

Nativity Special 09-12-27b

Let's resume our study now. We're looking at the real nativity scene. And looking at the actual situation that faced Mary and Joseph, there was a lot of uncertainty, there was a lot of scandal, and the logistics necessary to get down to Judea and to Bethlehem with a pregnant wife.

And if you look at Luke chapter 2, you find that they were shoehorned in with a lot of other people. And one of the things that is not commonly noted in reviewing the Christmas story, you have the thing, I've seen countless greeting cards, I think I even made one once, you know, here's Mary and Joseph going, she's with child, she's on the donkey, and there's a star in the background, a little silhouette, they're going along down south to get to Judea. And they arrive in Bethlehem, and they're knocking on the doors, and no, we're full up.

And they go somewhere else, no, we're full up. And they, well, you can go out in the stall and have your baby out there in the hay. And that is not the situation.

Take a look quickly at Luke chapter 2. Came to pass in those days, decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be registered. And by the way, that word decree is interesting. You know what it is in Greek? Dogma.

It was a dogma. And this was like a standing order. It doesn't mean, oh, the decree came out, all right, everybody, this was like a policy.

And it was being implemented in different regions at different times. And they say, oh, we can't find any historical record. Well, boo on you.

Luke is a historical record. And he says there was one. So there was.

It was a dogma from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was a census for tax purposes. And among all of the other complications, think about this.

My mother got pregnant and the nine months was up near the end of December. And so my father was stationed in Barstow at that time at the Marine Corps base there. And so he took my mother out to Calico.

There's a ghost town, an old Western mining and cowboy camp type of thing out there. And so he took my mother out there and walked all up and down to exercise can bring on labor. And sure enough, she had me on December 31st.

And my dad got to claim me as an exemption for the entire year, even though I was born on the very last day. Well, you think about Joseph, he's going down there to be registered. And instead of having to pay tax for two people, he's going to end up having to pay tax for three because he's got this unexpected boon, you know, this child that he wasn't really looking for.

Curse to me, but look at all went to be registered. Everyone to his own city. Joseph also went up

from Galilee out of the city of Nazareth into Judea to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem because he was of the house and lineage of David.

We know this from what Gabriel said, what the angel of the Lord, we assume it was Gabriel doesn't actually say when he, when he appears to him in Matthew and says, look, you know, take the, take Mary as your wife and calls him son of David. And so both gospels confirm that he was of the house and lineage of David. And that's important because Jesus is essentially the adopted son of Joseph.

And in those days, adoption is as good as birth for legal inheritance purposes. Caesars were forever adopting somebody and, you know, passing along their ruling rights and so on. Men would adopt whoever they wanted to be their heir and their successor.

And they didn't even have to be a blood relation. And since Joseph is not Jesus actual father, but he obviously adopted him as his son. And so Jesus inherits on the legal side, entitlement to the throne of David through his legal father, Joseph.

And then Mary is also, we get that alternate genealogy. She is descended through Nathan and Joseph is descended through Solomon. And so you have those two lineages given in Luke and in Matthew, but all went to be registered.

Joseph went up to Bethlehem. He was the house of lineage to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife who was with child. And we've already seen how that took place.

So it was now look at verse six, this I've never heard anybody point out, but look at what the Bible says in verse six. What does it say? So it was that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. They had been in Bethlehem for days, weeks, a month, month and a half, however long they had been there some time they went down to wait.

You know, this takes time. They didn't have computers. They didn't have all of the technology to, you know, there's a census coming up this next year, April of this coming year, 2010, every 10 years in the United States, you have a census and the census is coming up in 2010 in about four months.

And they develop a lot of data out of that as well. So they had to wait, they had to stick around because, you know, the census takers having to go around manually, they're having to collate, they're, you know, scratching on pot sherds and who knows how they're taking all of their data. And then they've got to go back and collate all this, be sure they got everybody before they can go home.

So they're having to sit there for weeks and perhaps months because the census is scanning through. And so while they were there, she came to full term and it was time to have the child. So they're not arriving late at night at the last minute, looking for a place to have the baby.

They've been staying there. But what's the problem? Well, as has been pointed out by secular

naysayers, oh, wow, you know, how can this even be possible that everybody had to go to his own city to be registered? David's got hundreds of descendants. Yeah, exactly.

That's why the city is brim full. Joseph and Mary are staying with relatives, no doubt, but they're shoehorned in with several other people. There's probably several people all stay in the same room.

Well, where do you go for privacy to have a child? You know, it's one thing to have a place to sleep. People do this on the holidays, get these air mattresses and pallets and sleeping bags and put the kids on the floor. And this one will sit and sleep on the couch.

And this one's here, there and yon. But imagine that situation. We've had a house full up at my folks where their people are sleeping every place there's a flat surface.

Well, that's fine. But what if somebody is about to have a baby? Where are you going to do that? How many people are you going to clear out of a room so that all the necessary things can take place? You know, you've got to have a little bit of privacy. There just wasn't any room in the house they were staying to go through this childbirth process.

You got little kids and teenagers and all kinds of people shoehorned in there. And labor takes hours. You don't know when the baby is coming.

And so they, well, you can't do this here. You know, discommode everybody's standing outside, waiting, you know, hour after hour, checking their sundials or whatever. How much longer is it going to be? So they said we need a place where she can have some kind of privacy.

So they made a space out where the animals were kept. Might have been a cave. Might have been a stable.

Don't know exactly. But that's in Bethlehem. There's hilly country and there might have been nearby.

You know, there's some information to the effect that it might have actually been a cave that was rigged up to shelter animals from storms and bad weather and so on. Whatever it was, that's where they went so that she could be apart. And she wasn't just there and here's Joseph kind of standing around holding the donkey and all of a sudden, wah, and here's a child inside.

There was the usual help. There were women, midwife and attendants and family members. She was not alone when she had the child.

They just had to do it apart. And so the whole thing we have in the nativity, where's the midwife? Where's the other women? It was just the place that was apart. They weren't well off.

They didn't have a house with an upper room like Jesus is going to share with the final meal with his disciples. They weren't wealthy people. They weren't staying with wealthy people and there wasn't a nice spare room where they could spread out and do this.

They were just shoehorned in and so they went off. But there were people to help. She didn't do this on her own.

And there was no star over the cave or the stable on this night. There's no star. The angels didn't appear to the shepherds and say, follow the star.

And there's a wonderful old Negro spiritual that gets sung around Christmas time. It's on one of my favorite Christmas records. Take good heed to the angels, rise up shepherds and follow.

Look at the star and go to Bethlehem. Well, there was no star for the shepherds. They had to go find by another means.

And I don't know how they ascertained. They probably said, hey, anybody know that there's a woman that had to have a baby in a stable? I said, oh yeah. Down the road there, that Joseph clan boy, they are full to the brim.

And they had to put the pregnant woman off with the oxen and so on. And so the shepherds went and found it. But there was no star.

There was no star over Bethlehem on the night of Jesus birth. Just so you know, I've got, you know, the nativity scene like everybody else. And it didn't happen.

It wasn't there as we'll see shortly. But look at verse six. So it was while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered.

She had been there for days and the days were completed and it was time. And so she brought forth her firstborn son, wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them in the house, in the house. It wasn't an inn.

It wasn't a, you know, tavern with upstairs rooms and we've got no room and the barkeep there with the towel over his arm. I'd always kind of, you know, room, no room at the inn. This is no room at the house where they were staying.

That's all it means. So we talked about the challenge and it's as though, you know, they're having to figure these things out on their own. God didn't miraculously waft them to some heavenly circumstance.

They had practicalities. They had practical problems they had to solve for this child to come. And there were no angels coming into the house slash inn saying, get out of here.

Don't you know the Messiah is being born? Who are you? You know, go sleep in the street. You go sleep in a manger. This is, this is Holy Virgin Mother Mary and she's about to have her holy child and look at these halos and look at all these angels and get out of here.

You know, we're clearing out. None of that. The people stayed in the house.

Mary, the mother of the Messiah, went to the animal place to have this. There was no divine intervention involved. They had to solve practical problems on their own.

A lot of people probably said, well, it serves you right. You know, you got pregnant out of wedlock here and yeah, you go down to the state. We're not moving for you.

You know, we heard about the timing of this whole deal and you all weren't married yet. And yeah, you know, I heard rumors that somebody said there was angels and dreams involved and you go down the road. We don't want to discommode ourselves on your behalf.

Who knows what all got said, but the upshot of it was that they were down the street or up the road or out on the hillside where the cave was, wherever it is that they foddered and sheltered the animals. That's where she went and nobody put themselves out and said, Hey, I'll take my kids and we'll go pitch a tent. They had to go down the street, pregnant and all.

And the women who came to help, you know, did they do so grudgingly? Did they do so with a good attitude? Did they understand or not? We don't know. We're not given that information, but it happened in as lowly circumstances as you can imagine. And that part of the Christmas story is, is valid.

It was not a, a wonderful, uh, well-provided scene. They just had to make do. But what were the provisions that God made? God gave them information.

Gabriel came to Mary and told her why this circumstance was happening. The angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph and said, don't be afraid to take Mary. And so they both got the word of God in advance and they had to believe it and they had to trust it.

And they had to live in the light of it for the next year. As she went through the pregnancy, as they made this trip down to Bethlehem, whatever explanations they had to make to their distant relatives down there, who probably had already heard that there was some kind of a cloud over the whole marriage and pregnancy and, you know, kind of looking askance, well, but you're still kin folks and, you know, okay. And, you know, um, the second affirmation and provision was the Zacharias and Elizabeth scenario.

Because when Mary went to visit Elizabeth in the sixth month of her pregnancy, after she had already heard, Gabriel said, you go see Elizabeth. She said, let it be to me according to your word. And then she traveled.

She left wherever she was and went and found Elizabeth. And you remember that story back in Luke where, uh, you have the, the, uh, babe leaping in the womb and Elizabeth, uh, and by the way, Mary stayed there. She went in the sixth month and she stayed there until John was born.

So the first part of Mary's pregnancy, she just gets out of town and goes and stays with Elizabeth. So if you remember, she arose in Luke 139, went to the hill country with haste, went to the hill country to a city of where Judah. Mary went from wherever she was down to Judah

because of course, Zachariah being a priest has to live in the burbs, has to live near Jerusalem so that he can go up and do his priestly duties.

He's, he is of the house of Levi. And apparently Elizabeth and her family are perhaps from the tribe of Judah in some fashion because Mary is certainly related to Elizabeth. So she went to a city of Judah and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth.

It happened when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb. This is Luke 1 41. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy spirit.

Now, how can you tell there's no tongue of fire on her head? Uh, how, how do you know that she's filled with the Holy spirit because of what she says? She was filled with the Holy spirit. Then she spoke with a loud voice. She didn't walk up and hug Mary and whisper in her ear.

Blessed are you among women. She shouted. Mary walks in and says, hi Elizabeth, long time no see.

And Elizabeth gets this kick in the abdomen from her child. And she's filled with the Holy spirit and she prophesies. What's interesting about this is that she's a woman.

Most of the prophets, certainly the writing prophets in Israel were men. You hear about Holden and various ones, you know, the daughters of various guys are said to be prophetesses, but you don't typically get any lengthy prophecies from them recorded in scripture. But here's a prophecy and it is woman to woman.

And there is a prophecy in the old Testament that says, I'm going to do a new thing in the earth. A woman will encompass a man. And it is an oblique reference to this whole event and incursion of God.

And, and it is unexpected. No priest, no elder, no Pharisee would be impressed with this meeting or give it any credence whatsoever. If God is going to announce, if God is going to confirm, if God is going to, to intrude himself into the affairs of men, he's going to do it with men.

This is not public. They're not on the steps of the temple. There's not a great public spectacle made.

The angel that appeared to Zachariah appeared to him where only Zachariah could see him. Gabriel shows up in the Holy place, but in front of the altar of incense, Zachariah can't confirm this to anybody. He doesn't get any help in people not thinking he's a nutcase.

That he's had some kind of a, you know, mental infarction of some kind. And that he, you know, now he's, maybe they thought he had a stroke. He couldn't speak.

He said he had a vision. He's trying to write this stuff down. Elizabeth believes him, but all the other people say, oh yeah, right.

Well, you know, obviously you bumped your head on the golden altar or something in there, you old geezer. And you come out, can't talk and, you know, ranting about angels and sons and your wife getting pregnant and so on. You know, people easily dismiss this sort of thing, but she says, blessed are you among women.

This is the rest of the, you know, hail Mary full of grace. Blessed art thou among women, blessed is the fruit of your womb. Of course, Catholics tack on his name.

I don't think Elizabeth knew his name at this point. Why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? Now, Gabriel had said a lot of things to Zachariah and Elizabeth got the message and she has her rebuke removed. You know, she said back up early in the chapter, thus the Lord has dealt with me in the days when he looked on me to take away my reproach among people.

And it echoes Hannah and Sarah and some of the other ladies, even Rachel, who never thought that they would conceive and bear children and God visited them in a miraculous way. But there's no indication that she knew who the mother of the Lord was going to be. But when the Holy Spirit comes upon her, she recognizes in Mary right off the bat that this is the, Gabriel didn't say, oh, by the way, you know, Elizabeth's cousin Mary is going to be the we have no record of that, but she recognizes her.

And Mary knows that Elizabeth has conceived, but Elizabeth, up to this point, we have no knowledge that she was told anything about Mary, but she recognizes it. And this is a confirming sign that as soon as Mary walks in, Elizabeth, who's been in the hill country and has been out of touch, has hidden herself away as incommunicado and incognito up there. As soon as Mary walks in, she knows the babe leaps in her womb.

The Holy Spirit comes upon her and she says, what is, why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? Now, those who say that there's no indication of the deity of Christ outside the gospel of John, you know, the naysayers, the Bart airmen's and the, you know, all these other attackers of the integrity of scripture say, well, you can't find the divinity of Jesus anywhere, except in the gospel of John, Matthew, Mark, and Luke know nothing of Jesus as the divine son of God. What does Elizabeth say here? The mother of who? The mother of my Lord should come to me for indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. Blessed, look at verse 45, blessed is she who believed for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord.

Elizabeth hasn't even heard the things that were told her yet. Mary just walked in the door and Elizabeth gives her this prophetic affirmation. This is provision.

Mary and Joseph are living through a very difficult circumstance, but within their family, within their extended family, are other faithful believers. Zechariah has a hard time at the beginning and the angel rebukes him and takes away his speech for a while because he was a little slow on the uptake, but he's going to come around. And when it comes time to name the child and

he says, his name is John, he writes it down and people say, there's nobody in your family named John.

Zechariah says, look, his name is John. Get over it. That time of speechlessness is all he needed to get his ducks lined up.

And then Mary gives out with this great poetic song that she had composed in meditation and in thinking about the things that have been revealed to her. And she shares this with her cousin Elizabeth. And that's why you have it here.

Mary said, my soul, she didn't just come up with this on the spot. She's had some time to meditate. But as you go on, we studied this in a different Christmas study.

So I'm going to skip that. But notice verse 56. Remember, it's the sixth month of her pregnancy when Mary comes to visit her up in the hills and Mary remained with her about three months.

So if it's in the sixth month of her pregnancy and Mary stayed with her three months, when did Mary leave? Mary stayed long enough to see the birth of John. She saw the baby John, the same baptizer that Jesus is going to meet down at the Jordan. His mother saw him born, saw him as probably helped out, probably helped deliver him.

She stayed there three months up in the hills. And of course, this is the first three months of her own pregnancy. And of course, in typical fashion, you have this reversal where 56 is given before 57, because you conclude the Mary story and concentrate on Elizabeth and Zachariah down below.

Elizabeth's full time came to be delivered. She brought forth a son. Neighbors and relatives heard how the Lord had shown great mercy to her.

They rejoiced with her. And you have the story of the naming. You have the prophetic words of Zachariah.

And then in verse 80, the child grew and became strong in spirit and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel. People have such a hard time. They go to Genesis and they say, look, there's two different creation accounts.

This is sequential in here in chapter two. You have one thing in chapter one, you have something else. And it's all confused in two authors.

And notice here just in passing in Luke, verse 80, John the Baptist, the child grew and became strong in spirit. He was in the deserts until the day of his manifestation to Israel. That takes you all the way up until John is 30 something, right? Then you back up in chapter two.

It came to pass in those days that a decree went out and you have the birth of Jesus. You've taken John all the way up to the day of his manifestation to Israel. And then you back up to tell a different part of the story.

We had Mary staying for three months, going home, and then you back up and you have the birth of John. It's a common feature of Semitic narrative to complete a theme or to story that is in view and then to back up and tell a different story that may overlap or go back and then give more detail of something that has been given in summary form. It is a common, standard, well-known feature of Semitic narrative.

So don't pay any attention when naysayers come and say, oh, the Bible is a poorly patched together set of stories that don't match and don't meet. How many times did God create man and woman? Because you've got Genesis 1 and then Genesis 2, male and female created He them. And then you go back and you get Adam out of the dust of the ground, Eve out of the side.

People who say those things are simply manifesting their lack of knowledge of the way stories were told in the ancient world. And you don't come with 21st century modern expectations and put them on 3,000-year-old, 2,000-year-old ancient Near Eastern narratives. It's foolish.

And there are even people who know better, like Dr. Ehrman, who do it anyway because it pleases the ear of a population who is anxious to find a way to dismiss the Bible. And he plays into that when he knows better, which to me is not only disingenuous, it is consciously deceptive. He knows better than to make that kind of argument, but it plays so well and is so effective he uses it anyway.

And I say shame on anybody that does that. You have an example of it here. But here's my point.

This was a difficulty. This wasn't easy for Joseph. It wasn't easy for Mary.

And they had to do a lot of things for themselves. They had to figure out how to get down into Judea for the census. They had to figure out a place to stay.

They had to cope with lack of logistics. God put this burden on them. And what's the upside of this? What does Joseph get out of this deal except relocation and hardship and loss of reputation and people looking askance at him? What's in it for Mary? It kind of reminds you of what God told Eve in the garden.

In sorrow you will bring forth children. She wasn't surrounded. They didn't have a big shower for Mary saying, oh, how wonderful.

What a great expectation. It was a hardship. It was a dismal thing.

She went away for three months just to get away from the community. And when she comes back, three, four months along, you start showing. And now they've got some ways to disguise it.

But there's no point in delaying the inevitable. She's going to end up with a child and people

can do the math. And it's just going to be a hardship all the way around in the community and everybody they know.

But you have Gabriel's message to Zechariah and to Elizabeth in Luke 1. You have Gabriel talking to Mary herself. You have Elizabeth giving this confirming sign and recognition to Mary here in Luke 1. And you have the angel to Joseph in Matthew 1. God gives his word. There's nothing tangible.

There's nothing provable. People have said, well, how do you know the baby kicked? You just have to take Elizabeth's word for that. Well, yes, you do.

And you have to take Elizabeth's word and Mary's word that there was this recognition that passed between them. Only people who know Mary and who know Elizabeth and know their faith and their belief are going to take their word. Anybody else, who's going to believe Joseph when he says an angel appeared to him? Only somebody who knows Joseph well.

Only somebody of like mind. Only somebody willing to accept the word of God and recognize it when they hear it. It's unprovable.

You can't win an argument. You can't silence a critic with any of this information. But to those who have a receptive heart and a desire to know the things of God, it rings true.

They recognize it for what it is, but that's a very small group. And to those who are outside, it's easy to rebuke and to criticize and to be negative and to have an air of supercilious, arrogant superiority and looking down and casting aspersions and spreading gossip and rumors and speculations about, well, how did she get pregnant? And all surrounding this is very negative. And it's a great difficulty.

I don't see how Mary or Joseph could look at this as a blessed event. It was a hardship. And it just goes on from there.

But she has the child. And as a further confirming sign, out of nowhere, shepherds show up. These are men who were looking for the deliverance of Israel.

And the angels come and announce it to them. They're in the lowest stratum. It would have been one thing if scribes and Pharisees or emissaries from the Council of Seventy from the Sanhedrin had come and made big obeisance or whatever.

What is the confirmation that comes to Mary after the child is born? Shepherds from nowhere say, a messenger told us that we would find the hope and insider information. This is from an unexpected source. And it's a sign, it's a comfort that God, they haven't heard anything from God in quite some time.

Mary hasn't seen Elizabeth in half a year. Haven't been any more dreams and signs and angelic appearances. They've just had to work through this for weeks and months.

But after the child is born and they say, well, you know, God didn't even make arrangements for us to be indoors. But then here come the shepherds. And they say, we have heard from God, from God's messengers.

And we have come to worship the coming Messiah. They believe the word and they come and they find it just as the angel told them. And you can imagine the fellowship of strangers on that night that they weren't getting from their family and they weren't getting from their friends.

But here are these lowliest of the lowly. And yet you think about it, what was David's occupation of all the possible visitors? It ties them back a thousand years to David himself. And there's that great symmetry.

And that's a confirmation and a comfort that God is still actively involved and is watching over them. And so as you continue in Luke's account, the angels go and the shepherds appear. Then the shepherds return glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen as it was told them.

Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. That's 19 and 20 of Luke chapter 2. Then in verse 21, a week goes by, no more supernatural things. They spent another week there.

Mary's recovered from the birth. The child is healthy. When eight days were completed for the circumcision of the child, his name was called Yeshua, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

This by the way, is how we know that it was Gabriel that appeared to Joseph because it doesn't say the angels. Remember, Mary and Joseph were given the name Yeshua to christen the child, christen. The name given by the angel singular.

So it's the same angel that appeared to them both before he was conceived in the womb. When the days of her purification, according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. As it is written in the law of the Lord, every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord.

And all this Catholic stuff that Jesus didn't actually open Mary's womb and the perpetual virginity and all that. Excuse me, but in verse 23, every male who opens the womb shall be called holy. And you can't have this magical passing through unchanged.

The Catholics have got this weird thing that Jesus invisibly passed out of her body and that she was still, you know, nothing changed. Well, it wouldn't fulfill scripture if that were the case. Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord and offered the sacrifice, according to what it is said, a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons.

They were not well and this was the poor person's offering. Now, here is the confirmation again. Verse 25, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon.

This man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel and the Holy Spirit was upon him. This is aside and apart from anything that happened to Mary, Joseph, Shepherds, anybody else. He was waiting for the and his devotion and his obedience and his love for God.

God had revealed to him by the Holy Spirit. Notice this is the Holy Spirit on a man before Pentecost, before the glorification of Jesus. Holy Spirit not yet given, Christ not yet glorified, yet the Holy Spirit is on him.

The Holy Spirit was on Elizabeth when she prophesied. He was on him and it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah, the Lord's Christ. So, he came by the Spirit into the temple.

No doubt he frequented the temple as a devout man, but he came especially at this time and on this day. You can imagine the milling throngs in Jerusalem and all the crowds of people coming and going. When the parents brought the child Jesus to do for him according to the custom of the law, Simeon took him up in his arms and blessed God.

How did Simeon know it was him? Out of all of these people, probably all kinds of babies being dedicated, all kinds of sacrifices coming and going, milling throng, God the Holy Spirit led. How do people meet? How do people become acquainted? How do we find like-minded believers for fellowship and for encouragement and for affirmation, speaking the truth to one another in love? God does it. It's a work of God's Holy Spirit.

We need to be patient. We need to watch and pray and let God do his work. When the time is right, he will lead people to the right place and the right time and they will meet.

It doesn't matter if you're thinking of dating and marriage or you're thinking of fellowship or you're thinking, where can I find encouragement and fellowship? Leave it to God's Holy Spirit. This is how God works in the Old Testament age and in the New Testament age. It is a work of God's Spirit.

You think, I'm old, I'm blind, I'm decrepit, I'm leaning on a staff, I'm staggering around here waiting for the consolation of Israel. How am I ever going to find it? No problem. God the Holy Spirit led him to the temple on the day and in the milling throng, he had no problem at all.

How did that happen? It's a work of God's Spirit. He walked right up, took the child in his arms, knew him just like that, and blessed God and said, Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace according to your word. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel.

Joseph and his mother marveled at those things which were spoken of him. What a great encouragement. Wouldn't you marvel in that situation, having gone through everything they've gone through, coming in, being obedient to the law of Moses, they're still following God's word.

They don't say, well, you know, he's special. I don't have to do the normal thing. He's special.

You know, people think that they're a special case, that the word of God doesn't apply. Well, I'm unusual. You don't get any more unusual than this child and this situation, and yet they are following to the letter the law of Moses.

Circumcision on the eighth day, days of purification completed, bringing the appropriate sacrifices as their means allowed, and out of nowhere, out of the crowd comes this old, old gentleman and takes the child in his arms and blesses God and says these words. And we would marvel too. Marvel not only at this extraordinary circumstance, but the things that were said.

Simeon knows who this child is, a man they've never seen. He's got to make the introductions afterward. Oh, by the way, my name is Simeon.

Marvel at those things that were spoken. Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, behold, this child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel. Notice the fall first and then the rising for a sign which will be spoken against.

Yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul. Also more trouble ahead. They figure, hey, I've already had some piercing.

I've already had this speaking against. That the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed. Who is it that loves God? Who is looking for the fulfillment of his word? Who can recognize the word when they see it and when they hear it? There are those who do and there are those who don't, even in their own household, even in their own family.

The thoughts of many hearts may be revealed. He is destined for the fall and rising. Those who look and reject are going to fall.

Those who look and live, those who look and accept, those who look and recognize, like Elizabeth, like Simeon, are going to be raised up. But it comes at a price. There is a cost.

A sword will pierce through your own soul also. Then look at verse 36, another provision of God, another communication from God. There was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher.

She was of great age and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity. And this woman was a widow of about 84 years. So she had had an early week of years.

One of these days we're going to do an Anna study. I can't tell you how much there is in this little paragraph. I don't have time to do it this morning.

I'm going to be lucky to finish what I started here. This woman was a widow of 84 years who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. Who are the kind of people to whom God reveals his word and his will? Those who are looking, those

who are asking and seeking.

What do you think she was doing with her fasting and prayers night and day? Looking for the face of God, looking for the truth of God. And coming in that instant, no sooner is Simeon handing the child back, then here comes Anna. Coming in that instant, she gave thanks to the Lord and spoke of him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

Who's Anna's circle of acquaintance? Who does she spend her time with when she's not down at the temple and fasting and prayer? She knows everybody in Jerusalem who is looking for redemption. Everybody who has that heart for God. That's her circle of acquaintance.

That's her family and friends. Old, old, old lady. Why does God keep old, old people around? They are the ones, when they are of the faith, who can share the truth of God with those who are looking for redemption in Jerusalem.

It's another affirmation. It's another confirmation. And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city, to their city Nazareth.

The child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him. Notice the whole trip to Egypt is left out in Luke's account. And you think, well, where is the Herod and the slaughter of the infants and the going away and so on? Well, that's not presented in Luke's account.

It doesn't mean it didn't happen. There's plenty of room. There's plenty of time for these things.

There's nothing in Luke's account that conflicts with Matthew. Let me just give you quickly, in the visit of the wise men in Matthew chapter 2, there is another confirmation. After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the king, the Magi, the Magoi in Greek, came from the east to Jerusalem saying, 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.

I will skip many of the details of this. There is a Christmas special that we did back in 2001 that is in the various folder on the church FTP site there. If you want to review all of those details, we covered it in pretty good detail.

The prophecy of Balaam, the scepter that arises in Israel and smites the brow of Moab. This was an astronomical event. I think it was a comet.

A comet is scepter shaped. It looks like a stick in the sky. It would appear and travel across the sky in an arc.

If it was heading generally south, it would make a smaller and smaller arc each night. As the wise men initially left Chaldea and traveled up the following, they would see it initially. They would come to Jerusalem where they would expect the king.

Then in the waning days before this thing disappeared below the horizon, it would be further and further south making a smaller and smaller arc. Bethlehem is due south of Jerusalem, about five miles. As they followed the star, on the last night of its observation just above the horizon, it would be due south.

It would be easy enough, even if it was not a supernatural light, it would come to rest. It would stop arcing in the sky and would be visible on the final night due south. When they came into Bethlehem, here they come and here is the house where the child is.

They came in and worshipped the child. They saw the young child with his mother Mary in verse 11. They fell down and worshipped him.

They opened their treasures. They presented him gold, frankincense and myrrh. Then being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed to their own country another way.

Warned in a dream, that's a provision from God. I'm sure they communicated this before they left. I'm sure they explained their conversations with Herod and so on.

When they had departed, verse 13 of Matthew 2, behold an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. What's the name of Jesus' stepfather? Joseph. What's Joseph in the Old Testament most famous for? The interpreter of dreams.

He has dreams himself. He interprets Pharaoh's dreams. Did Gabriel appear to Mary in a dream? He doesn't say so, but he appears to Joseph in a dream, doesn't he? He appears again in a dream.

The angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph saying, Arise, take the young child, his mother, flee to Egypt, stay there until I bring you word, for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, departed for Egypt and was there until the death of Herod, 4 B.C., that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt I called my son. Herod saw he was deceived by the wise men, put to death all the male children in Bethlehem and all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men.

What did he ask the wise men? What time did the star appear? He figured that was the time of the birth. So Jesus was likely a year old, and to be on the safe side, he says two years old and under. Herod dies in 4 B.C. They have to spend some time in Egypt.

This puts the birth of Jesus probably somewhere in the two years old and under. Even if you allow for a year, you have to also allow for the time that they spend in Egypt, which is some time. How did they survive in Egypt? What's their provision? Well, the wise men brought them treasure, and here's the means of sustenance.

Joseph probably didn't have the budget for a stay away from relatives down in a strange land,

but miraculously here's this bounty from the Magoi, the Magi, and so no doubt this is part of what sustained them on that unexpected time down in Egypt. Provision, protection, communication from God. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah, the weeping and so on.

Now verse 19, when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared, how? In a dream to Joseph in Egypt. How many more beatings over the head do we need to think about Joseph in Egypt and dreams as communication from God? An angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt. You could go back to Genesis and probably find almost the identical phrase, saying, Arise, take the young child and his mother and go to the land of Israel.

For those who sought the young child's life are dead. He arose, took the young child and his mother and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea instead of his father, Herod, he was afraid to go there.

He was going to go back. Why would he go back to Judea if he's from Nazareth? Because they had been living in Judea after the birth of the child. They stayed there.

They stayed in the Bethlehem area well after the birth and the circumcision and the dedication that we just read about. And he was going to go back home. They figured, well, he should be raised here in Judea.

This is the land of David. And he was going to go back there after the sojourn in Egypt. But he was afraid to go there.

And what does it say in 22? Being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the region of Galilee and he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth. And this apparently, based on what it says over in Matthew, is where they were from. He came to their city.

Now, was it their city because they moved there after all of this? Or was it their city because that's where they were betrothed? We don't know. We know that they had family up in Cana of Galilee, but we don't know where they lived. They may have gone to a new town, Nazareth.

We just don't know. He came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth. That it might be fulfilled, he shall be called a Nazarene.

So it was a challenge. It wasn't a greeting card moment. It was tough.

We face challenges all the time, and yet God makes provision. There's provision from his word. There's provision in fellowship.

There's guidance from God, sometimes almost extraordinary guidance. Sometimes it's not easy. Sometimes the circumstances that come to us are very difficult.

And we think, how can this be a part of the plan of God? Well, look at the entry of the Lord Jesus into this world. It was fraught with difficulty. It was fraught with bad opinions.

It was fraught with misunderstandings of people who were not really of the faith. Joseph and Mary were misunderstood. They were castigated.

They were criticized. They were cast out. They had to make their own way.

They were thought of as odd. You had a dream? What? You're going to Egypt? What? But along with these extraordinary tests, there were extraordinary provisions. At the right time and the right place, there was communication from God.

There was strengthening and encouragement and comfort through the fellowship of people of like mind, the shepherds, the wise men, Elizabeth and Zachariah, Simeon, Anna, and the messenger of God himself, who in that day was an angel. And in these days, often the messenger is just another person in our periphery who speaks the truth in love, reminds us of things that maybe were difficult for us to call to mind from Scripture because we're in the thick of it. But God calls us to an extraordinary life, just as he did these people.

And he makes extraordinary provision for us. And it's a wonderful thing to think about. The aftermath of Christmas, the aftermath of the tinsel and the neon and the carols and the presents and the almost secularized celebrations that we have, to remember that it was a momentous time and it called for great faith.

It called for obedience. It called for those who knew God's word and who shared God's word with each other. And in that small inner circle, there was great strength and great provision and great blessing from God, even in the midst of these tremendous adversities.

And this is how Jesus came into the world. And that's how he left the world, ignominious, executed as a criminal, abandoned by those who knew him best. And yet, in and through these things, God affected and accomplished our deliverance and our salvation.

And we are called to be followers of Jesus Christ, to use the same provisions of the spirit and the word to meet our challenges, however hard and seemingly incomprehensible they may be. Look at the beauty of God's plan. It's like the parables that Jesus told.

To those who are outside, it's senseless, but to those to whom it is given, it's blessing, it's revelation, it is comfort and encouragement and strength and direction, guidance, provision. The very same thing. Who has eyes to see? Who has ears to hear? Who has a heart to accept and to understand? The coming of the Lord Jesus sorts.

He has come for the fall and the rise of many, to see what is in the hearts. And that's our daily challenge, to be sure that we are in that positive side, those who humble themselves under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt us in due time. Well, that's our little post-Christmas message for this morning.

Let's close in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the wonderful preservation and illumination of these things in your word. Thank you for the privilege we have of assembling

with believers who appreciate you and appreciate your word and whose very presence and enthusiasm is an encouragement.

We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will minister these things to our hearts and encourage and strengthen us for the challenges that we face, that in our lives and in all things, the Lord Jesus will be glorified as we await his return and our everlasting association with him, all by grace, all by the provision that you have made through him on our behalf. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.