



THE CHRISTMAS STORY



7 Lessons
Learned from
Key People

LEON FONTAINE

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INTRODUCTION

As we get into the Christmas season and celebrate the birth of Jesus, I want to share a special eBook with you.

We're going to take a look at some of the key people in the Christmas story and the principles they can show us. I believe this eBook is going to touch you and your family in a special way this Christmas.

Let's start by getting a new perspective on the wisemen.

THE WISEMEN

Somehow, they knew something stunning was happening—the King of kings was born!

Who were the wisemen? Where did they come from? How did they know what the star meant?

While the Bible doesn't give us all the information, we know they came from the east and that they studied the stars. Whatever they saw in the heavens at that time must have impacted their imaginations in a magnificent way to inspire them to travel such a long distance. **Somehow, they knew something stunning was happening—the King of kings was born!**

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.'

Matthew 2:1-2 (NKJV)

Most people think there were three wisemen. But the Bible only says there were three *gifts*. **It's likely that a whole caravan of wisemen traveled to see Jesus.** Many Nativity scenes also depict them arriving on the exact night of Jesus' birth, but that's not true either. Some scholars believe Jesus would have been somewhere under two years old when they arrived.

And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Matthew 2:11 (NKJV)

Can you imagine Mary and Joseph looking out their front door one day and seeing a massive caravan of brilliant, wealthy, high-ranking men... and all of them were there to see their little toddler, Jesus?

FOLLOW GOD'S GUIDANCE

You can be the wisest and the most brilliant person on the planet, but you still need God's guidance.

What's beautiful about the story of the wisemen is that God led them. He guided them by a star first of all, and He also protected them on their journey. King Herod was secretly planning to kill Jesus, but God warned the wisemen not to return to the king or tell him where Jesus was (Matthew 2:12).

The thing is, you can be the wisest and most brilliant person on the planet, but you still need God's guidance. It doesn't matter how intelligent you are, you'll never reach what God has for you unless you trust Him to lead you.

Jesus says in John 10:14 (NLT), "I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me." As you listen to His voice, He provides a way of escape from danger, leads you to the answers you need and guides you into peace and joy in every area of your life.

Another thing about the wisemen is that they followed the light—in this case, a star.

Just like you use a flashlight to see where you're going, a lamp shows you the best way to go. It helps you avoid tripping in the dark or getting hurt. **The wisemen following the light of a star is a beautiful picture of you and I following God's Word.**

The more you learn the Word, the more accurately you can live your life. Many of us learn things by experience, but experience can be a painful teacher. It's so much better to be guided by the wisdom in God's Word. His principles help us make wise decisions and avoid a world of hurt.

GOD IS LEADING AND PROTECTING YOU

Make sure you turn to Jesus every day, in every decision you make.

God protected the wisemen from harm, but He also protected His plan when He directed them away from King Herod. In the same way, God can bless you and benefit His Kingdom at the same time!

I don't profess to be as smart as the wisemen. If some of the most brilliant men of the then-known world needed God to guide them, then I want to be led by His Word in my life too.

And when you give your life to Christ, you have Holy Spirit living within you—the best guide there is. As the Spirit of truth, He'll teach you, lead you around danger and show you the great paths God has prepared for you (Ephesians 2:10).

This Christmas I want you to know: God is going to lead you and bless you.

Make sure you turn to Jesus every day, in every decision you make. If you haven't yet, invite Jesus into your heart and give Him your life. Then do what the wisemen did—follow the light. Follow God's Word and Holy Spirit's guidance on the inside of you.

Just like God led the wisemen where they needed to go, He's leading you down the best path for your life!

THE ANGELS

Angels are powerful, awe-inspiring beings.

Now, let's talk about a part of the Christmas story that inspired many of the carols we sing today.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: ,Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!'

Luke 2:13-14 (NKJV)

So many people love angels. I know my family does. At this time of year, we've got angels all over the house—on our Christmas tree, on candles and ornaments, you name it.

When we talk about the heavenly host of angels appearing to the shepherds, you might have a certain picture in your head. You might imagine sweet, little cherubs singing like a children's choir.

In reality, if you were to see an angel, your hair would probably stand on end! And to hear them sing that night would've been beyond anything you can imagine. If there's a certain singer's voice that makes your skin tingle, then the angels' singing, harmony and rhythm is a thousand times better than that.

Angels are powerful, awe-inspiring beings. In the Christmas story, not only do we see them announcing Jesus' birth, but they also appeared to various people to guide them and lead them out of harm's way.

So, how are angels involved in our lives today?

ANGELS SERVE AND PROTECT

The angels' job is to serve and protect believers; these powerful beings are encamped around you!

When you invite Jesus into your life, you become born again. At that moment, there's a massive change as you move from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light—and the hosts of heaven begin looking after you.

Are not the angels all ministering spirits (servants) sent out in the service [of God for the assistance] of those who are to inherit salvation?

Hebrews 1:14 (AMPC)

Angels play a crucial role in your life. **Their job is to serve and protect believers.** Most of the time, you won't even know angels are there. But that doesn't change the fact that **these powerful beings are encamped around you** (Psalm 34:7)!

In the old days, when an army would lay siege to a city, all around those city walls there would be hundreds of thousands of enemy tents as far as the eye could see. Now imagine that—but in the positive sense. You're completely surrounded by angels, God's divine protection!

One night I was telling my grandkids a bedtime story, and my granddaughter talked about being afraid. I began explaining that big, powerful angels were right there in her room to protect her. She liked that, but I could tell she was still a bit scared of how big they were, so I emphasized, "And they *love* kids! These angels are always smiling."

I had to paint a picture for her of what angels are like. Yes, angels are huge, mighty beings, but they're also filled with God's presence. Just think, if Heaven is brimming with peace and laughter, then **angels are also full of this incredible joy.**

ANGELS OBEY THE VOICE OF GOD

When you declare God's Word, angels spring into action!

Bless the Lord, you His angels, who excel in strength, who do His word, heeding the voice of His word.

Psalm 103:20 (NKJV)

When you declare God's Word, angels spring into action! As a dad and a grandpa, verses like Psalm 91:11-12 inspire me so much because I know guardian angels are watching out for my family. You can speak promises like this out loud and declare that you and your family have angelic protection wherever you go.

For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.

Psalm 91:11-12 (NKJV)

When we read the Christmas story, we see angels guiding the wisemen and the shepherds. The angel Gabriel also announced to Mary that she would give birth to the Saviour. And in a few other instances, an angel appeared to Joseph in dreams.

I often hear from people who wish they could have this kind of experience. But the thing is, as wonderful as Mary and Joseph were, they weren't born again. Jesus hadn't died yet and taken their sins. Their spirits couldn't house the presence of God yet, so they needed this outside guidance from angels.

Today, as a follower of Jesus, Holy Spirit is within you. **Rather than needing an angel to appear and give you direction, you have constant direction from God.** You don't have to wait for occasional help from Heaven—it's yours continuously. Every second of every minute of every day, He's with you! Just as angels were intricately involved in the Christmas story, they're also involved in your life. **They're protecting you and your family everywhere you go. And when it comes to guidance, you already have 24/7 access to God Himself!**

MARY & JOSEPH

God didn't pick Mary because she was more perfect than anyone else, but because He knew she would *believe* His message.

I want to share some powerful truths we can learn from Mary and Joseph. One of my favourite Christmas carols is *Mary, Did You Know?* I get tears in my eyes when I hear the lyrics: "Mary, did you know that your baby boy would one day walk on water? Mary, did you know that your baby boy would save our sons and daughters?"

Mary was probably a 16-year-old teenage girl when God chose her to give birth to the Saviour of the world. He didn't pick her because she was more perfect than anyone else. It's because **God knew she would *believe* His message.**

Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus."

Luke 1:30-31 (NKJV)

Then there's Joseph. He was probably in his late teens or early twenties at the time. In their culture, it was not an easy decision for him to take Mary as his wife when the baby wasn't his. Joseph needed a little convincing from an angel, but eventually he came around.

These two young, inexperienced, imperfect people became the mother and father of the King of kings. What did they know about raising kids, much less bringing the Son of God into the world? But God guided them, prepared them and led them through every step.

In life, you may not know all the steps ahead of you or understand how you'll get to the place you're believing for. But God will always look after you the same way He looked after Mary and Joseph.

GOD REDEEMS THE BARNYARD MOMENTS

In life, there are going to be things you didn't expect.

Take a moment to imagine the night Jesus was born. We've got two teenagers on the road, with no place to stay except a barn. You might think the stable was cute and snug like the ones you see in Nativity scenes. Modern day barns can be nicer than some houses. But back then, a stable was a smelly, awful place to spend the night.

I picture Joseph trying to help Mary through childbirth and looking for a clean place amidst the dirt and animal manure to put baby Jesus. All they had was a manger—a feeding trough for animals.

Mary and Joseph were only human, so I imagine they felt disappointment. There was no drummer boy and no big celebration. Mary was probably discouraged, thinking, "God, You spoke to me. You told me this is Your Son, the King of the world. And look where we are."

But God made up for it in a way Mary and Joseph never expected. All of a sudden, a group of shepherds converged on that smelly little stable. The Bible doesn't give us the details, but I'm sure tears of joy were streaming down the shepherds' cheeks as they shared about the incredible thing they'd seen—skies filled with angels singing about Jesus' birth. I like to think they stayed and talked for hours with Mary and Joseph, hearing about everything God had revealed to Jesus' parents.

In life, there are going to be things you didn't expect. You may not have the big, "castle in the sky" moment you wanted. Instead, you might be in the middle of a barnyard moment, manure and all, just like Mary and Joseph. But **what I love about God is that He always provides a way.** He gave Mary and Joseph a place to stay, and He brought them encouragement in the form of the shepherds.

CHOOSE TO REJOICE

God's providing for you and leading you every step of the way. Choose to focus on Him and rejoice.

Movies will show you picture-perfect Christmas moments with everyone smiling as violin music plays in the background. But in real life, we have to deal with messes and spills. Sometimes the toys under the tree aren't the ones our kids asked for, or someone burns the Christmas turkey.

Maybe you don't have the perfect Christmas you wanted, and the people you love couldn't travel to be with you. Maybe for the first time, there's a missing piece in your family. **I want you to know that God will always provide. This too will pass.**

Don't let the enemy come in and steal your joy and peace. Psalm 118:24 (NKJV) says, "This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it." It doesn't mean God made the bad things happen. But no matter the circumstances, **we can choose to rejoice this Christmas.** It's okay to be sad for a moment, but then let it pass and let the joy of Jesus permeate your life.

God didn't love Mary and Joseph any more than He loves you. Although they had an incredible part to play in raising Jesus, your life is important too—and God has a plan for it.

As you gather around the Christmas tree this year, I pray that you have a sense of God's care for you. He's always with you. He's providing for you and leading you every step of the way. Choose to focus on Him and rejoice!

JESUS

Jesus gave up the advantages of being God and was born on this earth as a human being.

I want to give you a perspective of Jesus that you might not have seen before. So many people have the wrong picture of God. They see Him as distant and aloof—a judge who's waiting to punish us. **But if you want to know what God is like, just follow the life of Jesus.**

In John 14:9 (NLT), Jesus said, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father!" In fact, He was given the name Emmanuel, which means *God with us* (Matthew 1:23).

Think about the Christmas story. What do you think baby Jesus was like? Some people think He never would've messed His diapers, spit up or cried. Yet if you want a Biblically accurate picture, you have to realize Jesus was fully God... *and* fully man. In fact, Jesus called Himself the Son of Man far more often than the Son of God. Why was that?

You see, back in the Garden of Eden, mankind had authority over the earth (Psalm 115:16). But Adam and Eve fumbled the ball and gave our ownership over to Satan. Since a human gave it away, it was a legal requirement that another human had to take it back. That's why Jesus had to be fully man.

So He gave up the advantages of being God and was born on this earth as a human being—in the middle of a dirty, smelly stable.

There was nothing beautiful or majestic about his appearance, nothing to attract us to him.

Isaiah 53:2 (NLT)

There was no trumpet blast to announce His birth. He didn't have a glowing halo or anything visibly special about Him. He was a real baby. Mary had to change Him and burp Him. He had to learn how to walk and talk. I'm sure He would've stumbled and skinned His knees.

At the same time, Jesus wasn't exactly the same as any other little boy. His Father wasn't a fallen man. There was no sin in Jesus' physical body—nothing to downgrade His cells—which means He would've walked in divine health.

FULLY GOD, FULLY MAN

Jesus would've been the most amazing friend; the kind of friend that sticks around.

What else do we know about Jesus?

We know that **as He grew up, Jesus loved the Word**. One day at age twelve, He slipped away from His parents without telling them. They found Him *days* later in the temple, listening to the teachers and asking them questions. (See Luke 2:41-50.) After that, Scripture jumps to when Jesus' ministry began at age thirty.

In those silent years, what was Jesus doing? He was being a son to Mary and Joseph. He was laughing and playing with His younger brothers and sisters. He celebrated birthdays and holidays. He hugged His mom. He laid in bed while His dad told Him bedtime stories. Jesus had and *enjoyed* a family!

He also would've been the most amazing friend. Many people come and go through the seasons of our lives. But **Jesus was the kind of friend who sticks around**. He loves you unconditionally, forgives you, encourages you and simply enjoys spending time with you.

When I think about Jesus, I don't believe He paraded down the streets in a holy processional. He and His disciples were comrades. Jesus cooked for them, chatted with them, touched them and went fishing with them.

I can see them walking down the road together, laughing and talking. Maybe they picked up rocks and competed to see who could hit the nearest fence post. I can imagine Jesus pulling Peter in for a hug. And Scripture tells us John leaned against Jesus as they shared a meal (John 13:23). Jesus would've told stories, laughed at jokes and let His friends know they were amazing.

What about the miracles Jesus performed? I bet those were exciting times. As He taught the Word, fed thousands and healed the sick, the disciples must have whooped and hollered and high-fived each other. They would have celebrated with gusto as they saw the lame walk and the blind start seeing. **Life with Jesus would have been the most incredible thing.**

CONCLUSION

Throughout His life, Jesus lived amongst imperfect humans like you and me and showed us who God is. Not distant or judgemental, but full of incredible love.

I hope you're beginning to see Him—and the other players of the Christmas story—in a new light. **This baby boy we're celebrating is the whole reason for Christmas.** He's God's gift to us, the best gift we could ever receive.

As you focus on Him during this season, know that this same Jesus wants to get involved in your life and family. He wants to fill your home with the same peace, love and infectious joy that He demonstrated during His life on earth.

Whatever your Christmas looks like, let His presence fill your heart. Sally and I are **praying the peace, blessings and favour of God** on you and your family. Merry Christmas.