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Connection

The magazine with Skip Heitzig

to Him
alone

Skip Heitzig

Jesus: Foretold & Stage Center

Bob Coy

God's Christmas Tree

Arthur T. Pierson

The Person of Christ

Lenya Heitzig

Finding Christ in Christmas

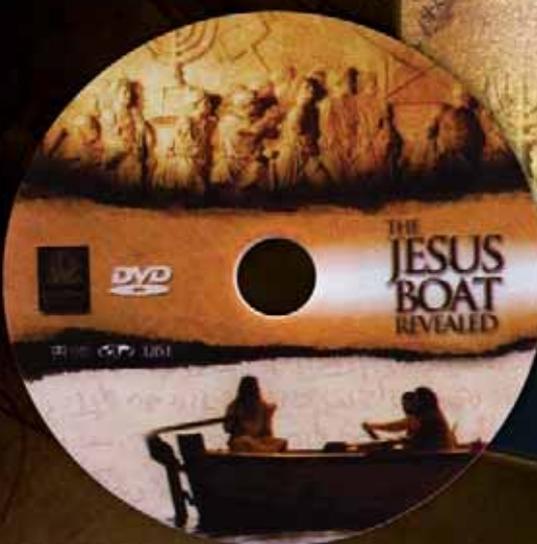
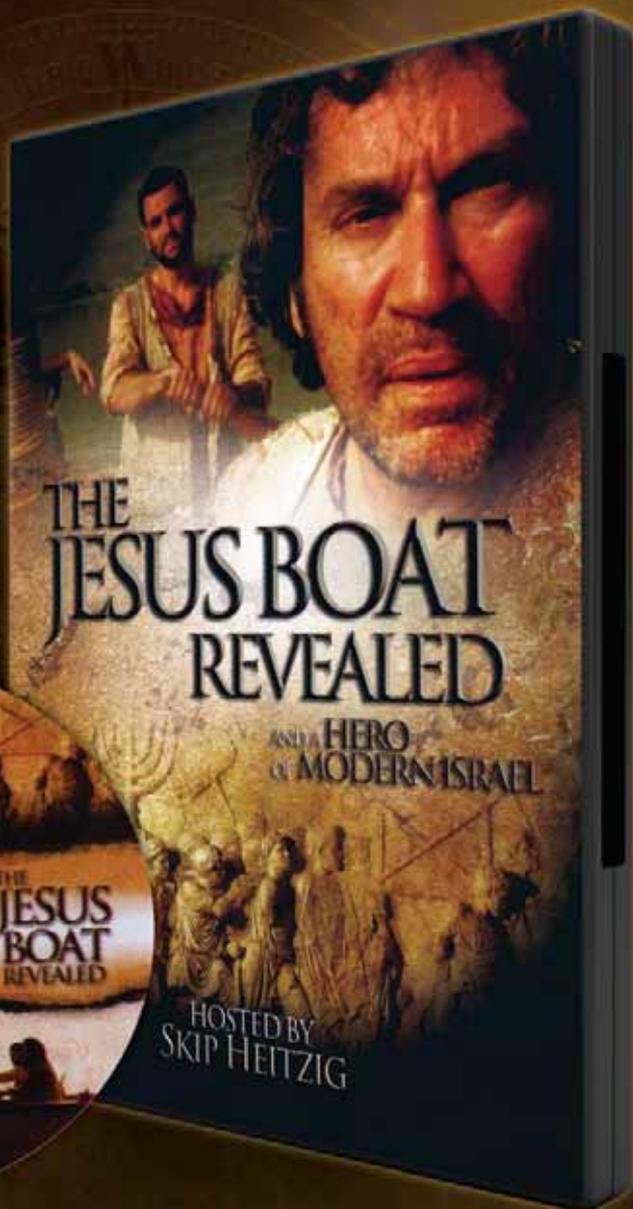
Winter 2009

Centuries ago
when Jesus walked the
earth, an ancient fishing
vessel disappeared in
the Sea of Galilee.

Then in 1986 a record
drought revealed the long
hidden relic. Two fishermen
first spotted it and when
archaeologists arrived at the
scene, a double rainbow
appeared overhead.

Was it a sign?

Could this be the
boat of Jesus Christ?



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Skip's Note

Dear Friend,

Welcome to the winter edition of *Connection: the magazine*! It's Christmas time once again and—in spite of no parking spaces, long lines, and a generally impatient atmosphere around town—Christ is still our ever-present center. In this issue, we'll explore the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ, and consider Him as the heart of our individual lives. And together we'll find Christ in Christmas.

In Luke 2 we read: "Then the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord'" (Luke 2:10-11). Our "Truth Connect" focuses on the gospel of Luke and the birth of Christ—our Savior and our Lord.

We're also going to look at the Christmas tree. As our guest pastor, Bob Coy asks, "You ever wonder what God thinks about a Christmas tree?" Trees play a powerful and poignant part in Scripture. Although pastors and churches have denounced the Christmas tree as a pagan tradition, we'll uncover the accurate biblical interpretation. And we'll survey some false perceptions that Christians—in general—have about Christmas.

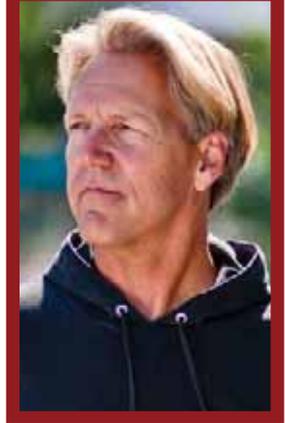
Finally, we address our Hot Spot issue: the virgin birth. Historically, the Christian church understood this biblical teaching to be of such paramount importance that its truth was included in the Apostle's Creed. So is it any less essential today? "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God" (John 1:1-2). The miraculous conception of Jesus Christ is an unmistakable association of Jesus' divine, pre-incarnate state of being.

We sincerely hope you enjoy the resources found in *Connection: the magazine*. And when you're finished with your copy, please pass it along as a small Christmas souvenir—to neighbors, friends, or even strangers.

In His strong love,



Skip Heitzig



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A publication of



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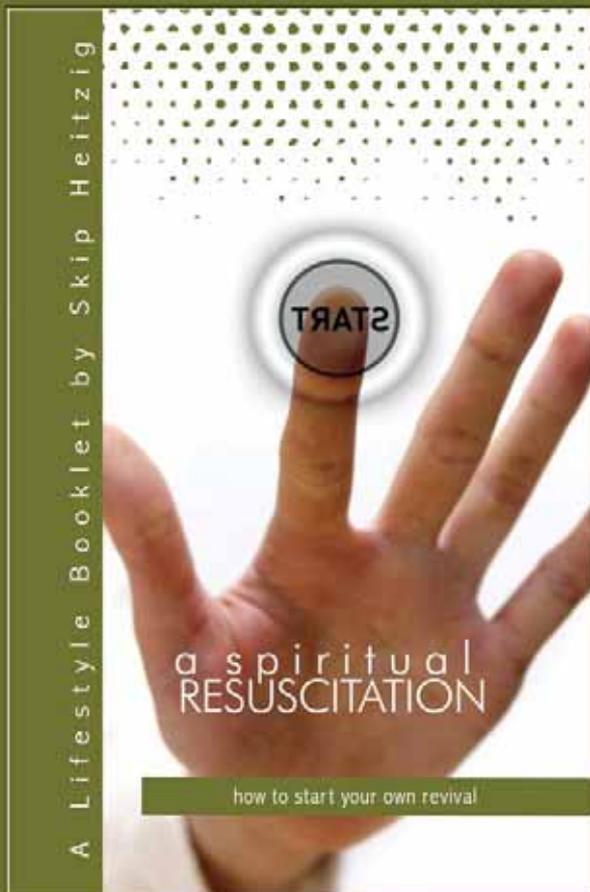
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Our Mission:

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never-changing
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What IS personal revival?



Personal revival. It seems like a contradiction. Isn't revival supposed to be for the other person—the unbeliever?

Yes and no.

Pastor Skip Heitzig examines personal revival, focusing on four key elements that lead to revival:

- Restlessness
- Receptivity
- Renunciation
- Return

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The Heart

A doctor's visit can be intimidating for a child—for anyone, really. But especially for a little four-year-old girl, who doesn't quite get it. A pediatrician was trying to calm the girl—to befriend her. As he looked into her ear he asked, "Am I going to find Big Bird down there?" The little girl remained silent. The doctor took the tongue depressor and looked down her throat and asked, "Am I going to find Cookie Monster down there?" She just looked up at him. Finally, the doctor put the stethoscope



Foretold & Stage Center

on her chest and asked, "Am I going to hear Elmo in there?" That got her attention—she spoke up and said, "Oh no, sir, Jesus is in my heart! Elmo's on my underpants!"

If you ask any child who is a believer about Jesus Christ, they are going to tell you the same thing: *He's in my heart*. As children, that's the first thing we learn and know of Him: He's in our hearts. In the book of Galatians, the apostle Paul reminded us that Jesus is the heart. He's the center. He's the main character on the stage of history. If you were

to ask God the Father, "What's the bottom line in life? What's the central issue that I need to deal with?" He would say, "Jesus Christ. That's it."

The beloved John said "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life" (John 3:36). Peter agreed. He wrote: "There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12). Jesus is stage-center in history.

The Capstone

Even the unbeliever knows this. The agnostic, the atheist, the polytheist—all of them struggle with the Person of Christ. Why? Jesus is the Bright Star of history. He shines brighter and looms greater than any other person. And His influence is greater. Compare Jesus to the great philosophers of Greece: Socrates taught for forty years, Plato for fifty, Aristotle for forty—that's 130 total years of classical Greek instruction. Jesus taught for just three and a half years, yet His influence is far greater than all of the others put together.

Jesus never painted a picture—but the greatest artists used Him as their subject: Leonardo, Michelangelo, Raphael. Jesus never wrote a poem—but some of the very best were inspired by Him: Milton, Dante, Herbert. Jesus never composed a melody—but the likes of Bach, Beethoven, and Handel were moved by Him. Even the French Emperor Napoleon once said: "Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I myself have founded great empires, but Jesus alone founded His empire on love. And to this very day, millions would die for Him."

The fullness: time

In verse four, Paul writes: "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law" (Galatians 4:4). This is a very descriptive way of saying that a period of preparation was completed and a brand-new covenant had arrived. *The fullness of the time*. The first coming of Christ was the hinge by which the door of time swings—and we testify to that today. Last time you wrote a check or signed a legal document, you dated it 2009. And what is the date? A reference to the hinge of Christ's coming. Because we're referring to 2009 A.D., Anno Domini, or "the year of our Lord." And before that was B.C., "before Christ."

A definite timing element. God is never late and He is never early. And He sent forth His Son when the fullness of the time had come.

The fullness: religion

The polytheistic religions of the Romans and Greeks left the citizens feeling empty. Historians tell us there was a sense of expectation; a sense of hope that their religions couldn't and didn't fulfill. Even in Judaism, there was a Messianic expectation unparalleled in Jewish history. Why? Because for the past 3,500 years, the Jews had been persecuted, hated, controlled by foreign power, and dislocated from their land.

The fullness: politics

The Jewish people hated foreign power at the time of Jesus Christ. A little over a century before His birth, a Syrian ruler by the name of Antiochus IV brought a pig into the Jewish temple and slaughtered that pig to a false god—the abomination of abominations in Israel. After this, a group in Israel known as the "zealots" began to form—and they would do anything to overthrow the Roman government.

The fullness: civilization

A few hundred years before Jesus, a man named Alexander the Great hit the world scene. His dream was to Hellenize the world—to bring the Greek culture and language everywhere. The Greek dialect is the most accurate, precise, and complete language ever written. The verbs explain moods and show voice and the nouns contain gender. All of this information was packed into the Greek language.

By the time Jesus came, the whole world spoke and read Greek. And when

Alexander the Great took over Jerusalem in 332 B.C., he encouraged the Jews to colonize themselves around the world—resulting in Greek-speaking Jews reading Greek Scripture everywhere in the world. By the time Christ came, the human language that God chose to reveal His mind to the world was the most precise and exact and it pervaded the earth. Everybody had access to it.

Yet during this time, Rome ruled the world. And it was their desire to connect every part of their empire to every other part by establishing a road system. Today, we can still walk along Roman roads built 2,000 years ago.

Now let's put all of this together. We have a time in which people are spiritually hungry, a pervasive and concise language, and a road system able to carry the Christian gospel around the world. This was truly the fullness of the time—it was the perfect time for Christ to come.

The Fullness: Prophecy

The Bible is filled with prophecies concerning the Messiah, Jesus Christ. And the Jewish people always expected and anticipated the Messiah's coming. But at the exact time that Jesus came, the expectation of the Messiah was never higher. In a book written by Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver, he said: "Prior to the first century of the Christian era, the Messianic interest was not excessive. The first century, however, when Jesus came, especially the generation before the destruction of the second temple, witnessed a remarkable outburst of Messianic emotionalism." The Messiah was expected around the second quarter of the first century—exactly when Jesus was revealed!

"Jesus never became God—He always was God."

What are the odds of one man in history fulfilling forty-eight prophecies? *1 in 10,157*. Yet Jesus Christ fulfilled over 400 prophecies in the Old Testament that pointed to the coming Messiah! Remember that next time somebody says, "That was just a coincidence" or "Jesus did that on purpose to fulfill them." Impossible.

The precision that God keeps revolves around the Person that He sent. The Scripture reads: "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law" (Galatians 4:4). That's an interesting way of combining a description. God "sent His Son"—sent implies pre-existence. His Son was "born of a woman"—born implies His dual nature. Christ was the God-man: fully God and fully man. He was fully God. He was sent. He existed before God sent Him.

The Savior

Jesus never became God—*He always was God*. But He came and He emptied Himself. Before Bethlehem, before the manger, on the cross, after the cross—always God. But He emptied Himself in the incarnation.

Why did He come? To buy us back from the slave market of our sin in this world. To make us His children. To bring us into an everlasting relationship with Him. And that is what makes Christianity so unique and so singular. In the fullness of the time, God sent His Son to save us and to give us eternal life.



Skip Heitzig is the author of the book *Beyond the Summer of Love* and is the senior pastor of Calvary of Albuquerque.

DEAD PASTORS SOCIETY



The People of

Nearly nineteen centuries ago, in an obscure town in Palestine, an event took place which has had more influence on the history of the world than any other since time began. A child was born—surely not so rare an occurrence as to awaken in itself any great interest.

This was no son of distinguished parents, no heir to riches or royalty, no scion of a noble house, no prospective ruler of a world's empire. He was born in a stable and cradled in a manger, because in the inn there was no room for the mother even in the crisis of the sorrow of her sex. Yet, about that natal hour, that lowly cradle and that humble child, the thought, love and life of millions have, from that day to this, been centered.

**“Truly,
this was
the SON
OF GOD.”**
—Matthew
27:54

PERSON Christ

Arthur T. Pierson
(1837-1911)

The Precious Name

It is evident He was more than man. There is that in the PERSON OF CHRIST which has won almost involuntary homage from even skeptical minds. When we study the marvelous history of those thirty-three years, we stand in the presence of the most significant period of all history, folding in its bosom the most precious facts ever cherished in the heart of man. The existence of Jesus Christ is the pivot upon which turn the history and destiny of the world. This one man, born in poverty and bred in obscurity; without rank, wealth, culture, or fame; who could call no spot home, and no great man His friend, who was hated by the influential men of church and state, and died as a criminal, by their united verdict; even whose tomb was the loan of charity, to save His body from being flung over the walls to the accursed fires of Topheth—this one man somehow sways the world! We date our very letter and papers, not “Anno Mundi”—the year of the world—but “Anno Domini”—the year of our Lord; and even he who, from his dark chamber of doubt and disbelief, sends out his as-

saults upon Jesus of Nazareth, still dates his pen’s production “Anno Domini”—unwillingly bowing to Christ’s Lordship, even of the world’s calendar! Even creation is forgotten, as the epoch from which all is to be reckoned, since that babe was born in Bethlehem of Judea—as though all history had a new birth then. Millions of believers offer Him the myrrh of their penitence for sin, the frankincense of their prayers and praise, the gold of their costliest offerings of gratitude and service; and even the profane swearer rounds his oath with the precious name of Jesus, while no other name is spoken with such reverence by the pure and good!

The Scarlet Thread

What shall I do then with Jesus? However I may account for His existence or explain His character and career; whatever I may think of His being born of a virgin and begotten of the Holy Ghost—whatever I think of His words and works, as divine or human, He is Himself the miracle of history!

Science and philosophy vainly try to account for Him or interpret Him.

He stands absolutely alone in history; in teaching, in example, in character, an exception, a marvel, and He is Himself the evidence of Christianity. It is therefore no marvel that the Word of God is full of this wonderful personage. In the British navy-yards, where all the cordage, from the huge hawser down to finest strands, has braided into it a peculiar scarlet thread, you cannot cut an inch off without finding it marked. So everywhere, woven into and through the word you may find the scarlet thread—and beginning anywhere, preach the blessed Christ.

The Strange Hold

One of the most sublime facts in connection with this wondrous PERSON OF CHRIST is the strange hold He has upon millions of believers at this remote age. After eighteen centuries have passed, a large proportion of the human race, the most intelligent and most lovely, can say of Christ, with Paul, "Whom having not seen we love." Everything connected with His personal life on earth has perished. We can only guess at the spot where he was born, the place where he lived, the site of the cross and the tomb; and yet, millions are living for Him, and would die for Him. They believe that this unseen presence inspires their faith, hope, love, life; that with this unseen Saviour they hold daily communion; they go through the valleys of tears, leaning on His arm; and they fear not the shadow of death, cheered by His smile.

We have referred to Christ's birth as attracting the gaze of the world. But if such interest gathers about His cradle, what shall be said of the interest that gathers about His cross? It was a cursed tree indeed, yet the tree of knowledge of good and evil, which is associated with the first sin and the original curse, has on Calvary been transformed into the tree of life, whose very leaves are for the healing of the nations—and whose fruit is abundant and perpetual! That cross of shame is the most precious object that the eye of faith rests upon. It is the focal point of history—toward that, all lines converge from the creation, and from it all lines diverge and radiate until the end of the world.

The Way, The Truth, The Life

Again we ask what then shall we do with Jesus who is called Christ? We calmly and reverently say, there is no middle ground. Here is a gigantic fraud, in comparison with which, all the dishonesties, perjuries, and villainies of men sink into insignificance—as mole-hills are forgotten under the shadow of colossal mountains; or else here is the one gigantic fact of history, the one grand personage of all the ages and eternities, the God-man—Creator, Ruler, Judge of all mankind, the Anointed Messiah, and only Redeemer. No middle ground! And yet you dare not call Him an incarnation of fraud—reason and conscience alike forbid; and only when men have ripened or rotted into the most daring and desperate blasphemy, apostates both from God and a right mind and a pure heart, have they dared to hint that Jesus Christ was a deceiver! And when a man does venture such self-evident blasphemy, his own companions in

skepticism shrink back from him as from himself as great a fraud as he makes the Nazarene to be.

And yet there is no middle ground—you must curse him as a wretch or you must crown him as the King. If you claim to hold neutral ground and cast no vote, remember He has said, “he that is not with me is against me.” If He be a gigantic deceiver, you cannot be guiltless, unless you do all you can to meet gigantic imposture with gigantic resistance; you are bound therefore to be a pronounced foe. If He is the King—your only Saviour, your final Judge—your guilt is awful and your exposure terrible, if you simply withhold yourself from His service, or above all lend aid or comfort to His foes! You are, by obligations of the highest sort, bound to be a pronounced friend, and to do your best and utmost to lead others to see and confess His beauty.

And so, the voice of truth and duty calls on you, in tones of thunder, to choose this day, what you will do with Jesus! You cannot, dare not be indifferent to the issue. He is or He is not the way, the truth, the life. If He be, then better you had not been born, than to wander from this way, deny this truth, forfeit this life. **D**

Arthur T. Pierson (1837-1911) was an American Presbyterian pastor, Christian leader, and author who wrote over fifty books. He was a consulting editor for the original Scofield Reference Bible (1909) and succeeded his friend Charles H. Spurgeon in the pulpit of the Metropolitan Tabernacle, London.

The Dead Pastors' Society is a class Skip Heitzig teaches at the School of Ministry in Albuquerque, New Mexico. In this seminar, he introduces students to the preachers of yesteryear.

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"This book will lead you to the all-sufficiency of Jesus" - CHUCK SMITH

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God's Christmas Tree

We have a Christmas tradition.

As a family, we trim the tree. Yes, we do. I apologize to you—don't want to perplex the purist—but we bring a cut tree into the house. So we bring the tree inside and then we put on Christmas music. It's the only time of year we hear Bing Crosby, Burl Ives, and Perry Como.

This year I was putting the lights on, putting the ornaments in place, and I sat back and looked at our tree. "Wow! Spent some money, spent some time! That thing's plugged in—it's gonna continue to cost me! Wonder what God thinks of all this?" You ever wonder what God thinks about a Christmas tree? Would He have one of His own? And how would He decorate it?

Wait a minute, Pastor Bob, you're not gonna find a place in Scripture where God's got a Christmas tree. OK, but trees play a powerful, poignant part in the Word of God. Can I remind you it was at a tree where we lost paradise? It was at a tree! But it's also where paradise was found: "Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed." (1 Peter 2:24). See the word "tree" there? It can also be translated cross or stick of wood. You get the idea. So the cross could be God's Christmas tree? I mean—the cross? Exactly.





By
Bob Coy

His Sign

So how was it decorated? First, His tree had a sign: “Now Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross. And the writing was: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. Then many of the Jews read this title, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. Therefore the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but, ‘He said, “I am the King of the Jews.”” Pilate answered, “What I have written, I have written” (John 19:19-22).

Christ saying He is King of the Jews says a lot. Keep in mind they were asking for a sign. Do you remember that? He said: “An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign” (Matthew 12:39). Jesus says, “You guys are looking for a sign that I am who I claim to be. I’ll tell you what; I’ll only give you one sign: in the same way that Jonah was swallowed up by a fish for three days and three nights, I, the Son of Man, will be buried three days, three nights. But I’m coming back.” *And He did it!*

The Nails

Second, God’s Christmas tree would have nails. Jesus was crucified because, according to the law, if someone committed a heinous crime and they deserved death, you hung them on a tree (see Deuteronomy 21:22).

He was pierced—they spiked and scarred His body: “Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:4-6).

Another word for transgression is rebellion and another word for iniquity is perversity. The NIV says “pierced.” He had to be pierced to be able to hang on the tree. And the nail reminds us of why He had to die: He had to die because of my rebellion, because of your rebellion—certainly not because of His.

On God’s Christmas tree hung a body—from nails. Why? So God could teach us what kind of love would willingly go to the cross: “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (John 15:13).

You know the scene: He’s in the Garden of Gethsemane with drops of blood flowing from his forehead. He’s called out to the Father and pleaded, “O My Father, if it is possible [if there is any other way], let this cup pass from Me” (Matthew 26:39). You’ve had friends say, “All roads lead to heaven.” Well, if all roads lead to heaven why did Jesus have to

**“On God’s
Christmas tree
hung a body”**

hang on a cross and die? And if all roads lead to heaven, why is He crying out to His Father, asking if there's any other way? As in: "If there's any other road that leads to heaven I'd rather not die!"

He's met with silence from the kingdom. "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will" (Matthew 26:39). And then the Bible says He went forward to meet them. They say, "We're looking for Jesus of Nazareth." He says, "I am He" (John 18:5). Wow. He goes willingly. Why?

"He said: Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me... then He said, Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God" (Hebrews 10:5, 7). He took away the first that He might establish the second. The first way for the Jew to get to God was a sacrificial system. But Jesus says, "I know you weren't interested in sacrifices. You don't have any joy in an offering like a ram. It's the second covenant: the covenant of a life surrendered, not an animal offered." And that's why Jesus Christ hung and died.

His Blood

So what else is on God's Christmas tree? Blood stained the cross—the perfect pure blood. In Exodus 12, the Egyptians were going to lose their firstborn because of the stubbornness of Pharaoh. And God told Moses to tell the people: "I want the angel of death to pass your house. Take lamb's blood, mark the doorpost of your house, and the angel of death will pass you by."

It's the Lamb's blood that saves you—the blood that completely soaks your sins and cleanses you so the angel of death will pass you by. "The Lamb of

God who takes away the sins of the world!" (John 1:29).

If Jesus didn't die, we might be celebrating the season with gifts and whatever comes with spending and sharing. But let me tell you something—we'd still be damned and bound by our sin. We can't have life around the tree until we've had death at the cross. My life for His life—the great exchange.

Paul wrote: "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). God says, "Can I do an exchange? I'll take the sinless perfection of My Son and give it to you. And I'll take all of the wickedness, rebellion, and perversity and take it from you." What a gift-giving exchange! What a bargain! God is willing to make you right—because He allowed His Son to become wrong.

Our Gift

God's Christmas tree is decorated with the blood, the body, the nails—His gift. He died so you wouldn't have to. He truly is the King of the Jews. He's the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

G

Pastor Bob Coy is the senior pastor of Calvary Chapel Fort Lauderdale.

*Excerpt from "Calvary's Christmas Tree"



Off the Cuff



Dr. Nelson Walker

Skip Heitzig recently spoke with Calvary of Albuquerque's Assistant Pastor, Dr. Nelson Walker, on Christian notions of Christmas. Nelson came to Calvary of Albuquerque in October 2001 and began teaching in the School of Ministry in January 2002. He became the director of the School of Ministry in January 2003.

Skip:

What are some Christian imperceptions about Christmas? Specifically, what does Scripture say about the nativity and Christ's birth that we've slightly slanted?

Dr. Walker:

The typical American nativity scene has Mary and Joseph, some shepherds, sheep, goats, or other barn animals. They're all in a cozy, open-barn setting, with the baby Jesus in a soft, straw manger, a bright star or angel overhead, and three wise men. What's happened is people have taken different parts of Bible stories and combined them.

When Jesus was born, a manger was generally a cave. The feeding trough wasn't a nice wooden box—it was made from hewn stone. It's true that the night Jesus was born, the angels told the shepherds of His birth and the shepherds visited the manger that evening. But it wasn't until three years later that the wise men came. They didn't show up the same night.

The wise men came from Persia and there were more than three—more like a few hundred. They were royalty and traveled in style with great wealth. They didn't travel without their servants, guards, and an army contingency to keep them safe. Scripture says they went to the house where Jesus stayed—not to the manger.

According to the gospels, the true nativity scene should depict Mary and Joseph in a cave carved in the side of a mountain, with Jesus lying in a stone trough. It was probably very cramped and very dark. No star, no wise men, until three years later.

Skip:

So it wasn't necessarily a barn, but a cave. And we don't portray that—a cave isn't as attractive in comparison to a nice barn in a nativity scene. What would the cave have looked like inside?

Dr. Walker:

A barn looked as it was—lived in by animals. It was generally a natural area carved inside a mountain and with one side gated. They would build stalls if necessary. If they couldn't, they wouldn't—sometimes it would be a free-for-all. There was no real plan.

The purpose was to keep the animals out of the elements. So it was smaller than a barn; it didn't maintain huge herds. The inside was cramped, dirty, smelly, and probably loaded with insects and rodents.

Skip:

Was the star the wise men saw truly in the sky for three continual years?

*The wise men
more than the*

Dr. Walker:

That's where people have speculated. It's hard to navigate by a star. The North Star can give direction, but the gospels state they were following the star they had seen in the East. After leaving Herod, they saw the star hovering over the house where Jesus was. A star in the many miles up in the celestial heavens—it would be extremely difficult to pinpoint the exact house it stood over. Whatever the bright burning light was, it would appear and then disappear. It was not a celestial star or an alignment of planets—none of those would have provided direct guidance. The best interpretation is of it being the *shekinah* glory manifestation of God. Just as there was the fire by night and the pillar of cloud by day to lead Moses. It was not a celestial star.

Skip:

Tell us about the gifts they brought Jesus. Why gold, frankincense, and myrrh?

Dr. Walker:

The wise men brought three gifts. This is why they've said throughout church history there were three wise men. The three gifts actually had symbols. Gold was of the highest monetary value and denoted royalty. So they brought gold befitting a King. This wasn't a few coins—they brought a large sum. Frankincense was very expensive incense, often used in priestly settings. It's symbolic of prayer, of praying before God. And myrrh was a type of herb that really had no value until

came from Persia and there were three more like a few hundred.

you crushed it. When crushed, it sent off a great aroma and was used as an embalming fluid, just as formaldehyde is today. They would take the myrrh and crush it, mixing in moisture and turning it into a paste. Just as we use strips to make a cast, they dipped strips of cloth in the paste and wrapped the body. The myrrh, as embalming fluid, symbolized

His death.

Skip:

What do you think Mary thought upon seeing the gifts? Did she understand the symbolism?

Dr. Walker:

Mary didn't seem to grasp what was going to happen. When Jesus ministered as an adult, Mary and her other sons (Jesus' brothers) thought that He had lost His mind and came to take Him home. When Jesus told His disciples, "I am going to Jerusalem where I will be crucified and I will be raised again on the third day"—they didn't understand. Mary saw the Messiah according to her culture, as a King coming to overthrow the yoke of Rome and elevate the Jewish nation to the center of the universe. When she saw the gifts, she wouldn't have seen the symbolism as much as she would have seen the value—probably the three most expensive gifts that could be given. Remember that Joseph had to take Mary and flee to Egypt and live for many years. They were poor; the gifts sustained them for the next few years.

Skip:

How important is all of this to our concept of Christmas and the nativity?

Dr. Walker:

Although these are non-essential doctrines, they are truth. In the School of Ministry we cover concepts like these in both theology and apologetics. We look at the various traditions of the Christian church. We look at what the Bible says and explain the difference between tradition (that has no foundation), essential doctrine (that must be obeyed), and beliefs that people hold that are non-essential, such as whether or not you can speak in tongues or things of that nature. The goal is to see the truth and lead people into a fuller and more accurate understanding of Jesus Christ. 

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finding

Christmas in Christmas

By Lenya Heitzig

Every year our country tries its best to remove Christ from Christmas. It's almost as if some Scrooge encourages America to burst out a big "Bah, Humbug!" This year, when we're at the mall, we won't hear a cheerful, "Merry Christmas!" Instead, we'll probably hear, "Happy Holidays." Instead of going to a school Christmas pageant and listening to Christmas carols, we'll go to a holiday program featuring winter songs. Brightly lit Christmas trees with symbolic stars, angelic decorations, and Christmas

gifts nestled underneath aren't out in public anymore. Instead, "Giving" trees decorated with teddy bears and more "tolerant" symbols are prevalent. Most of us are asking, "Where is Christ in Christmas?"

There's a famous joke about two brothers who were well-known troublemakers. They were called into the church office after the figure of baby Jesus was stolen from the manger in the church's life-size nativity scene. The pastor had the youngest boy wait in the reception area as he interrogated the older sibling.

The pastor asked, "What have you and your brother done with baby Jesus?" The oldest boy said, "I don't know." As he was excused, he was asked to send in his little brother. Instead, he grabbed his brother by the arm and yelled, "Run! Someone's kidnapped God and they're trying to blame it on us!"

no joking matter

That's a funny little joke—but truth is stranger than fiction. On Wednesday, December 1, 2004, the Patriot Ledger offered a one thousand dollar reward for information on the theft of a life-sized baby Jesus figure. Police said the twenty-inch statue was stolen from a nativity scene at a cemetery adjacent to Quincy, Massachusetts's City Hall. The newspaper reported that most of the figures in the display were screwed to the manger's base. The fiberglass Jesus was glued to its crib to deter vandals.

"It's our sincere hope that the reward will contribute to the speedy return of this symbol of the season's religious significance," Patriot Ledger editor Chazy Dowaliby said. The thirty thousand dollar display was paid for by a group of Quincy's churches

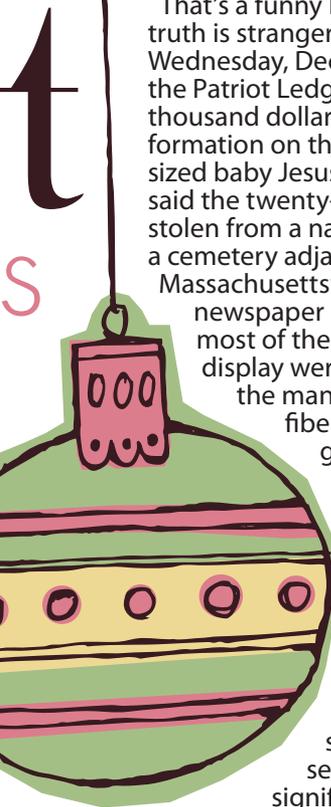
following a 2001 controversy over the city's placement of the nativity scene in front of City Hall.

"I just hope whomever is responsible returns it," said the Reverend Sheldon Bennett of the neighboring First Parish Church. "Who knows what was going in their mind? Hopefully, it was just a prank and it will be returned."

santazilla

For several years, Somerset, Massachusetts was the center of a dispute over a Christian nativity scene set up during the Christmas season in front of the Town Hall. The crèche had been a tradition for six decades. But in 1997, the ACLU filed suit against the display, arguing that it was an unconstitutional endorsement of religion. They demanded that the display be relocated to the front of a Baptist church. The town refused.

When the ACLU filed suit in U.S. District Court, the city agreed to secularize the display by moving an enormous forty-foot-high plastic Santa Claus—dubbed "Santazilla"—from the local service station to the front of Town Hall along with plastic candy canes, reindeers, and a giant menorah for the Christmas display. "They're hoping that Santa and other decorations will detract from the 'centrality' of the Nativity scene so they can sneak it under the wire of the First Amendment," said an ACLU spokesman. "This is just another ploy to try and 'save



the crèche' and continue to make what is clearly a religious statement."

hide & seek

In our home, we established a tradition of setting up a nativity set to remind us of God's greatest Gift. When Nathan was a little boy, Skip would sneak downstairs early in the morning and hide baby Jesus. That way, instead of running to the Christmas tree to look at the lights or count the presents underneath, the first thing Nathan would do was to search for Jesus. When he found Him, he'd put Him back in the manger.

The next day, it was Nathan's turn; he'd rise early and hide baby Jesus from his dad. This ensured that Nathan was finding Christ in Christmas every morning throughout the holidays. That was our little way of making sure we put Jesus in the center of the season.

the greatest gift

As believers, we know that God gave us the greatest Gift ever given—Jesus Christ—the Savior of our souls. One of the most well-known Scriptures

reminds us: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

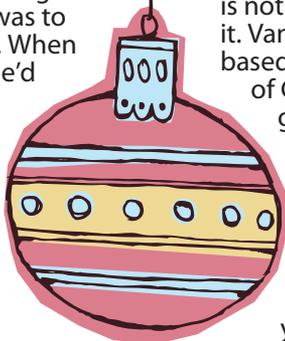
One Christmas when I was a young girl, my Grandpa Davis refused to open any gifts. None of us could understand why. I don't think he was angry with the family. I don't think he wanted to hurt our feelings. I think he was feeling ill or superstitious. But the presents sat in the library for weeks after the holiday. Sadly, he died before he even opened one.

This may seem obvious, but a gift is not a gift unless someone accepts it. Vance Havner said, "Christmas is based on exchanging gifts: the gift of God to man is his Son; and the gift of man to God is his heart."

No strings attached

A gift is also not a gift if you're trying to earn it. My sister Suzanne and I sometimes feel unworthy when we receive gifts. Usually when someone gives us a gift, we try to think of what we can give back. But real gifts come with no strings attached. They are freely given with no expectation. The website dictionary.com defines a gift as "something given voluntarily without payment in return."

Just imagine how you'd feel if your child on Christmas morning said, "Mom, I don't deserve these presents. I'll repay you by mowing the lawn and doing the dishes." It would cheapen the gift and the giver!



From Calvary Albuquerque Women's Ministry Leaders
Lenya Heitzig & Penny Rose

Bible studies for women *on the go*

The beauty of God's gift of His Son is that He freely gave Him. There is nothing you could ever do to possibly earn the gift of salvation. Paul said, "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!" (2 Corinthians 9:15).

I once heard about a ten-year-old girl who went with her family to see Christmas displays throughout the city. At one church, they stopped to look more closely at a nativity scene.

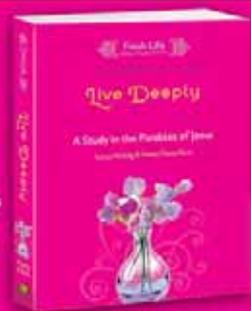
"Isn't that beautiful?" said the little girl's grandmother. "Look at all animals; Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus."

"Yes, Grandma," replied the girl. "It is really nice. But isn't baby Jesus going to grow up? He's the same size He was last year."

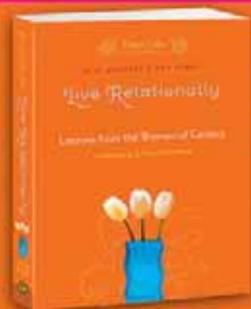
This time of year is a great reminder that God sent His Son to us—born in a manger. He gave us His Son for free. Will you accept His gift? Because the baby Jesus *did* grow up. He became the Savior of the world. **L**

Lenya Heitzig is an award-winning author and sought-after speaker at conferences and retreats worldwide.

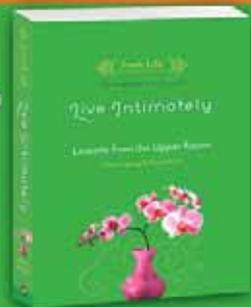
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just 20 minutes a day"



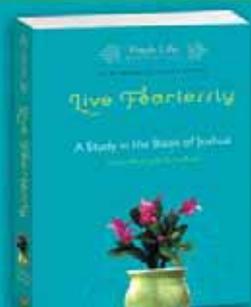
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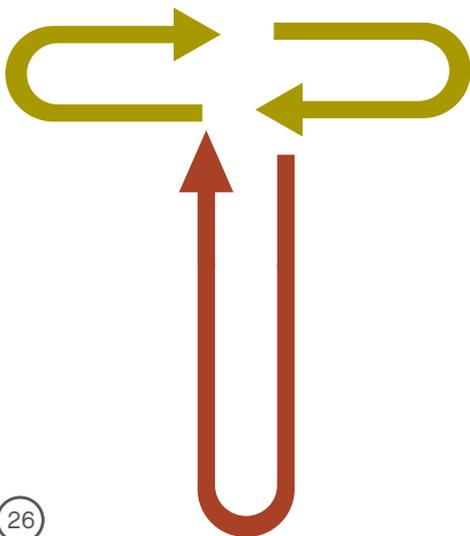
TRUTH CONNE

Truth Connect is a road map for your spiritual journey. Each quarter we'll help you "unpack" what God has to say to you. You can use this personal Bible study in any way that meets your lifestyle.

Maybe you've always wanted to explore God's Word but just don't know where to start.

1. For instance, on Monday: Read the passage; Tuesday: Review the passage; Wednesday: Reach Up to God; Thursday: Reach Out to others; Friday: Reach In to believers; Saturday: Remember the Scripture passage.
2. Complete the study one day during the week; then take the rest of the week to memorize the Scripture and ponder the lessons learned.
3. Gather with some friends and complete the study together.

Truth Connect is divided into six simple steps:



Read: Your journey begins when you study the Scripture passage. 2 Timothy 3:16 explains that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God" and is therefore worth in-depth exploration.

Review: This section offers insight into the historical context of the passage, as well as teaching you key words, concepts, or phrases that add meaning to the message.

Reach Up: At this time, you'll want to ask yourself: "How does this Scripture enhance my relationship with God? How does it cause me to reach up to Him?"

Reach In: Here, you'll see how the passage encourages you to use your gifts to "be of real help to the whole church" (1 Corinthians 14:12 NLT).

Reach Out: This section focuses on the portion of the passage that exhorts Christians to help people in need.

Remember: Here, you're encouraged to memorize a Scripture passage so that you will have it at your disposal whenever you need it.

Fast Facts: Luke 1 & 2

Author:

Luke, the beloved physician, accurately recorded Christ's life: His birth, His ministry—and His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. Though not a disciple of Jesus, his sources were eyewitnesses to the miraculous events. Luke was a companion of the apostle Paul both in prison and on many of his missionary journeys. Luke was the only known Gentile to write a New Testament book.

Date:

Approximately 60 A.D.

Themes:

Luke has been called "the most beautiful book in the world." The first two chapters of Luke record the prophecies and praise songs of Zachariah, Mary, and the angels announcing the coming births of Jesus and John the Baptist. Serving, submitting, singing, and the Savior's birth are themes in the chapters of Luke.

Key People:

- **Theophilus:** Addressed by Luke in this gospel and in Acts. Clearly a dear friend; probably a prominent Roman believer. His name means "lover of God."
- **King Herod:** Of Idumean descent and Jewish faith; ruler at the time of Christ's birth. He was both destructive (killed male infants) and constructive (built the temple).
- **Elizabeth:** Daughter of the priestly line of Aaron; Mary's cousin. Barren for much of her life, she miraculously became the mother of John the Baptist.
- **Zacharias:** Priest of the division of Abijah; Elizabeth's husband and John the Baptist's father. He was struck deaf when he questioned God's messenger.
- **Joseph:** Mary's husband; the stepfather of Jesus. A "just man" who wanted to "put Mary away secretly" until he heard from the angel of the Lord (see Matthew 1:19).
- **Mary:** Mother of Jesus; lived in Nazareth; from the tribe of Judah. Came from modest means. A virgin; Christ was conceived through the power of the Holy Spirit.
- **John the Baptist:** Son of Elizabeth and Zacharias in their old age through the miraculous intervention of God. Prophesied to be the forerunner of Jesus Christ.
- **Jesus:** Born of the Virgin Mary; "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). The Savior of the human race. Jesus first came as a humble servant and will come again as the conquering King.

October-December
Good Tidings of Great Joy

OCT.

Week One-October 1st-10th

Read: Luke 1:1-12

Review: Luke's book proclaims the good news that Jesus came "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). A historian and physician who gathered eyewitness information, Luke sought to learn everything about Jesus and His life. Let's make that our goal as we study the first two chapters in Luke. This week, we'll meet Luke, Theophilus, Zacharias, Elizabeth, and the angel of the Lord.

Reach Up: List some reasons why Luke wrote this gospel (vv. 1-4). Pray that God will give you "perfect understanding of all things" (v. 3) as He did Luke.

Reach In: What do you learn about Zacharias and Elizabeth (vv. 5-7)? What made them "righteous" and "blameless" (v. 6)? How are you like them now? How could you become more like them?

Reach Out: Describe Zacharias' occupation and what happened as he performed his duties (vv. 8-12). Zacharias felt "troubled, and fear fell upon him" (v. 12) when he saw the angel. How might you respond? As believers, Christ "has made us kings and priests to His God and Father" (Revelation 1:6). List some priestly duties you enjoy (for example: prayer, Bible study, acts of service, etc.).

Remember: "That you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed" (Luke 1:4).

Word Study: Instructed

To sound down into the ears. This implies oral teaching; being informed by word of mouth. Luke put in writing what Theophilus and others had only heard. More importantly, he wanted to make sure the gospel record was completely accurate.

Week Two-October 11th – 17th

Read: Luke 1:13-25

Review: We've met Luke, the author of this gospel, who took us to Judea during King Herod's rule. We also met Zacharias and Elizabeth, a godly but childless couple. This week we'll discover why the angel visited them.

Reach Up: The angel told Zacharias his prayer had "been heard." Use the key words "will" and "shall" to describe the marvelous things that would occur (vv. 13-16). Which do you pray to experience (for example: "joy and gladness" (v. 14); "filled with the Holy Spirit" (v. 15); "turn many of the children... to the Lord their God" (v. 16)?

Reach In: Why did Zacharias question Gabriel (v. 18)? How did the angel respond to Zacharias' doubts and why (vv. 19-20)? Describe a time you doubted God would keep His promises to you. How did He prove faithful?

Reach Out: What two outward signs proved that God would keep His promise (vv. 22-25)? God took away Elizabeth's "reproach among people" (v. 25) by blessing her with a child. God took away your reproach by blessing you with Jesus Christ. How will you share this news with others?

Remember: "Thus the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when He looked on me, to take away my reproach among people" (Luke 1:25).

Word Study: Reproach

To be disgraced or shamed. In the Old Testament, reproach implied divine punishment for a secret sin. In Israel, being barren was considered a reproach. We know that God saw Elizabeth as a righteous woman. Other barren women include Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Hannah.

Notes

Week Three-October 18th – 24th

Read: Luke 1:26-38

Review: We move to Nazareth in Galilee where Gabriel announced another miraculous birth. Gabriel often acted as God's messenger, explaining the prophetic seventy weeks to Daniel and announcing John the Baptist's birth. Many believe Gabriel will be the "archangel... with the trumpet of God" (1 Thessalonians 4:16) who will accompany Christ at the rapture of His church.

Reach Up: When did Gabriel visit Mary and how did he describe her (vv. 26-28)? Though Mary was "troubled," list the promises Gabriel said "will" or "shall" happen (vv. 29-33) with the birth of her child..What is troubling you? Look at God's Word and find a promise to appropriate as your own.

Reach In: Describe how the Son of God would supernaturally be conceived (vv. 34-35). Why do you think Gabriel told Mary that Elizabeth had also conceived a son (vv. 36-37)? Do you believe that "with God nothing will be impossible" (v. 37)? Why or why not?

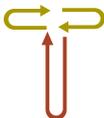
Reach Out: How did Mary express her willingness to serve God (v. 38)? What did she risk in doing this? What will you risk to serve God?

Remember: "And of His kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:33).

Word Study: Kingdom

The kingdom of God refers to God's perfect peaceful rule in the world. The prophets' predicted Messiah would inaugurate this kingdom. John the Baptist said the kingdom was "at hand" (Matthew 3:2). Jesus said, "Surely the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matthew 12:28). With Christ's second coming the kingdom of God will reach its culmination.

Luke 1



Week Four-October 25th – 31st

Read: Luke 1:39-45

Review: Mary submitted to God's will and so a poor girl from Nazareth gave birth to the promised Messiah. As Isaiah prophesied, "The virgin shall conceive and bear a Son" (Isaiah 7:14). Now we'll see how Mary celebrated her good news with Elizabeth.

Reach Up: Explain where Mary went, who she went to see, and why you think she went there (vv. 39-40). Recount the supernatural event that occurred when Elizabeth saw Mary (v. 41). Read Titus 3:4-6 and describe what the Holy Spirit does in the believer's life. How have you experienced this?

Reach In: What did Elizabeth call the baby in Mary's womb (v. 43)? How did Elizabeth's baby respond to Mary's baby (v. 44)? How did you respond when the Holy Spirit revealed Jesus as your Lord?

Reach Out: What blessings did Elizabeth pronounce upon Mary (vv. 42-45)? Take time to pronounce a blessing on someone dear to you this week.

Remember: "Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord" (Luke 1:45).

Word Study: Fulfillment

To bring to full measure, complete, or finish. Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promises. When Jesus appeared to the disciples after His death, He said, "All things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me" (Luke 24:44).

Notes

Nov.

Week One–Nov. 1st – 7th

Read: Luke 1:46-56

Review: Elizabeth acknowledged that Mary was carrying the Messiah when she called Him “my Lord” and poured blessings upon her young relative. Her baby leapt for joy within her womb at the presence of the Christ child. In response, we’ll explore Mary’s beautiful praise song known as The Magnificat.

Reach Up: Key in on the personal pronoun “my” and “me.” Describe how God intervened in Mary’s life (vv. 46-49). Focus on the “He” statements in verses 46-49. Turn these verses into a personal praise song.

Reach In: List the things “He has” done (vv. 51-55). Describe some instances when “He has” intervened personally, historically, and/or globally in these ways.

Reach Out: Verse 50 says, “And His mercy is on those who fear Him.” What do you think it means to fear the Lord? How do you display this in your everyday life?

Remember: “For He who is mighty has done great things for me” (Luke 1:49).

Word Study: **Mighty**

Possessing power; capable; strong. The Greek word is *dunatos*, the root of our word dynamite. God is omnipotent—all-powerful—and is able to perform anything.

Notes

Week Two–Nov. 8th – 14th

Read: Luke 1:57-66

Review: Mary traveled to visit her relatives Elizabeth and Zacharias in the hill country of Judah. Their Spirit-led meeting was full of joy and praise that God was sending the Savior. This week our text remains in the Judean village for the birth of John the Baptist.

Reach Up: Describe how Elizabeth’s neighbors and relatives reacted to the birth of her son (vv. 57-58). Read Romans 12:15. Do you “rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep”? How do you think this glorifies God?

Reach In: Describe what happened when it was time to circumcise and name the child (vv. 59-64). What events in this passage make you marvel like the townspeople did?

Reach Out: How did the people respond throughout the hill country (vv. 65-66)? Put yourself in their shoes: how might you have spread this story? How can you spread this story now?

Remember: “When her neighbors and relatives heard how the Lord had shown great mercy to her, they rejoiced with her” (Luke 1:58).

Word Study: **Mercy**

Kindness; goodwill; compassion toward the afflicted. Mercy is joined with a desire to relieve the misery of others. It speaks of God’s mercy toward humans both universally and in specific instances. God was especially merciful in sending Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

Notes

Week Three–Nov. 15th – 21st

Read: Luke 1:67-80

Review: God loosed Zacharias' tongue when his son was born. The priest immediately confirmed the name Gabriel had revealed to him: John, which means "God is gracious." His next words were a prophetic song, commonly called the Benedictus. This beautiful ode reminded the people that God kept His covenant when he sent the Savior. He also prophesied concerning his son's role in preparing the way for the Messiah.

Reach Up: Who inspired Zacharias to prophesy (v. 67)? Why did he bless the Lord (vv. 68-70)? Rephrase these verses to create your own personal praise song.

Reach In: How did he predict the Redeemer would deal with Israel's enemies (vv. 71-74)? Messiah came in Zacharias' lifetime to conquer humanity's greatest enemies: sin and death. When did you accept Jesus as the Savior of your soul? Read Revelation 19:11-13. Explain when Zacharias' prophecy concerning Israel will be completely fulfilled.

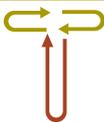
Reach Out: Describe what Zacharias predicted for his child (vv. 76-77). Verse 80 tells us he "grew and became strong in spirit." What are you doing to grow spiritually stronger? How will you use your strength "to give light to those who sit in darkness (v. 79)?"

Remember: "The Dayspring from on high has visited us" (Luke 1:78).

Word Study: Dayspring

Rising light; the first streak of sun; the dawn. Figuratively, this describes Jesus: "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it" (John 1:4-5).

Luke 1-2



Week Four–Nov. 22nd – 30th

Read: Luke 2:1-7

Review: This week we witness the birth of Jesus Christ. Luke is the only gospel which records Mary and Joseph's journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. This gives us not only the political picture of Israel under Roman governance, but also the prophetic picture of how Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled the prophecy of Micah: "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah... out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel" (Micah 5:2).

Reach Up: Describe what happened in the days of Caesar Augustus (vv. 1-3). Read Proverbs 8:14-15 and describe who put Caesar in place. What does this teach you about God's authority?

Reach In: Why did Joseph and Mary travel to Bethlehem (v. 4-5)? Describe a time in your life when God used providential circumstances to get you where He wanted you to be at just the right time.

Reach Out: Recount what happened while the couple was in Bethlehem (vv. 6-7). "There was no room for them in the inn" (v. 7). How have you made room for Jesus in your life?

Remember: "She brought forth her first-born Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger" (Luke 2:7).

Word Study: Firstborn Son

The simplest meaning is that Jesus was Mary's eldest Child, the firstborn Son. But there is also a larger meaning. Firstborn does not only mean first in time; it also means first in place, first in order, first in importance. In the New Testament He is called "Firstborn of Creation." He is called "Firstborn from the Dead." He is called "Firstborn among many brethren."

Week One-December 1st – 12th

Read: Luke 2:8-20

Review: We've seen Mary and Joseph, two lowly people of royal lineage, called by a Roman ruler to register for a census. Little did Caesar know that he was being used by God to fulfill the prophecy: the Savior of the world would be born in Bethlehem. Let's go to the surrounding hills to witness some wondrous happenings.

Reach Up: What message did the angel of the Lord bring to the shepherds (vv. 8-12)? John proclaimed Jesus to be the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Why might this make it appropriate for the angel to appear to the shepherds? What does God's willingness to pronounce the Messiah's birth to humble shepherds say about His character?

Reach In: The shepherds immediately went to find Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus. What was your first response when you heard the glorious news of Christ's birth? Read Luke 2:14. How have you found peace on earth through your relationship with Christ?

Reach Out: In verses 17 and 20, what did the shepherds do because it was "told them"? How will you follow their example? Who will you tell about the Child?

Remember: "For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11).

Word Study: Christ

Anointed one; the Greek translation of the Hebrew word Messiah. This name for Jesus indicated He was the prophesied Deliverer who would usher in a kingdom of peace and prosperity. Peter proclaimed, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16).

Week Two-Dec. 13th – 19th

Read: Luke 2:21-32

Review: We've seen the shepherds rejoice and spread the good tidings of Christ's birth. This week we'll see how Joseph and Mary carefully followed the traditional ceremonies associated with the birth of a new Jewish life. As they celebrated their newborn child, we'll also meet a special man named Simeon.

Reach Up: List the ways and rituals that Mary and Joseph fulfilled "the law" (vv. 21-24). Read Matthew 5:17. Why was this so important? Do you consider it important to follow God's Law today? Why or why not? Provide scriptural reasons.

Reach In: Describe Simeon and what God revealed to him (vv. 25-26). What words do you think Luke would use to describe you? Simeon waited for "the Consolation of Israel." According to Philippians 3:20-21, what do we, as believers, eagerly await?

Reach Out: Verses 27-28 tell us Simeon came by the Spirit and took Jesus into his arms. According to Simeon's blessing, why could he depart in peace after seeing Jesus (vv. 29-32)? Simeon beheld Jesus with his physical eyes (v. 30). How do we "behold" Jesus today?

Remember: "For my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples" (Luke 2:30-31).

Word Study: Salvation

(Psalm 119:139): Deliverance from the power of sin; redemption. Specifically, spiritual and eternal deliverance granted by God through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ alone. "For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5:9).

Week Three-Dec. 20th – 26th

Read: Luke 2:33-40

Review: We've read Simeon's beautiful praise song: "You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel" (vv. 31-32). His statement reminds us that Christ came not just for Jews, but for all who believe. This week we study Simeon's word of prophecy for Mary and the nation of Israel. We'll also meet a prophetess named Anna.

Reach Up: How did Mary and Joseph respond to Simeon's prophecy about Jesus (v. 33)? What have you marveled at during this study of Christ's birth?

Reach In: After blessing them, what did Simeon prophesy about the Child concerning Israel, Mary, and the thoughts of people (v. 34-35)? What do you think he was talking about? Do you believe it's possible for Jesus to reveal what is in your heart?

Reach Out: What do you learn about Anna (vv. 36-37)? What happened when she saw Jesus (v. 38)? What does this teach you about age and evangelism?

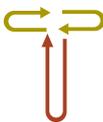
Remember: "And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him" (Luke 2:40).

Word Study: Grace

Grace in both manner and actions. This speaks of showing favor or kindness despite a person's worthiness to receive such compassion. Grace is one of God's key attributes (see Exodus 34:6) and is revealed in the Person of Christ.

Notes

Luke 2



Week Four-Dec. 27st – 31st

Read: Luke 2:41-52

Review: We move forward in time twelve years. During this time, Matthew 2 records that the magi came to visit Jesus in Bethlehem and the family fled Herod's persecution to Egypt. Clearly, there's a gap in time between verses 40 and 41. We pick up our narrative of Jesus' childhood following Herod's death, when Jesus was twelve years old.

Reach Up: Describe what happened after the Passover Feast (vv. 41-45). Read Exodus 12:1-14. Why was the Passover Feast so important to the Hebrew people? Read 1 Corinthians 5:7. How did Jesus ultimately fulfill the Passover?

Reach In: When Mary and Joseph found Jesus in the temple, how were the people responding to Him (vv. 46-48)? How much time do you spend with Jesus "listening" and "asking questions" (v. 46)?

Reach Out: Jesus told Mary "I must be about My Father's business" (v. 49). What business has your heavenly Father given you to do? How are you going about it?

Remember: "But His mother kept all these things in her heart" (Luke 2:51).

Word Study: Heart

In the spiritual sense, the heart is the inner self that thinks, chooses, and dreams. Biblical references to the heart often speak of the human personality. The heart is the center of thought, feelings, and morality.

Notes

From the **blog**

with Pastor Skip Heitzig

Question:

I've heard some pastors and churches denounce Christmas trees as a pagan tradition. Is this true?

Answer:

For a long time Christians opposed the Christmas tree. Tertullian, an early Christian leader, argued that too many fellow Christians had imitated the pagan tradition.

The Puritans condemned a number of customs associated with Christmas including caroling, decorating trees, and hanging mistletoe.

There are three possible pagan roots for the Christmas tree: 1) The festival of Saturnalia, celebrated around December 23, was a Roman dedication to the god, Saturn, 2) The Germans used trees and stockings for religious purposes surrounding the winter solstice, and 3) The British Druids traditionally burned a Yule log and hung mistletoe.

But we have no evidence that the pre-Christ pagans influenced Christian celebrations. Paganism—as a formal

religious system—was out of popular use for 1,000 years. The actual custom of setting up a Christmas tree can be traced back to 16th century Germany. Christians began decorating trees after the church set December 25th as Christ's birth date to counter the pagan celebration of the winter solstice.

The common biblical opposition to Christmas trees quotes the prophet Jeremiah:

“Thus saith the LORD, ‘Learn not the

“we have no evidence that the pre-Christ pagans influenced Christian celebrations”

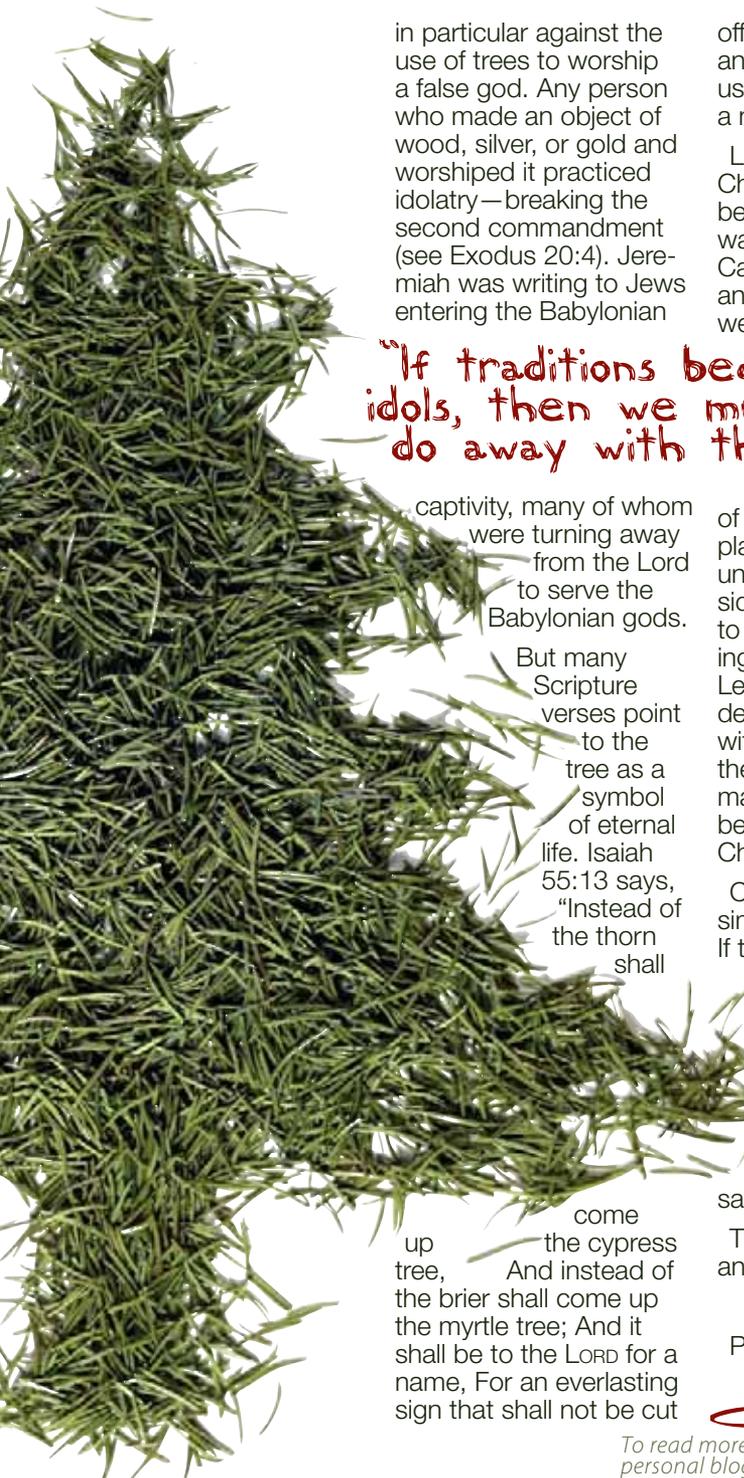
way of the heathen,

then, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them. For the customs of the people are vain: for one cutteth a tree out of the

forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe. They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammer,

mers, that it move not.” (Jeremiah 10:2-4 KJV).

The more accurate interpretation of this Scripture is its condemnation of idol worship. Jeremiah spoke



in particular against the use of trees to worship a false god. Any person who made an object of wood, silver, or gold and worshiped it practiced idolatry—breaking the second commandment (see Exodus 20:4). Jeremiah was writing to Jews entering the Babylonian

off.” Both Ezekiel 47:12 and Revelation 22:2 also use trees as a symbol of a new fruitful life.

Look at the Christian Christmas tree. Remember that Christ’s body was nailed to the tree on Calvary—reuniting God and humanity in love. As we string lights on the

“If traditions become idols, then we must do away with them”

branches, let’s remember that He is the Light

captivity, many of whom were turning away from the Lord to serve the Babylonian gods.

of the world. When we place our packages underneath the tree, consider how He is the Gift to all creation. And hanging up our ornaments? Let’s not forget that He decorated the heavens with His glory. That’s how the tannenbaum, German for “Christmas tree,” became the Christian’s Christmas tree.

But many Scripture verses point to the tree as a symbol of eternal life. Isaiah 55:13 says, “Instead of the thorn shall

Christmas traditions are simply that—traditions. If traditions become idols, then we must do away with them. But if they help us to celebrate the Christ Child and Risen Lord, let’s use them with humility and joy in celebration of our salvation.

come up the cypress tree, And instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree; And it shall be to the LORD for a name, For an everlasting sign that shall not be cut

Thanks for the question and Merry Christmas!

Pastor Skip



To read more of Pastor Skip’s personal blog, visit his website:

SkipHeitzig.com



like a
VIRGIN

Virgin. Maybe a few people still hear the word and blush. But today, most of us don't even blink an eye. Pop culture is fascinated with the concept—blockbuster movies titled “The 40 Year Old Virgin” and “The Virgin Suicides” are mega hits. The idea sells.

T S P O T S

By Skip Heitzig

In the 1600's, virginity was used as a description of royalty: the Virgin Queen Elizabeth. Even 150 years ago, the word "virgin" conjured great attention. Western culture valued virginity as a moral virtue.

So what's the definition of a virgin? Taken from the Latin word *virgo*, it means "an inexperienced maiden." Historically, the description specifically related to a sexually inexperienced woman.

But where did the moral concept of virginity arise? Most Christians agree the answer is clear: Mary, the mother of Jesus, was a virgin. Yet history tells us that the virtue of virginity predated Mary, going all the way back to the Old Testament. (See Genesis 24).

Still, it's Mary's virginity that gets the most attention. Why? Because the Bible teaches that Mary was a virgin when she conceived Jesus. Scripture teaches that Mary didn't have sexual intercourse with a man—yet she gave birth to Jesus. This was a *miracle*.

Historically, the Christian church understood this biblical teaching as one of paramount importance. In fact, it's included in the church's earliest statement of faith, the Apostle's Creed:

[Jesus Christ] was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary.

The Scriptural basis is Luke 2:27-28 (and inferred in Matthew 1:18):

"Now in the sixth month the

angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph... The virgin's name was Mary."

This miraculous birth is a clear link to Jesus' divine, pre-incarnate state of being (see John 1). By means of the virgin birth, the Word remained entirely God but gained true humanity—yet uncontaminated by sin.

Instead of re-defining the text, or dismissing it as not actual, or even tossing it off as unessential, it's best to let the Word of God lead. Mary was a virgin when she gave birth to Jesus. She had never had sexual intercourse—yet conceived Jesus by a miraculous work of God through the power of the Holy Spirit.

But since the early 1800's, this cardinal doctrine has come under attack by many—even within the church.

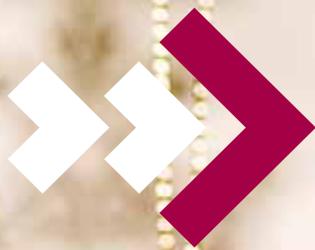
Sometimes the attack revolves around an anti-miraculous bias. Because the virgin birth is a miracle—and miracles "don't happen"—the virgin birth never occurred.

Another attack comes from a redefinition of the word virgin. Some argue the word can simply mean a "maiden," or a young girl. They believe the use of virgin doesn't mean one who has not had sexual intercourse, but simply a young girl.

Except, this redefinition of the word is not true to the Scripture. If it simply meant a young girl, why did the angels announce it as a miraculous event? Why all the amazement and controversy surrounding the birth?

And why did Mary, after hearing she would conceive, clearly protest, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" (Luke 1:34).

Seems pretty clear. Mary was a virgin. 🔥



connecting the dots

1 Jesus Christ is life's bottom line. God sent His Son to save us and offer us eternal life when "the fullness of the time had come."

2 Jesus Christ was born a humble Child in a lowly cradle. Two thousand years later, millions are living for Him.

3 Jesus Christ's death on the cross was God's most precious gift to us. Our lives for His life—the great exchange.

4 Jesus Christ is our King; our great High Priest. His death was sacrificial and provided atonement for our sins.

5 Jesus Christ was conceived by a miraculous work of God through the power of the Holy Spirit. He was born of a virgin—allowing Him to remain entirely God while gaining true humanity uncontaminated by sin.

*If you have **not** already accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and personal Savior—do it now. Please don't wait. With a sincere and repentant heart, simply pray:

"Father, I know I am a sinner. I repent of my sin, and turn away from it. I turn to Jesus. I believe that Jesus died on the cross and rose again, saving all who believe in Him. Fill me with Your Spirit and come into my life. Transform me. Make me into a new creation. I pray this in Jesus' name."

If you prayed this prayer, please contact
Calvary of Albuquerque
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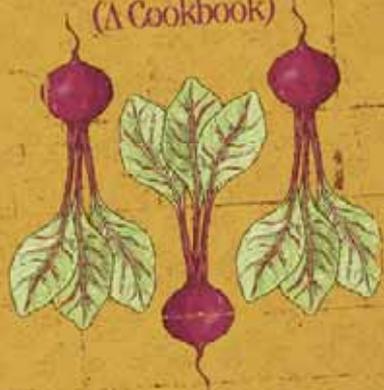
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