

Series Title: Christmas: Beloved Myth or Life Changing Truth?

Sermon Title: Week 8: The evidence of history

Date: 12-08-19

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- **Today is second Sunday of Advent. According to most widespread church tradition, the themes of the four weeks of advent are HOPE, PEACE, JOY, LOVE.**
- **These are, of course, wholly Biblical. And yet, our celebration of the advent season is a TRADITION. There's nothing in NT that tells us to celebrate Christmas at all, and there's little historical evidence of Christians celebrating Christmas, anything remotely like we do, until 4<sup>th</sup> century.**
- **HERE'S REALITY! Much of the details of our celebration of Christmas are BELOVED MYTH, with no connection to what scripture actually says. AND YET, THE BIRTH OF CHRIST IS NOT A MYTH, and when we managed to dig beneath all the tradition, find not myth, but LIFE CHANGING TRUTH.**
- **SO, lets start with...**

✠ A little myth-busting **(BASED UPON SCRIPTURE)**

- About the trip to Bethlehem
  - **What was Mary's mode of transportation?**
    - **A: Camel B: Donkey C: Uber**
    - **D: We don't know... Likely walked!**
- About where Jesus was born
  - **Where was Manger located**
    - **A: Stable B: Cave C: Shopping mall**
    - **D: We don't know. Cave, stable, outdoor pen?**
  - **What animals were present around manger?**
    - **Ox? Donkey? Cow? Camel?**
    - **All above**
    - **None of above!! Bible mentions no animals**
- About the Magi
  - **When did Wise men visit Jesus**
    - **A: Night of his birth, along with shepherds**
    - **B: 12 days later- tradition of Epiphany**
    - **C: Between 40 days and two years**
    - **After 40 day purification period, dedication of Jesus. Sacrifice of 2 birds. This was sacrifice of poor person- if gifts of maji, would have been lamb. 2 years is Herods decree to kill**
  - **HOW MANY Magi: At least two, many more likely**
- About the Star
  - **Was the star...**
    - **A: Really slow Comet**
    - **B: Supernova**
    - **C: Supernatural phenomena, such as angel**
- About the date of Christmas
  - **4 to 6 BC- "Days of Herod", Herods death. Don't really know- around 1, but range is several years.**
  - **Almost certainly wasn't 12/25. Bible doesn't say year or season of year.**
  - **More likely summer or fall "Flocks at night"**
  - **12/25 most likely Christian version of Roman holiday of Saturnalia, winter solstice. First Record of 12/25 is in 300's AD.**

– **SO!!! What DO WE KNOW about Birth of Christ?**

○ **From Matthew and Luke**

† Reality! What scripture actually tells us about the birth of Christ is limited, it is concise, and to a significant extent is fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

- **CONSIDER- Jesus's birth isn't just historic event, but was fulfillment of even old history, of prophecy.**
- **Our main source is MATTHEW, writing to Jewish audience who knew the messianic prophecies of OT.**
- **ANY TIME you talk about biblical prophecy, always nuance, always controversy... but 5 MAIN PRO...**

● **The Messiah would be born of a virgin.**

**Isaiah 7:13-14** Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also? <sup>14</sup> Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

**Matthew 1:22-23** All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: <sup>23</sup> "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

● **The Messiah would be born in the town of Bethlehem**

**Micah 5:2** "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."

**Matthew 2:1-5** After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem <sup>2</sup> 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." <sup>3</sup> When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

**Luke 2:4-7** So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David.

● **The Messiah would take refuge in Egypt**

**Hosea 11:1** "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.

**Matthew 2:13-15** When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

<sup>14</sup> So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, <sup>15</sup> where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."

● **The Messiah's birth would be accompanied by the slaughter of innocents**

**Jeremiah 31:15** This is what the LORD says: "A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more."

**Matthew 2:16-17** When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. <sup>17</sup> Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

- The Messiah would be of the lineage of Jesse, and thus King David.

**Isaiah 7:13** Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also? <sup>14</sup> Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

**Isaiah 11:1-3, 6** A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. <sup>2</sup> The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him— the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD— <sup>3</sup> and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.

– **(famous 'lion and lamb lie down... but different)**

The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them.

**Luke 2:4** So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David.

– **Powerful evidence- of History that Jesus would make, and history he fulfilled. THAT SAID...**

† A few honest questions about these prophecies

- How do we know the Old Testament Passages weren't written after Jesus' birth?

– **This is easy one. Septuagint. Greek translation of OT, 100 to 300 BCE. Totality of OT was compiled, translated into Koine Greek, well before birth of Christ. Many of oldest prophetic texts are far older.**

- How do we know Matthew didn't just write his gospel to conform with prophecy?

- **This is the bigger question, and Gospel writers have been accused by historians of doing just this.**
- **GOOD, IN-DEPTH answer, but very simply...**
- **Strong evidence Gospels written prior to AD 70. THUS, birth narratives of Matthew and Luke written, and began circulating, while people who had known Jesus were still alive, including the Apostles. THEREFORE, difficult to lie about basic details of his birth, because people would have known, hurt credibility of the gospel.**
- **!! ULTIMATE evidence of Gospels is not the birth of Jesus, but the RESURRECTION. Given overwhelming evidence of resurrection, no motivation to lie about, or embellish record of his birth, especially when there were people alive who would have known differently.**
- **BOTTOM LINE, if you apply standards of historic accuracy you use for any other event of ancient history, the most common sense explanation of Jesus' birth is that it happened the way Gospels portray. NOT THE WAY TRADITION PORTRAYS, but the way SCRIPTURE PORTRAYS.**
- **Why does this matter? Because it speaks to historic validity of Jesus birth, and THAT he was promised messiah! Not just THAT CHRIST WAS BORN, but even more importantly, WHO HE IS. For in the person and nature of CHRIST, we see the person and nature of GOD!**
- **Over last 9 weeks, 'Crossroads' series, our focus was on WHO WE ARE in Christ. Who GOD SAYS we are as his creation, his children.**
- **BUT IN ADVENT, in the BIRTH SCRIPTURES and PROPHECIES... we see picture of WHO GOD IS. WHAT IS TRUE ABOUT HIM.**

† From Isaiah to the shepherds to you- the promise of a savior.

- **Isaiah wrote about the promised messiah some 700 years BCE. This promise was proclaimed to a group of Jewish shepherds some 2000 years ago. FRIENDS, TODAY,**

**HERE WE HOLD (Bible) that same promise TO YOU. TO ME. Promise that God would come to us, live among us, AS US, to SAVE US.**

– **AS I READ, listen, to WHO GOD IS.**

**Luke 2:8-14** *And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.*

<sup>9</sup> *An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.*

<sup>10</sup> *But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. **(GOD IS ONE WHO DELIVERS FROM FEAR)** I bring you good news **(GOD IS GOD OF GOOD NEWS)** that will cause great joy **(GOD IS GOD OF JOY, HOPE!)** for all the people. **(THAT MEANS YOU!)***

<sup>11</sup> *Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. <sup>12</sup> This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” <sup>13</sup> Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup> “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”*

– **On whom His favor rests- on WHOM does God’s favor rest? Go to Isaiah 9**

**Isaiah 9:2-7** <sup>2</sup>*The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.*

– **To whom has God shown his favor, his love? To the people in darkness. TO US. TO HUMANITY.**

- **To those who are confused, afraid, hurting**
- **To those whose circumstances haven’t changed**
- **To those who are crying out for hope, peace**
- **To those have little, and those who have much**

– **TO YOU, TO ME, TO THIS WORLD, ISAIAH proclaims-**

<sup>6</sup>*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

– **HEAR! For all of who Christ IS, he is a gift we must CHOOSE to RECEIVE BY FAITH. Isaiah described the messiah, Jesus as a GREAT LIGHT. In John 1...**

<sup>9</sup>*The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. <sup>10</sup> He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. <sup>11</sup> He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. <sup>12</sup> Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— <sup>13</sup> children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.*

– **WONDERFUL COUNSELOR... means little, if we do not listen to Him, follow him**

– **MIGHTY GOD... means little, if we do not trust him**

– **EVERLASTING FATHER... means little, if we do not hope in him**

– **PRINCE OF PEACE... means little, if we do not rest in him.**

**Next Week: Much ado about Mary!**