Spirit within her womb. And the Child that would be born to her would be called the Son of the Most High. He would in all ways be the "Son of God". And then also, the angel spoke to Joseph and gave the reason why the Son of God was to take on human flesh. He said,

21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21 (ESV))

This was Who Jesus was and why He came to earth. He was the eternal Son of God and He came to save His people from their sins. It is as simple as that.

And folks, yes, family time and gift giving and all those other forms of celebration and tradition can probably continue. But listen! You and I need to devote our real efforts during this time of year to telling others "The Real Story of Christmas". It is about Jesus! He came to save His people, you and me and anyone who will receive Him, from their sins.

May we begin now, with this Christmas? As often as we can, may we step back from the frantic rush of gift getting and celebration and instead begin talking to people about Who Jesus really is and Why He came to earth. Listen as we close . . .

4 . . . when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. (Galatians 4:4-5 (ESV))