

Unwrapping Christmas – Part 1

Today we're kicking off our Christmas Series. A series we're calling Unwrapping Christmas. Today, we're going to be looking at Matthew's account of the story.

Matthew is of course, the first book of the New Testament.

Between the OT and the NT there's 400 years of history.

Those four centuries are called "The 400 Years of Silence."

For 4 centuries God was silent.

No one heard a word.

Picture a large gathering, all your friends and family are there, and you have a special announcement to make. What do you do before making that announcement? You get everyone to be silent. Perhaps you stand to your feet, raise a glass, tap on it to get everyone's attention, then once there's silence, you make the announcement. That's what God did, between the Old and New Testament. For 400 years, there was silence, then God said, "The Messiah is here!"

Matthew 1:18-23

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit.¹⁹ Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly.

²⁰ But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. ²¹ And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, **for He will save His people from their sins.**"

²² So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: ²³ "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, **and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us."**

Let's talk about the book of Matthew for a moment.

Throughout Matthew's Gospel, he uses two phrases that are unique to his book.

The first phrase is, ***"The Kingdom of Heaven."***

That phrase appears 32 times in the Bible, and all 32 times, the phrase is found in Matthew's Gospel.

Now here's why I think that's important.

Matthew was a tax collector before meeting Jesus.

Matthew spent his life working for a kingdom, the Roman Kingdom.

A kingdom that his people were in bondage to, then Jesus called him to be a disciple.

And Matthew traded one kingdom for another.

He stepped out of bondage, and he stepped into freedom!

The other phrase unique to Matthew's Gospel is the phrase, ***"That which was spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled."***

Matthew was writing to the Jewish people to convince them that Jesus was the Messiah.

To do that, Matthew references Old Testament prophesies concerning the Messiah.

Throughout Matthew's Gospel, Jesus is linked to 130 OT prophesies.

That one thing alone, is what separates Christianity from all other world religions.

That one thing alone, is what separates the Bible from every other book.

Two thirds of the Bible is made up of prophecy.

Only God can write history in advance.

As a matter of fact, the Apostle Paul used these OT prophecies to prove that Jesus was the Messiah.

Acts 18:28 KJV

For Paul mightily convinced the Jews, publicly showing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ.

Acts 18:28 NIV

For he (Paul) vigorously refuted his Jewish opponents in public debate, *proving from the Scriptures* that Jesus was the Messiah.

Now, let's back up to the first part of Mathew 1.

The first 17 verses are Jesus' Genealogy or his family tree.

Matthew points out that Jesus came from a pretty dysfunctional family.

Five women are mentioned in Jesus' genealogy.

One was Tamar, a woman who disguised herself as a prostitute in order to sleep with her father-in-law.

Together, Tamar and her father-in-law had a baby.

Tamar is mentioned in verses three.

In verse five we see Rahab. Rahab was a prostitute.

Verse six references Bathsheba.

Bathsheba was involved in the biggest political scandals of her day.

She had an affair with King David.

King Manassah is listed in verse ten and Manassah practiced witchcraft even sacrificing his own son to the devil.

Matthew paints this picture of Jesus' family tree because he wants us to realize that no matter what's in your past, God can rewrite your story.

You don't get to choose the heritage you come from, but you do get to choose the legacy you leave. Make sure, you leave a legacy that honors God.

Unwrapping Christmas – Part 2

Last week we kicked off our Christmas Series. A series we're calling Unwrapping Christmas. We are looking at Matthew and Luke's account of the Christmas story. Last week we looked at Matthew chapter 1. Today, I want to look at Luke chapter 1.

Let's talk about Luke himself for just a moment.

Luke was the only Gentile contributor to the NT.

In other words, he was the only non-Jewish author of the NT.

There are 27 books or letters that make up the NT.

All of which were written by Jewish men except for two: the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts.

Both those books were written by this man, Luke.

So, Luke writes from the perspective of an outsider who became a follower of Jesus.

Perhaps that's why throughout Luke's Gospel he focuses on Jesus' ministry to the outcast.

Luke includes certain stories and parables that the other Gospel Books left out.

The story of the Good Samaritan, that story is only found in Luke's Gospel.

And who is the Good Samaritan in that story? An outsider.

The Prodigal Son is only found in Luke's Gospel.

Luke was an outsider, so he focuses on Jesus' ministry to the outsider.

Here's what else we know about Luke; he was a physician.

So, Luke was a highly educated, very analytical man.

In Colossians 4:14, the Apostle Paul called him the "beloved physician."

So, Luke is both educated and he's influential.

Luke 1:1-3 NLT

Many people have set out to write accounts about the events that have been fulfilled among us.² They used eyewitness reports circulating among us from the early disciples.³ ***Having carefully investigated everything from the beginning,*** I also have decided to write an accurate account for you, most honorable Theophilus.

The phrase, "***Having carefully investigated everything from the beginning...***"

That phrase comes from a Greek word ***from which we get the word autopsy.*** As a physician, Luke was no doubt a very analytical man. So, Luke is saying, "I'm not quick to believe anything. I need proof. And I have dissected this story and here's what I know beyond a doubt, has happened."

So that's a little background on Luke and the book he wrote.

Most of Luke 1 is about the birth of John the Baptist, and the birth of John was the fulfillment of OT prophecy as well. Let's read that story starting at verse five.

Luke 1:5-25

⁵ When Herod was king of Judea, there was a Jewish priest named Zechariah. He was a member of the priestly order of Abijah, and his wife, Elizabeth, was also from the priestly line of Aaron. ⁶ Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous in God's eyes, careful to obey all of the Lord's commandments and regulations. ⁷ They had no children because Elizabeth was unable to conceive, and they were both very old.

⁸ One day Zechariah was serving God in the Temple, for his order was on duty that week. ⁹ As was the custom of the priests, he was chosen by lot to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰ While the incense was being burned, a great crowd stood outside, praying.

¹¹ While Zechariah was in the sanctuary, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the incense altar. ¹² Zechariah was shaken and overwhelmed with fear when he saw him. ¹³ But the angel said, "Don't be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give you a son, and you are to name him John."

¹⁴ You will have great joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great in the eyes of the Lord. He must never touch wine or other alcoholic drinks. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even before his birth. ¹⁶ And he will turn many Israelites to the Lord their God.

¹⁷ He will be a man with the spirit and power of Elijah (*Isaiah 40:3, Malachi 3:1 and Malachi 4:5*). He will prepare the people for the coming of the Lord. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and he will cause those who are rebellious to accept the wisdom of the godly."

¹⁸ Zechariah said to the angel, "How can I be sure this will happen? I'm an old man now, and my wife is also well along in years..." ²³ When Zechariah's week of service in the Temple was over, he returned home. ²⁴ Soon afterward his wife, Elizabeth, became pregnant and went into seclusion for five months. ²⁵ "How kind the Lord is!" she exclaimed. "He has taken away my disgrace of having no children."

Now we don't know how old they were, but the Bible says they were both very old. Can you imagine the first time they had dinner with a group of friends and Elizabeth tells the ladies at the table, "I'm pregnant."

- All the ladies blushed.
- All the men looked at Zechariah and said, "Yeah boy! Getting it done!"

Notice what the angel said, **Don't be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give you a son.**

Here's my question: What prayer?

What prayer was the angel referring to when he said what he said?

The answer is obvious.

Their prayer for a child, of course.

So the angel wasn't referring to prayers they were currently praying.

Because they were too old then.

He was referring to prayers they used to pray.

Prayers they had given up on!

I came to tell somebody today that you need to dig up some prayers you've given up on!

I'm prophesying to somebody that God's about to resurrect some unanswered prayers in this house.

He's about to answer prayers that you forgot you prayed.

If you believe that give God praise in the house!

In Scripture, prayer is likened to childbirth.

We see this in Galatians 4:19 when Paul says that he "*labored in prayer.*"

No two pregnancies are ever the same.

Some deliveries take longer than others.

Some take days while others come quickly.

Still, it goes without saying that you don't stop pushing until you see the baby.

Prayers of faith are eternal, recorded in heaven and never forgotten.

In Revelation, we read about an angel in heaven waving a sensor filled with the prayers of the saints.

Your prayers have not gone unheard.

EM Bounds said, "Prayers always outlive the ones who prayed them."

Unwrapping Christmas – Part 3

We are in our Christmas Series. A series we have called *Unwrapping Christmas*. In this series, we're looking at Matthew and Luke's account of the Christmas story. So far we've looked at Matthew chapter 1 and Luke chapter 1. Today we're going to pick up where we left off in Luke 1 and we will venture over into Luke chapter 2.

Luke 1:26-38 NLT

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee,²⁷ to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David.²⁸ Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!"

²⁹ Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. ³⁰ "Don't be afraid, Mary," the angel told her, "For you have found favor with God! ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus.³² He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David.³³ And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!"

³⁴ Mary asked the angel, "But how can this happen? I am a virgin." ³⁵ The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God.³⁶ What's more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! **People used to say she was barren**, but she has conceived a son and is now in her sixth month.³⁷ **For the word of God will never fail.**"

³⁸ Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true." And then the angel left her.

Notice that in verse twenty-six the Bible says that God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a small village where Mary was living. We see Nazareth referenced again in Luke chapter 2. Notice the passage.

Luke 2:1-7 NLT

At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire.³ All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census.

⁴ And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of **Nazareth** in Galilee. ⁵ He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child.

⁶ And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. ⁷ She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.

Now the reason I point out Nazareth is because of an OT prophecy in Micah 5:2.

The prophet Micah prophesied that the Messiah would be born in the town of Bethlehem.

But Mary and Joseph didn't live in Bethlehem, they were in Nazareth.

We're smart enough to know that you can't be born in two places.

So, God stirred the heart of a Roman Emperor, to call for a census to be taken throughout all the land.

See, God will orchestrate certain events in your life to bring to pass His plan for your life!

You never know what God's doing behind your back.

You never know who God's talking to behind your back.

The Romans were enemies to the Jews.

God can use your enemies to bring to pass His plan for your life.

The Romans Emperor thought he was taking a census, when actually, he was playing into God's plan.

Listen to me church, everything God has ever promised you... If you'll be faithful, God will bring it to...

God can turn disappointments into divine appointments

Me between 6th and 7th grade.

So, here's my question:

What current events might God be using to bring to pass His plan for your life?

Who might God be using to bring to pass His plan for your life?

What separates the Bible from all other books:

- The Bible is the most sold book of all time at over 7 billion copies sold.
- To put that in perspective, the Harry Potter series is one of the most sold book series in history and it's sold 200 million copies. The Quran has sold 800 million.
- And did you know that Jesus is mentioned five times more in the Quran than Muhammed?
- The Bible is the most smuggled book in history.
- The most translated book in history with over 4,000 translations.
- It was written by 40 authors over a 1,500 year period.
- It possesses thousands of ancient manuscript to authenticate its credibility.
- It's the most prophetic book ever written and more prophecy has been fulfilled from the Bible than from any other book ever written.
- No other book has proven to be true, through the study of archaeology, like the Bible.