

Christmas Special 07-12-21

This is Friday, the 21st of December, 2007. We're going to have a little special lesson tonight, a single lesson dealing with the holiday season, the event that we celebrate at this time of year, even though it probably didn't happen at this time of year, but it's as good a time as any to address it. Let's take a moment as we begin to clear our hearts of any rubbish that may have accumulated during the day or last few hours or however long it's been since the last time we cleared out the accumulated rubbish and ask God's blessing on us as we spend time in fellowship in God's Word together.

Father, we're always grateful to find ourselves in the company of believers who love your Word and who share an enthusiasm for your plan and purpose as it is exemplified and made possible for us in the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you for our salvation. We thank you for the hope and the opportunities that we have in this life because of him.

And we know that one essential preparation and one essential foundation upon which we build our lives and lead our lives is the truth of your Word. We ask your blessing on us as we study it and spend time meditating on it together. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.

The theme or the central idea tonight is related to Christmas because we're very near Christmas. It seems like a propitious moment to think about it. But we've spoken briefly in the last few weeks about the traditional understandings that have grown up around Christmas.

And really there is a reason why we, Grace & Truth Bible Church, are independent of a denominational affiliation. There is a reason why we look very carefully at those things in Christianity that partake to a greater or lesser extent of tradition. There is a lot of tradition in Christianity.

We tend to think, well, tradition is of the Jews. If you've ever seen *The Fiddler on the Roof*, they've got a whole song about that, about tradition. And we think, well, the Pharisees, they were bound up in tradition.

They had all of these accretions. But we have a lot of tradition in Christianity. And the more you get into denominational or sectarian strands of Christianity, more and more of that do we find.

And so we think, well, but there are certain things that are kind of free of that. We have Easter. We have Christmas.

We have things where, I mean, the birth of Christ. Now, the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise. And you think about the story of the shepherds and the story of the visitors, the magi, and so on.

And we think, well, we pretty well know the details of this story. But we're going to take a look at the narrative, some of the details. We don't have time for an exhaustive study because we're

only going to go for a short time tonight.

But I just want to point out a few of the facts from the account of Matthew and the account of Luke that have to do with the Christmas story. And we just want to think about some of these. A few of them you may have a recollection of from previous holiday studies that we have done in times past.

But some of you all weren't here or weren't old enough to comprehend it. And so we'll review a few of those. But there are also some new observations we're going to make tonight.

But it is good to celebrate the birth of Christ. Let me just start by saying, you know, despite my previous comments a week or two ago about people getting up in arms over whether or not Christ is being taken out of Christmas and so on, it is good to celebrate the birth of Christ. This is as good a time as any.

You may or may not know that originally the earliest church celebrations of Jesus' birth were on January the 6th. Early, early Christians celebrated. And the idea that Jesus' birth was on December 25th was somewhat later in the 2nd, actually the 3rd century A.D. is when it began to shift.

But some of the traditional understandings have been perpetuated by one camp or another, whether it's the Catholic Church or opponents of Christianity. The Jews, of course, have a view on Jesus Christ. There is a great long article in the Jewish Encyclopedia on Christianity.

There is another great long article in the Jewish Encyclopedia on the nativity of Christ, on Jesus Christ himself, which includes a section on nativity. And, for example, if you go to Wikipedia, there is, of course, an article on Jesus. There is an article separate on the nativity of Jesus.

And I want to give you a few highlights from the Wiki article because this is how the world views Christian faith in general and the birth of Christ in particular. It mentions that the accounts are given in Matthew and Luke, that Mark, which is by most people believed to be the earliest gospel, has no mention of Jesus' birth at all. And since Matthew and Luke seem to be later, people want to imply that the accounts of Jesus' birth are somewhat legendary.

They are also full of references to angelic appearances. Mary sees an angel. Zechariah sees an angel.

Joseph has a vision and a dream by night. And these are supernatural elements that are commonly associated with legendary stories. So, of course, anything supernatural is going to be put in that category.

But let's begin with the scriptural account in the Gospel of Luke. Because you remember that in the first chapter, the story of Zacharias, his priesthood, the announcement of the coming birth of John the Baptist, even though, like Abram and Sarah, Zacharias and Elizabeth are quite old and she is past childbearing age, this is another one of those cases where God makes possible

what by human standards is impossible. And Elizabeth, in her old age, has a son just like Sarah did.

And it is significant if you think about it because the age of Israel proper, the age of the people of Israel as a nation, begins with Abraham. What is the promise to Abraham given way back in Genesis 10-17? What does God keep telling Abraham over and over? I will make of thee what? A great nation. I will make of thee a great nation.

Abraham's citizenship card in the nation of Israel has the number 0000001. He is the first citizen of that nation. It begins with him through Isaac.

In Isaac shall thy seed be called. Not Ishmael, not the other 17 sons, not through Keturah, not through Hagar, it is Abraham and Sarah, Isaac. And they have this child.

It is a miraculous conception, a miraculous birth, a miraculous preservation of Isaac. Isaac and Rebekah, Rebekah has her twins, Jacob and Esau, she is not particularly old, it is not a miraculous birth, it is twins and they fight and there is a whole different set of issues with that birth. But Abraham and Sarah, it is in their old age, it is inconceivable that she would conceive, and yet she does.

Well, at the very end, at the very close of the age of Israel, minus of course the portion we know is yet coming, the 70th week of Daniel, but at the close, what do you have? It is one of God's favorite communication devices. It is a bracket, it is a close parenthesis. Once again, an elderly couple with the wife well past the age of childbearing has a son.

Abraham is the first prophet, John the Baptist is the last prophet. And they both are born in the same circumstances in that regard. So you have that in the first chapter of Luke.

Then in the sixth month, and this is in verse 26 of chapter 1 of Luke, it says, after the announcement and the striking down and so forth of Zacharias, after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and she hid herself five months. So from the point that she realized she was pregnant, she went into seclusion, saying, Thus the Lord hath dealt with me in the days when he looked on me to take away my reproach among the people. Now in the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth.

Well, is this the sixth month of the Jewish calendar, or what? Well, given the context, if she has been in seclusion for five months, then in the sixth month that would be measured in terms of Elizabeth's pregnancy. It's the sixth month of her pregnancy. Therefore, we cannot calculate the time of year from this.

Gabriel is sent to a virgin betrothed to a man. You know this story. She saw him.

She's troubled. He speaks. You will conceive in your womb.

Bring forth a son. You shall call his name Jesus. All of that.

Mary says, Behold, maid servant of the Lord, let it be to me according to your word. The angel departed from her. Then she goes and visits Elizabeth.

And we can see that this sixth month of pregnancy makes sense, because by the time she packs up and travels down to Jerusalem from Nazareth to see her cousin Elizabeth, when Mary leaves and comes down, anybody remember how far it is from Nazareth to Jerusalem? It's 90 miles. It's a 90-mile journey. So on foot, if you figure you're traveling 10 miles a day at, let's say you travel maybe six hours of the day, breaking for meals and various other things, or maybe eight hours a day, it's generally going to be about a three-day journey after all is said and done.

You remember they were nearly home later when they discovered that Jesus is missing at the age of 12. He's been down at the temple, and they leave to go home. And they get two days down the road, and they say, Oh, wait a minute.

Where's our son? And they have to go back. So it's probably about a three-day journey. And so she goes down to Jerusalem, because this is where Zacharias obviously lives.

He's a member of the priesthood. That's where Elizabeth lives. So she goes down there.

So evidently they live south of Jerusalem, and he commutes in to do his priestly duties. And this reminds us of the fact that the family of Mary has connections up in Galilee, Cana of Galilee, for example, in Nazareth, that area, and also down in Judah in the vicinity of Bethlehem. This is important, what we're going to look at in a minute.

So she can go up north, and there's a lot of family up there. She can come down south, and there's a lot of family down there. And you remember the greeting, and the babe leaps in the womb.

This means John has not yet been born. So this is somewhere between the fifth month and the ninth month, and our sixth month. So this is probably late sixth month, early seventh month.

And babies can start kicking and making ruckus, as those of you who have had babies know. In the last couple of months, they can become quite active, and the babe leaps in the womb. So then Mary gives the Magnificat, as it is called, in 46 through 55 of that chapter.

Then Elizabeth gives birth, and you have the rest of the chapters taken up with the conclusion of the John the Baptist's birth story. Then in chapter 2, this is where we pick up here. And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.

This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. All went to be registered, everyone to his own city. Joseph went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child.

And that's where Jesus is born. Well, there is a notice about this census of Quirinius. Remember, at this time, the province of Syria includes Israel, includes the land.

So Quirinius is going to issue this decree and say, everybody needs to have the census, and that's why he is mentioned. It sounds like, well, Syria, why would anybody care about a census in Syria? But this is the Roman province of Syria, and it encompasses Israel. Well, according to secular history, in fact, according to Josephus, the census of Quirinius occurs in a certain year.

We know from the Bible that who is in charge of the local region there? Herod. And when does Herod the Great die? According to most accounts, based on an eclipse and one thing and another, he is thought to have died circa 4 B.C. The problem is, Josephus records a census by Quirinius in the year 6 A.D. So if the census of Quirinius is in 6 A.D., and this is when Joseph and Mary come down to Bethlehem, then how can Herod be around? Not only that, but as we'll see, the events concerning Herod that are mentioned in the gospel do not comport with the time of Jesus' birth. They are later.

The wise men don't comment his birth, as you may be aware. So let's talk about this a little bit. The scholars will therefore argue, well, these are made-up events.

Nobody was really checking that closely in 80 to 120 A.D. when they say the gospels were written, and by this time it was sort of out of living memory and so on. Well, without going into a great deal of detail, because there are other things to cover, Josephus mentions a census by Quirinius in 6 A.D. To say that that is the only one that he ever accomplished, suppose this is a census. The United States does not do a census every year.

How often does the United States perform a census? All of us native-born American citizens, Debbie knows, every ten years. U.S. federal census is conducted every ten years. If you do any genealogy work, you'll find this out.

There's an 1850 census, there's an 1860 census, there's an 1870 census. It's on the whole year. The next one will be done... Did any of you all fill out your census deal back in the year 2000? There'll be another one coming up in about a couple more years.

Anyway, think about this. If Quirinius is doing them every so often, then there could easily have been a census. The dates are fuzzy about when he became governor.

He was in a position of power before he actually became governor. To cut a long story short, there is really no conflict. This census obviously is earlier than the one that Josephus talks about.

That's all there is to it. People who try to make a big issue out of Quirinius not actually becoming governor fully until after the time of the birth of Christ and so on are pushing points to try to make a conflict. If you do any research on this, you will run across the idea that Matthew and Luke conflict.

Because Quirinius is too late, Herod is too early for these two to coincide. The details here, it's important to recognize because how many of us put out nativity scenes? I've got a big one on the mantle, you may have seen it. Got all the shepherds on one side, got all the wise men on the other.

They're all coming, the camels are kneeling, here's the gold frankincense and myrrh, here's the babe in the manger, it's a stable, there's hay, and the cattle are lowing, the poor baby waits and so on. Here's the thing. I want to talk a little bit about the vocabulary that is used to describe the scene when you have no room at the inn.

Sticking with Luke's account here in chapter 2, there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night. We've talked about shepherds because Jesus is talking about it in John, our Sunday study, and how they would make a temporary enclosure in which they could put their sheep when they're out pasturing them at night, rather than running them all the way back down to the main corral, they would leave them out in the hills and then they would sleep in the gateway and they become the door of the sheep. Well, the shepherds are watching their flock by night, so they've probably got their campfire going where they can see the gateway to the enclosure where all the sheep safely lay and so on.

And an angel of the Lord stood before them and the glory of the Lord shone round about them and they were so afraid, they were greatly afraid. Where is the angel? Where do you typically see the angel represented? Up in the sky, radiating, flying. This angel apparently has no wings, this angel is not levitated, it is not flying.

Where is the angel? The angel is standing before them. It is as though someone just walked into the glow of the fire. It is a messenger from God standing before them and the glory of the Lord shone around them and they were greatly afraid.

There is suddenly a glow that is not coming from the fire. So the angel says, do not be afraid. Look, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.

There is born to you this day in the city of David. Now, at what season of the year is there pasturage on the hillsides to where the shepherds would have the flocks out and be grazing them during the day and keeping them out in the fields at night instead of up. It is not the dead of winter.

Nothing to eat out there in the dead of winter. From that time and before until this, this takes place in the spring, the summer and the early fall months, not in the winter. They do not take the sheep out in the dead of winter, so this is evidently not December.

As I have said before, if I had to guess, I would say that this is probably in the time of the former rains. It is not able to be narrowed down much further than that. But there is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

This will be a sign. You will find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, which are basically strips of cloth that are used for various things, including wrapping the dead, lying in a manger. The word for manger is a word that does not mean a man-made cross-legged wooden trough, as you generally see.

They did not have and did not use such a thing in the days of Jesus. This is normally and usually a stone-cut trough, either in the side of a cave or at the side of a house. There were even houses that had these inside in the courtyard.

If you had a small number of animals, if you just had a couple of goats or a cow or two, people even had these in their... And if they had a double-storied house, which many of them did, the wealthier people had an upper and a lower floor, they would tend to live and eat and do things on the upper floor. And the downstairs was sort of like... It's kind of like the houses that they have, that I'm beginning to see pictures of around St. Louis, where they build them on the backside of a hill. So you walk in at ground level in the front door, but your back door has a veranda or a porch, and the hill has sloped away, and you can actually drive around and go in to the basement or the downstairs garage.

They did these sort of things in the hills. You remember Jerusalem is on hills, and Judea is a very hilly country, and they would have houses of this nature, where even if they're on relatively flat ground, there would be a lower floor that was used for more utility general purposes, and then there would be an upper room. And in the lower floor, many times they would have places where a visitor who had come on a donkey or whatever could tie their animal and feed it while the visitor went upstairs to be received and entertained in hospitality and so on.

So there is nothing indicated by the presence of a manger to say that this is a stable. There is nothing to prove that it is a cave. These types of troughs are found in caves that are used for stables, but they are also found in dwellings, in homes.

Now it says that they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the babe lying in this trough. And when they had seen him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this child. All those who heard it marveled at the things.

Mary kept them close to her heart, and the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen as it was told to them. That's the Luke account. Now flip over to Matthew.

You have the account of the announcements. First of all, the genealogy. The birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise.

He finds out that Mary is with child, and an angel comes and says, Do not be afraid to take her as your wife. She will bring forth. And where is our...I missed it.

Oh yeah, back in Luke chapter 2 verse 7, I forgot to point out. She brought forth the firstborn son, wrapped him in swaddling clothes, laid him in a manger, because there was no room for

them in the inn. Because there was no room for them in the inn.

The word translated inn does not mean inn. We get the idea that they came to the hotel. Well, the hotel was full.

You can go sleep in the garage where we keep the transportation. And so they went to the stable. But here's an interesting fact.

What happens the night before Jesus is betrayed and arrested and crucified? What takes place? Where do they go? He and his disciples go where? To the upper room. The word translated upper room is the same word as translated inn here. It's the same word.

In fact, there are places in the New Testament where an inn is specifically referred to, and it's a different word. But this is the word that means upper room. It would appear that Mary and Joseph came down south and were planning to stay at their relatives, but because of Mary's condition, because she is about to give birth, and the house of their relatives where they were going to stay, there in Bethlehem, is full.

There's a lot more people. Many of us have been in this position even recently. You go to a house and there's a lot of people there.

And, well, where are you going to sleep? Well, I'll go sleep here on this couch or on the floor or wherever because it's really full. Well, they got there and it was really full. And Mary, there was not a convenient place for her to have this child.

Evidently, there were other relatives, perhaps with children around. It just was not conducive. But there was no room in the upper floor.

And so it is every bit as likely that they were at the house of a reasonably wealthy relative who had a two-story dwelling. There wasn't room for them in the upper quarters where meals were shared, where fellowship was maintained, and so on. And so they went to the lower floor, probably where their donkey was tied.

I'm sure that Joseph did, in fact, bring Mary down on a donkey, as you often see it pictured, because in her condition she couldn't very well walk 90 miles. And so their animal and perhaps others were tethered down on the ground floor of this house, and that's where they went, and they used the built-in trough for the child. It could also be that it's in the more traditional view, but we don't know.

But the vocabulary tends to suggest against them planning to stay at a hotel and the hotel being full, or the innkeeper saying, oh, go away, don't bother me, and all of this. As I said, this is the word used for upper room. And if you think about this, at the beginning of his life, there is no room in the upper room for the Lord Jesus.

But at the end of his life, he is in the upper room with his disciples. His first night in this world,

he's not in the upper room. But his last night in this world, he is in the upper room.

And there is another of those interesting brackets that is sort of food for meditation. And I would say more about that, but there's a couple of other things I want to point out. The third thing is the attacks that are made on the biblical account, trying to say that Matthew and Luke couldn't get the story straight.

And they base this on the fact that Luke focuses on the shepherds. Matthew doesn't mention the shepherds. Matthew mentions the wise men.

So if you turn over to Matthew, as I had you do a minute ago in chapter 2, basically in verse 25 of chapter 1, Joseph goes ahead and took to him his wife, and did not know her until she had brought forth her firstborn son, and he called his name Jesus. And what is atypical of most legendary accounts, they try to say that these are legends and written well after the fact, but if you read the apocryphal gospels, they have all sorts of embellishments. And they love to, if it's a supernatural birth of some sort, why they would just go on and on and on about things that happen.

And what is typical of the Bible is understatement. Here is the virgin birth, shepherds, angels, and so on, and Matthew doesn't even mention it. He says, well, oh, by the way, the child was born.

And then, after Jesus was born in chapter 2, he was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king. Wise men from the east came. And you know that this is magi, magoi in Greek, M-A-G-O-I.

And they said, where is he who has been born king of the Jews? We have seen his star in the east and have come to worship him. Another interesting observation is that this word that is translated east can also mean, the word that describes the east, why is it called the east? When we think of the east, what do we think of? What happens in the east? That's where the sun comes up. When you talk about the movement of the sun and so on, east is only good for the sun coming up.

Once the sun is up, there's nothing special about the east. That's its only real unique quality. Well, the word that is translated east also has the idea of something rising.

We have seen his star rising is another possible understanding of this. And I've pointed out to you many times before, the prophecy of Balaam in the Old Testament that talks about, I see him now but not near, a scepter shall arise, and smite the brow of Moab, and there were constellations associated with countries in ancient times. And these men who are in the region where Daniel had deposited copies of the Old Testament scriptures centuries before, and the prophecies of Daniel were known, and copies of the Old Testament, which could have included the prophecies of Balaam, are all there.

And so these Magoi, evidently, you could easily imagine that a star, a celestial happening,

moved through a constellation. And rather than saying we have seen his star in the east, we have seen this star moving. We have seen this star rising.

It's on the ascendancy. So we have come to find out the king that has arisen. What's particularly interesting to me is they say, where is he who has been born king? They believed that he had just been born, that he was a royal prince or a royal son of some sort, but that he was young.

Something happened. They didn't just say, well, we've calculated the time and the king should be on the scene. They believe, from what they observed in the heavens, that he had recently been born.

Where is he who is born king? We have seen his star and we've come to worship him. He wasn't around, then we saw the star, so we know he has been born. They have come to do homage while he is still an infant.

And if you think about it, you think about mortality rates in the ancient world, you think about intrigues and royal lines, you look at the Caesars and what used to happen to Cleopatra's son and on and on, where there was infanticide and fratricide and all kinds of sides where different ones were killing the heir to the throne. And you think about these magoi who come. They not only recognize that a king has been born, but they have come to worship him.

Since when do you worship a child who is going to be the king? And this is the word for worship. This is the word for doing obeisance to a divine entity. We have come to worship him.

They believe, evidently, in his divine origin and they believe that he is going to live to become the king. Why not wait until he gets crowned and then come and do obeisance and worship? They're wasting no time. They've seen his star and they're coming now.

They believe in him in prospect. And that, of course, is the essence of faith, to believe in something that is not yet seen. And this is a long and arduous journey from where they're coming from, way over in Chaldea, to come all the way there.

And, of course, this is well after Jesus' birth. If they saw his star rising and they say, well, he's been born, this would be a trip that would take months. And this is why, of course, Herod says, I'm going to kill all the children two years old and under.

Because, evidently, when he tries to ascertain at what time the star appeared, he says, well, this was maybe a year and a half ago, so I'll take no chances. I'll kill all the children two years old and under. So this is well after.

So another objection that is raised is that Luke says Mary and Joseph are betrothed and they live and have their dwelling place up in Nazareth, up in Galilee, and they come down to Bethlehem for the census. Matthew seems to believe, because now it's a year and a half later, and where are Mary and Joseph and the child? This is, let's just say, a year and a half after the birth of Jesus. Maybe it's a year after.

Maybe it's six months after. However long after you think it is, it's not just a few days. How long did it take for the census? How long did it take for Mary and Joseph to register? If they were just down for a visit and there wasn't room to stay, this is a year and a half later, let's say? And where are they? They're still in Bethlehem.

Because, remember, Herod says, where is the Christ to be born? They said, well, he's to be born in Bethlehem of Judea. Thus it is written, you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, et cetera. So Herod called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared, and he sent them to Bethlehem and said, go and search carefully for the young child, for the young child, not the infant.

And when you have found him, bring back word to me that I may come and worship him also. When they heard the king, they departed. The star which they had seen in the east went before them until it came and stood over where the young child was.

So this is not just like a Christmas star that showed up for a couple of days and led them, you know, for maybe two or three days, and then this, some kind of way, and this is another big mystery, how did the star lead them? How do you go down streets and alleys and find the place where the child is? Notice it doesn't say where the young child lay. It says where the young child was, because he's not still in the manger. Mary and Joseph are not sitting there kneeling with bright things around their heads.

This is a long time after, and the star leads them not only to the town and to the neighborhood, but right to the place where he is. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy, and when they come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary's mother. They fell down to worship.

They opened their treasure. Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way. So, here's what's interesting to me.

If you read this carefully, if you shed all the traditional trappings, where does it say the wise men went to Bethlehem? Herod inquired, where is the Messiah to be born? And the answer he got was Bethlehem, right? So, he says, okay, you guys go find the child and let me know so I can come worship also. And read it carefully. What does it say? When they heard the king, they departed, and behold, the star which they had seen in the east went before them until it came and stood over where the young child was.

Where are they when the star stops and says, here's the spot? It doesn't say. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. When they had come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary's mother.

They fell into worship. They opened their treasures, gold, frankincense, myrrh. Being divinely warned that they should not return, they depart to their own country another way.

When they had departed, an angel appeared to Joseph. He says, take the young child to Egypt.

Stay there because Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.

So, he arose. He took the young child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt and was there until the death of Herod that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet saying, out of Egypt I have called my son. Then Herod, when he saw he was deceived, was angry, put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts from two years old and under according to the time which he had determined from the wise men.

This two-year-old deal is from the time determined by the wise men. Thus was fulfilled, voices heard in Ramah, lamentation in great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children. When Herod was dead, an angel came to Joseph and says, arise, take the young child, go to the land of Israel.

Those who seek the child's life are dead. He arose, took them, came to the land of Israel. When he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea, instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there.

Being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the region of Galilee and came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets. He shall be called a Nazarene. So, I say all of that to say there is no indication of where Mary and Joseph were when the wise men came and visited.

Might have been Bethlehem, might have been somewhere else in Judea, might have been up in Galilee. He certainly, Joseph does not return through Judea which would have been the normal path because Archelaus is reigning instead of Herod and so he was afraid to go there and so he takes the circuitous route. Now, if he is not going to pass through Judea, what route is he going to take to go back into the land? He's going to follow the path that Moses with the children of Israel followed, Transjordan on the east side, right? And go well past Jericho and Jerusalem, you know, the border, the northernmost border of Judea is right there at Jerusalem, right? And so he's going to get north of that and then he can cross and go on up into Galilee.

May or may not have gone through Samaria but he's going to go up there and cross way upstream rather than going through Judea and he goes back and dwells in Nazareth. So you can, one of my favorite Yogi Berra-isms is you can observe a lot by watching and it's important for us. These are just examples from a very familiar story that has a lot of traditional elements of how careful we have to be when we claim to understand the Word of God and claim to be students of the Word of God that we really do pay attention and live up to corporately our name as a Bible church.

What does the Bible say? Was Jonah swallowed by a whale or was he swallowed by a fish? Was Jesus visited by the wise men in the stable? Did the angels sing on the night of Jesus' birth? There's a whole cantata called The Night the Angels Sang and the Bible doesn't say the angels sang. There was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying Glory

be to God in the highest on earth peace toward men of good volition, good will. There will be peace for those who make the right choice.

So we want to carefully consider and carefully examine like the Bereans, search the scriptures to see if these things are so and just like Israel when Jesus came the first time, tradition and accretion can take place. Barnacles can grow on our understanding of the Word of God. When Jesus comes the second time, when Jesus returns for us, are we going to have an accurate understanding? Will we be able to see Him as Anna and as Simeon and as those shepherds? Will we have clear vision and a clear understanding and will we know what to expect when He returns and when He comes back to earth and slays thousands and blood runs as high as the horse's bridles, are we going to be shocked or are we going to be cognizant and aware? So I like ending a Christmas story on blood running as high as the horse's bridles.

It seems like a fitting place to close and so we'll do so with a word of prayer. Father, thank You for the truth of Your Word. Thank You that if we ask, it is given and if we seek, we find and if we knock, the door is open to us and we pray that as we live out the time that is allotted to us, that God the Holy Spirit will impress the truth of Your Word on our hearts, that we will seek clearly, that we will rightly divide the Word of Truth and in doing so, it will transform us, it will renew us and it will thoroughly equip us for every good work.

We pray that during this holiday season, our lives will reflect Your glory, that we will be as seasoning and as salt and that You will use us to be a blessing to each other and to those who find us shining as lights in the world, that they observe and glorify You. We ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.