



-- Question:

-- What is the first thought that comes to mind when I say, “Christmas time is here?”

-- Hold on to that thought, we will come back to it later.

-- Introduction

-- Trying to hang up my clothes after the Messiah concert motivating me to clean all the clutter from our walk-in closet on Sunday night.

-- After digging through all the clutter and throwing out a bunch of stuff, I made an amazing discovery...

-- In fact, you’ll never guess what I found...

-- (Donnie flings the Slingshot Monkey)

-- Although I thought it might have been lost forever, I found one of my favorite Christmas gifts of all time: My Slingshot Monkey!

-- Point: When we clear all of the clutter out of the way, we often discover something valuable.

-- This is certainly the case with Christmas.

-- **Big Idea: When we clear away all the clutter of Christmas, its true context inspires great worship and praise.**

-- Read Luke 2:1-20

-- Pray

A Brief History of Christmas

-- The Bishop of Rome sets Dec. 25 as the day of Christ’s birth.

-- He hoped that Christmas would bring a sanctifying influence into this month of unholy celebrations.

-- His hope was to replace irreverent festivals of December celebrations with a celebration of the birth of Christ.

-- As a result, Christmas has become a conglomeration of that which is distinctively Christian and that which is distinctively pagan.

-- Ornaments on Evergreens

-- This tradition most likely comes from a celebration called “Saturnalia,” which was a wild Roman festival in December named after the “god” of agriculture, whom the Romans called “Saturn.”

-- Candles and evergreen branches with ornaments were common elements of Saturnalia.

-- Gift-giving was also a prominent feature of Saturnalia.

-- Yuletide

-- Yule, or “Yuletide,” was a winter festival in honor of the “gods” Odin and Thor held among the Norsemen in the barbaric North lands.

-- It involved feasting, music, and getting drunk by drinking from horns.

-- Mistletoe

-- This tradition emerges from the Druids in England who considered it sacred and made live sacrifices to their many gods.

-- Mistletoe was supposed to be an emblem of peace and good fortune. According to the Druid tradition, whenever two enemies passed under the mistletoe, they had to embrace as a ploy to help people reconcile.

-- Hence kissing under the mistletoe which is some deviated form of that original embrace.

-- Santa Claus

In Holland there was a favorite saint by the name of St. Nicholas. This white-bearded bishop of Asia Minor was believed to have appeared around December 6. He would ride around town on a white horse, leaving gifts on the porches of good children and switches for the parents of bad children. The Dutch called St. Nicholas “Cinderclaus” from which we derive Santa Claus. According to the legend, St. Nicholas would occasionally toss coins into the chimneys of good children. On one occasion, some of these coins are said to have landed in some stockings that were hanging by the fire to dry. Out of that happenstance came the idea that Santa Claus comes down the chimney and fills your stocking with gifts.

We could go on, but the point is this: While the old Bishop of Rome may have had good motives for choosing December 25 as the birthday of Jesus, it doesn't seem to have helped much. In fact, placing the birth of Jesus Christ on the same day as so many contrary pagan celebrations has served to clutter up the celebration of Christ's birth with a series of unrelated pagan elements.

So our goal in the time we have left this morning is to cast away the clutter of Christmas and capture its true context. As we do, we will certainly find an

uncluttered Christmas treasure of infinitely great worth. In seeking to capture the real context of Christmas, five key points emerge, the first of which is this:

1.) The context of Christmas is the plan of God (v. 1-5).

- We see the plan of God in the fulfillment of prophesy.
- Isaiah 7:14 – *“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”*
- Isaiah 16:5 – *“In love a throne will be established; in faithfulness a man will sit on it—one from the house of David—one who in judging seeks justice and speeds the cause of righteousness.”*
- 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.”*
- v. 1-5 – God uses the power-hungry arrogance of Caesar to bring about the plan He put into effect before the dawn of time.
- In all, there are more than 400 Old Testament prophecies that Jesus perfectly fulfills. It is simply impossible to suggest that this is a coincidence or something manufactured by man.
- The coming of Christ is no accident, nor is it a desperate reaction of God. Every minute detail of Christ’s birth was planned by God before time began.
- Galatians 4:4-5 – *“But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.”*

Christmas reminds us powerfully that in all things, God has a plan. So remember, no matter what your circumstances may be today, God has a perfect plan for your life, too, and His plan for you begins with the baby Jesus, born for you, lying in a manger.

2.) The context of Christmas is the providence of God (v. 6-7).

- Although He did so in surprising ways, God provided for every need Joseph and Mary encountered.
- When Joseph discovered Mary was pregnant and the child was not his own, God sent an angel to guide him.
- Matthew 1:19-21 – *“Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.’”*

- When there was no room in the inn, God provided a manger for Jesus.
 - v. 7 – *“She gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.”*
 - This manger provided the perfect opportunity for simple shepherds to come and worship the newborn king.
- When Joseph and Mary were unaware of Herod’s plot to kill Jesus, God sent an angel to warn them.
 - Matthew 2:13-14 – *“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.’ So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt.”*
- Surely Mary and Joseph must have been tempted by fear and anxiety. Yet, as we look back on God’s providence, we see that His care was covering them every step of the way.

The Christmas story calls us to remember that in every situation, our God provides for His people. As believers in Christ, we may not always have everything we think we want, but we can be sure that God already has a plan to give us all that we need. As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 9:8, *“God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.”*

3.) The context of Christmas is the provision of God (v. 8-12).

- Jesus Christ is God’s perfect provision for all that we truly need.
 - Kids, please hear me, what you need most for Christmas is not a video game or a Barbie doll, or a new bike.
 - Parents, what you need most for Christmas is not a new car or a new job, or some peace and quiet.
 - What all of us need most for Christmas and for every other day is that which God has already given. As says in verses 10-11, *“Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will 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.”*
- Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem as God’s provision for the forgiveness of sin.

- 1 Timothy 1:15 – *“Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.”*
- The true context of Christmas, then, is an assurance that, no matter who you are or what you have done, there is everlasting hope for anyone will confess his sins and trust in Jesus Christ, through whom God made provision for the forgiveness of sin.

4.) The context of Christmas is the peace of God (v. 13-14).

- God’s provision of Jesus Christ brings God His highest glory (“Glory to God in the highest...”) by producing peace between God and sinners.
 - v. 14 – *“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.”*
 - This is not the kind of world peace that beauty pageant contestants seek, but reconciliation between sinful people and our holy God.
 - One of the best and truest lines in any Christmas carol comes in the first verse of “Hark the Herald Angels Sing,” when we sing, “Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled.”
 - Colossians 1:21-22 – *“Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.”*

- The context of Christmas, therefore, is a peace that all the wisdom and treasures of this world can simply never afford. It is a peace that passes all understanding. It is about reconciliation with a righteous God, and it is possible for all who believe because God sent us His Son to pay the penalty for our sins.

5.) The context of Christmas is the praise of God (v. 13-20).

- More than anything else, perhaps, the biblical account of Christ’s birth abounds with praise.
 - Even before Jesus is born, Mary, Elizabeth, and Zechariah praise God for the baby in Mary’s womb.
 - Luke 1:41-42 – *“When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!’”*

- Luke 1:46-49 – “*And Mary said: ‘My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name.’”*
- Luke 1:67-69 – “*[John’s] father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied: ‘Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David.’”*
- The birth of Christ itself is entirely enveloped in praise.
 - v. 13-14 – “*Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.’”*
 - v. 19 – “*Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.’”*
 - v. 20 – “*The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.’”*
 - Matthew 2:1-2, 11 – “*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 in the east and have come to worship him’... 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 and of incense and of myrrh.’”*
- The chief context of Christmas is abundant praise to God.
 - When we consider its meaning and message, how could it be otherwise?

Christmas, you see, is not about gifts under a tree. It is about the greatest gift ever given to anyone, anywhere, at any time. It is the gift of the God’s only Son who came for you to die for you... He was given for you so that you might give yourself to Him... He was born for you that you might die for Him... And he died for you so that you might live through Him. Christmas urges us to worship God because our Savior was born for us on Christmas day. Christmas summons us to praise because in it God has provided the only gift we will really ever need, salvation from sin and death through His Son Jesus Christ who was born of a virgin and laid in a manger.

- Thus, the chief context of Christmas is joyful praise to God.
- And, therefore, true Christmas spirit is not about tinsel and traditions, but about worship to God for the gift of Jesus Christ.

-- Conclusion

- At the very beginning of this message this morning, I asked, “What is the first thought that comes to mind when I say, ‘Christmas time is here?’”
- Do you remember what your first thought was?

Whatever it was doesn't matter so much now. However, as you leave here today and all throughout this Christmas season, I pray that your first response to this Christmas and every Christmas will be to worship God and praise His name... Praise Him for His eternal plan that is revealed in the coming of Christ... Praise Him for the gracious providence He provided to Joseph and Mary and continues to provide today... Praise Him for the perfect provision of Jesus Christ whose birth we celebrate this season... And praise God for the peace or Lord made possible through His birth, death, and resurrection.

When we cast off the clutter and concentrate on the true context of Christmas, what we discover is the glory of God. This is the true context of Christmas. Let us, therefore, meet this season with joyful worship and praise to our merciful Father in Heaven?

Christmas Quiz:

- How much of what we know is really just tradition?
- By Steve and Ella Pettit
- We've all seen and heard the Christmas story so many times that we know exactly what God's Word says about it, right? Or do we sometimes let tradition overtake the truth?

1. How did Joseph and Mary get to Bethlehem?

- a) On a colt
- b) Mary rode a donkey and Joseph walked
- c) Wagon
- d) Who knows?

d) The Bible gives no record of their means of travel.

2. When Mary became pregnant, Mary and Joseph were

- a) Married
- b) Just friends
- c) Engaged

d) None of the above

c) Matthew 1:18 – *“This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.”*

3. When Mary became pregnant,
- a) Joseph married her
 - b) Joseph wanted to dissolve their relationship
 - c) Mary left Nazareth for a while
 - d) An angel told them to go to Bethlehem
 - e) Both b and c
 - f) Both b and d

b) and c)

– Matthew 1:19 – *“Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.”*

-- Luke 1:39, 56 – *“At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea... Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.”*

5. Who directed Mary and Joseph to go to Bethlehem?
- a) Herod
 - b) An angel
 - c) Caesar Augustus
 - d) The IRS

c) Luke 2:1, 4 – *“In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world... 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.”*

6. How many angels spoke to the shepherds?
- a) A multitude
 - b) Two - Gabriel and Michael
 - c) One
 - d) Who knows?

c) Luke 2:8-10 – *“And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to*

them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people."

7. According to the Bible, when the little drummer boy meet Jesus?
- a) When Jesus was in the manger
 - b) When Jesus returned to Nazareth
 - c) When Jesus was about two years old
 - d) None of the above

d There is no little drummer boy in Scripture.

Barns and Yarns

8. The baby Jesus was born in a
- a) Cave
 - b) Manger
 - c) Hurry
 - d) Stable
 - e) Who knows?

e Luke 2:7 (We aren't told where Jesus was born, only that after His birth He was laid in a manger.)

9. What animals were present at Jesus' birth?
- a) Cows, sheep and camels
 - b) Cows, sheep and donkeys
 - c) Lion, tigers and bears
 - d) Who knows?

d The Bible doesn't say anything about animals being present.

10. When did baby Jesus cry?
- a) When He opened the wise men's gifts
 - b) Whenever babies usually cried
 - c) When the cattle started lowing
 - d) "No crying He makes"

b Jesus was fully human as well as fully God.

11. Joseph's family was originally from

- a) Jerusalem
- b) Nazareth
- c) Bethlehem
- d) None of the above

c) 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.”*

12. What sign were the shepherds to look for?

- a) A star over the stable
- b) A barn outlined with Christmas lights
- c) A baby in a manger
- d) Both a and c
- e) None of the above

c) Luke 2:12 – *“This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”*

13. What did the innkeeper say to Mary and Joseph?

- a) “I have a stable out back.”
- b) “Come back after the holidays.”
- c) “There’s no room in the inn.”
- d) Both a and c
- e) None of the above

e) There is no innkeeper mentioned in Scripture.

14. What is frankincense?

- a) A form of gold
- b) An incense from a tree
- c) A jewel
- d) None of the above.

b)

15. What is myrrh?

- a) A musical instrument
- b) A valuable wine
- c) A spice used for burial

d) None of the above

c) John 19:39-40 – *“He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs.”*

16. How many wise men came to see Jesus?

- a) One
- b) Three
- c) Thirty
- d) The Bible doesn't say

d) Matthew 2:1 – *“After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem.”*

17. What are Magi?

- a) Kings from the East
- b) Magicians
- c) Astrologers
- e) None of the above

c) Astrologers who dabble in the natural sciences.

18. When the wise men brought their gifts to Jesus, they found Him in

- a) A manger
- b) A house
- c) Vacation Bible School
- d) None of the above

b) Matthew 2:11 – *“On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him.”*

18. Why did the child Jesus went to Egypt:

- a) To meet pharaoh
- b) Because Joseph was told in a dream to take him
- c) Because the wise men warned Joseph about Herod
- d) Joseph did not take Jesus to Egypt

b) Matthew 2:13 – “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.’”

19. In what books of the Bible will you find these fascinating facts about Jesus birth?

- a) Matthew, Mark, Luke and John
- b) Matthew and Luke
- c) Mark and Matthew
- d) Matthew, Mark, and Luke

b)

20. Christmas has been observed on December 25 since

- a) The earliest records of the church
- b) The fourth century
- c) The ninth century
- d)

b) December 25 was selected late in the 4th century as the day to celebrate Christ’s birth.

-- Mithras

- In Persia fires were kindled to the god Mithras, who was believed to be the “god” of light.
- In this celebration, worshippers of Mithras would pray to the “god” of light in anticipation of the sun and the spring and summer.