

Intro: Nate Bargatze Christmas Video (During video, set up nativity scene)

I love the nativity scene. How many of you have a nativity scene somewhere in your home? Yea, we do to. One thing I love about the nativity scene, is it allows us all to find ourselves in the story. Young and old, rich and poor, powerful and weak, educated and uneducated, Jew and Gentile. We are all here.

Mary: Try to put yourself in her shoes. Do you remember what you were doing when you were 12 or 13? Mary is chosen by God to give birth to the Messiah. She agrees but this decision brings some unexpected consequences. Mary is pregnant and unmarried. There is no point trying to explain that to family and friends. They will assume you are crazy. Mary carries the baby for 9 months, waiting, uncertain and maybe afraid. This night Mary is a long way from home, with her fiancé, nowhere to stay, surrounded by livestock, and about to give birth, for the first time, without her mom a doctor or nurse. After giving birth successfully now she is responsible for raising God's son. Image how everything seems to be more critical because this is Jesus. **Mary needs Grace and Help.**

Joseph: Joseph is a good man. He loves Mary. He has been preparing for their life together but suddenly an angel appears and turns his entire world upside down. Joseph is a working-class carpenter. He is an oppressed Jew in the Roman empire. Now, he must travel, with his very pregnant wife to be, by donkey and on foot, from Nazareth to Bethlehem, 95 miles, not down the interstate or along a greenway but through a desert wilderness. Can you image the pressure? How would he protect Mary or the baby from thieves or wild animals. Where will they stay? Where will he get work? How will he provide? Furthermore, what would life look like for this young Jewish couple? Will he ever be accepted by his Jewish community? Will his honor ever be restored? Will anyone ever believe their story? Can they even tell the story? How can they teach their new son about God? How do you teach God about God? I have been a father and like me, **Joseph needs Grace and Help.**

Shepherds: Shepherds were outsiders. They were poor, uneducated, considered ceremonially unclean, and therefore not allowed in the temple. They were likely teenage boys, working the night shift when suddenly the sky was filled with the host of heaven. Have you ever felt like an outsider? Too young, too poor, not enough education, too much education, over qualified, under qualified. Wrong clothes, wrong body type, wrong neighborhood, wrong friends. Always on the outside looking in. You do not fit. You can't come in. **The shepherds need Grace and Help.**

Wise Men: The wise men or Magi were Persian, scholars, priests, experts in astronomy, astrology, and dream interpretation. They were not kings but often advised kings. They were upper class, wealthy, educated, connected, powerful men. They spent months, traveling 600–1,000 miles to see the king. They are in the nativity scene but did not arrive for a couple years after the birth of Jesus, when he was a toddler, and visited the family in their home. If they had it all, why did they spend months traveling hundreds of miles? Something was missing. One of the most sobering moments in life is when you finally achieve or acquire what you always believed would make you happy only to discover, it does not satisfy. Something is missing. Maybe by the world's standards, you have it all but if you are honest, something is missing. You still haven't found what you're looking for. **We all need Grace and Help.**

Angels: The angels make several appearances in the Christmas story. They appear to Mary, Joseph, Shepherds, and Zechariah. That reminds me of a verse in **1 Peter 1:12**, **"Angels long to look into these things."** What did they long to look into? What was so fascinating?

Jesus was born into the world, in order to be born in you.

Jesus is in the center and Jesus offers us all Grace and Help!

1. Jesus offers grace. 2 Corinthians 8:9,

Explain: God loves you as you are, not as you should be, for none of us are as we should be.

Illustrate: Babies, screaming, crying, demanding, pooping, spitting up- and yet we are crazy about them. At 52, I can still make a mess of things and yet God is crazy about me.

Argue: Romans 8:32

Apply: God's grace in an invitation into God's presence.

2. Jesus offers help. John 16:7

Explain: The Christian life is learning to live in the presence of God and trust in the power of the Spirit.

Illustrate: Trying to live the Christian life without the spirit is like trying to drive a car without gas or without a battery. It may look great on the outside but it will not get you anywhere.

Argue: Matthew 11:28-30, Galatians 5:22

Apply: How do I do that?

Invitation/Song/Candlelight