

# Truth for Today

*The Bible teaching radio programme*

---

For reply: Email: [truthfortoday@aol.com](mailto:truthfortoday@aol.com)

**Broadcast Date:** 26 December 2004

**No.** T0346

**Speaker:** Mr. David Pulman

---

## Christmas Broadcasts: Christmas Message 2004

It was earlier this year while driving into Newcastle upon Tyne that I ended up behind a car with a back window sticker which said, "To avoid the Christmas rush, go to church today". Many people only think about church for special occasions and in terms of God's great events the most remarkable is the first Christmas.

However, to have a first Christmas we need to consider events nine months previous. God became focused on a small village called Nazareth in the country of Galilee. The full event can be read in the Gospel of Luke 1:26-38. We will initially consider a young woman called Mary who was engaged to a man called Joseph. In Jewish society an engagement was the first stage of marriage where both were committed to the wedding and a life time together. To break off an engagement was the same as becoming divorced. An engagement was not entered into lightly. It is so different in our society where not only engagements but marriages are so easily broken.

God sends an angel to talk to Mary about the plan God has for her life. Mary is given a royal greeting, "The angel said to her, 'Rejoice, highly favoured one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!'" Luke 1:28. Mary was probably a fairly young woman for in those far off days it was not uncommon for women to marry in mid teens. Now Mary's reaction is very interesting. It is not so much the sight of the angel which troubles her but the greeting. Such a greeting would be more appropriate to some one of high rank or importance. However, we should digress and consider the genealogy in Luke 3 which according to Bible scholars is Mary's genealogy. From this we can trace Mary directly back to David, probably Israel's greatest king. Now if Mary had forgotten this fact, God had not. Therefore, according to Mary's genealogy, she was a princess of the kings of Judah. The greeting from the angel was indeed addressed to a very important person. This is not the only reason that Mary was important. Luke 1:30 states that Mary was in favour with God. It was not only that God liked Mary but much more. God saw in Mary the absolutely right kind of person who was suitable to be the mother of Jesus.

From Luke 1:31-35 the angel outlines the events that will take place that Mary will have a baby conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. The one born was the incarnate Son of God. His name is to be Jesus. He has rights to reign over the house of Jacob and, far more importantly, His Kingdom will have no end.

When Mary questions as to how this can happen, she was not a person of doubt. It is important to realise that Mary was not like Zacharias who earlier in this chapter doubted and was struck dumb until John was born and given his name. The acceptance of what the angel told her gives us to understand that Mary was God fearing and was ready to accept God's purposes for her life. We know that Mary's life was not to be an easy one. We believe that Joseph, her husband to be, probably died before Jesus commenced His public ministry. Jesus is described as the carpenter and this may well indicate that He had become the head of the family.

The angel gives Mary some additional news and this concerns her relative Elizabeth; that she is expecting a son. Consider what the angel says that Elizabeth is not simply expecting a baby, but a son. Elizabeth's child was also under the control of God. This child would become known as John the Baptist. With this news Mary decides to visit her relative and share the good news. When Elizabeth hears what Mary has to say she becomes filled with the Holy Spirit and says a very remarkable thing. "Why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" Luke 1:43. Elizabeth along with Mary recognises the importance of the event that her Lord was to be born as a child of Mary. The first Christmas was truly a wonderful event.

Mary's response to what Elizabeth says is found in Luke 1:46-55. Mary bursts into praise, has an inner joy, is not self exalted but realises the immense privilege that is hers. Mary also enters into the purposes of God as she considers that the child to be born will eventually bring about Israel's blessing according to the promises made hundreds of years previously to Abraham. For a young woman, Mary already had a tremendous grasp of Scripture in order to burst forth with this wonderful outflow of praise and appreciation of the ways of God.

Parents and grandparents should not neglect the teaching of the scriptures to our families.

While all this is happening, Joseph discovers that Mary is having a child! "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.” Matthew 1:18. In verse 19 we learn something of the character of Joseph. Joseph was a just or righteous person and he was loving and caring. Possibly the thoughts going through his mind might have been, “I thought Mary would be true to me and our engagement vows”. “Could I have been wrong as to Mary’s character?” Now Joseph wanted to handle things in a private way so as not to cause Mary any public embarrassment. “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. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.’” Matthew 1:20-21.

What can we learn about Joseph? He was not hasty in his judgment of Mary, he was carefully thinking over the matter when the angel came to him. Joseph still had a deep care and concern for Mary. He would not make a public spectacle of her. This was a matter to be dealt with privately.

After the angel had talked to Joseph in the dream, an accepted means by which God communicated with his people, Joseph accepts God’s explanation and continues on with the marriage. However, Joseph has well understood the message, the importance of the child that Mary was now carrying and so we read in Matthew 1:24-25 (New International Version), “When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.”

We need to look at Luke 2 for further information regarding Joseph. Now the popular impression is that Joseph and Mary arrive at the Inn and there was no room. However, we find that this was both inconsistent with Joseph as a caring person and the account in Luke. Caesar Augustus had made a decree that all citizens in the Roman Empire had to be registered in the place of their family home. For Joseph this was Bethlehem. Bethlehem was approximately 70 miles in a direct line from Nazareth but considerably more by the twisting roads of the day. Now Joseph plans the journey to ensure that Mary arrives before the baby is due, because it was after they had arrived that the baby Jesus is born. Luke 2:6, “So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered.” So why was it necessary to be in the stable and have a manger for a crib? Why are we told there was no room in the Inn? Our understanding of a hotel or similar accommodation is vastly different to the reality of that first Christmas day. Inns did not have en-suite or indeed separate and private rooms. Everyone would be in large rooms shared by many travellers and facilities were primitive by today’s standards. If there was to be any privacy for the birth, then we can understand why the stable would be used.

It was just as well that Joseph and Mary had the use of the stable because it was not long before shepherds from nearby fields came to visit. The shepherds had been given the wonderful news and they had responded immediately. We read in Luke 2:8-17, “Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: you will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.’ 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!’ So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven that the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.’ And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child.”

So the Saviour announced in the message that was given to the shepherds was none other than Christ the Lord or the Messiah. This message was spread about by them. The shepherds became the first Gospel preachers, making known this good news. The message has an impact and in Luke 2:18-20 we read, “And all those who heard it marvelled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.”

The next event for Joseph and Mary is to carry out what is required by the law: circumcision and an offering for a male child. As godly parents, it was natural that they did what was lawfully required. However, the offering made, that of two birds according to Leviticus 12, would indicate that Joseph and Mary were not wealthy but in fact poor. Jesus was not born into a wealthy family but a poor family, but a family that pleased God. This was a family to whom God entrusted both the birth and the bringing up of His Son as a child through to manhood.

Sometime later, after the visit of the wise men, Joseph is warned to take the child and Mary into Egypt. “Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him.” Matthew 2:13. It is at this time that Herod slaughters all children from two years old and under. This brings about the fulfilling of the sad prophecy in Jeremiah 31:15, “A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, because they were no more.”

Eventually Herod dies and the angel tells Joseph that it is now safe to return. As Joseph returns, he discovers that Herod's son was now king. However, the angel comes again and Joseph is warned not to go into Judea. So Joseph, the ever caring man, turns and heads towards Galilee and the town of Nazareth which he and Mary had left a number of years before to be registered in Bethlehem.

The first Christmas and the following few years were troublesome for Joseph and Mary as they sought to carefully bring up this special child whom God had entrusted into their care. In those early years there was no Christmas celebration as we know it today. Jesus was the eldest child in a poor family. Joseph, earning his living to support his growing family, did so in the humble trade of a carpenter. No doubt carpentry was a very sought after trade. From the scriptures we understand that Jesus was taught the trade as He became known as the carpenter's son and eventually as the carpenter in His own right.

For Christians, Christmas is the time when we remember the tremendous fact that the Son of God became a man. He did not give up anything of His greatness as a divine person, but rather added to it the perfection of being the only man who was sinless and who, at every moment throughout His life on earth, pleased God His Father.

The importance of the incarnation was only realised after the cross. The cross was the reason that the Son of God came and lived as Jesus here in this world. Without the cross, the incarnation would be of no value to you and me. Without the truth of the incarnation, the work of salvation, accomplished by the sacrificial death of Jesus, could not have been possible!

As far as this world is concerned, the incarnation was the first positive step that God took to make real blessing for mankind available.

What is Christmas all about? If we say the giving and receiving of presents, having a happy time with family and friends, celebrating, etc., then we have missed the point. God, in the person of His Son, left the realms of eternal glory and stepped into time, our time. Into a world riddled with sin. Into a world that was alien to Him who is the Creator of the whole vast universe. To a planet that, in the scope of the universe, was small and insignificant and yet He came, to bring redemption at the cost of His own life. This is the incarnation, this is Christmas. Christmas should cause every believer to bow in worship that He should come personally for each one of us.

There is a Christmas hymn which in recent years I have become fond of and I would like to quote some of the words:

*I'm sure he (Joseph) must have been surprised  
At where this road had taken him  
Because never in a million lives  
Would he have dreamed of Bethlehem*

*And standing at the manger  
He saw with his own eyes  
The message from the angel come to life,  
And Joseph said*

*"Why me, I'm just a simple man of trade?  
Why Him, with all the rulers in the world?  
Why here, inside this stable filled with hay?  
Why her, she's just an ordinary girl?  
Now I'm not one to second guess  
What angels have to say,  
But this is such a strange way to save the world."*

*To think of how it could have been  
If Jesus had come as He deserved  
There would have been no Bethlehem  
No lowly shepherds at His birth*

*But Joseph knew the reason  
Love had to reach so far  
And as he held the Saviour in his arms  
He must have thought  
"Why me...?"*

Sometime after that first Christmas day, the wise men came to seek Jesus. There are a number of remarkable things about these wise men. They were from countries to the east of Judea and they were in sharp contrast to God's earthly people, who were not looking! The wise men had been looking for signs concerning the King of the Jews! "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 2:2. They had seen His star, a special sign in the sky. By the time they arrived at Jerusalem they knew He would have been born. The wise men were so sure that an event of tremendous significance had taken place that they set out to find the King. Eventually they are led from Jerusalem to a house in Bethlehem. It is in the house that they present their gifts to the young child: gifts which were worthy of a King. We are probably all aware of the gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh. Many Bible scholars consider the gifts most appropriate. Gold speaks of the fact that here was God incarnate, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him", Mark 9:7. As then, so now God would direct our attention to Jesus the Son of God. There is no one more important than Jesus and everyone should listen to what He has to say. Frankincense would speak of the perfect life the Lord Jesus lived in this world. This life was fully appreciated by God the Father: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased", Matthew 3:17. The challenge to Christians is to live like the Saviour that we too might receive a "well done, good and faithful servant" from the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Finally, the perfume myrrh had many uses but one in particular was that associated with burial, see John 19:39. Joseph and Nicodemus took the Lord's body down from the cross and prepared it for burial. In the gifts we have a small overview of the person, His life and the reason for the Son of God coming as a baby in Bethlehem's manger so long ago.

What challenges come from the consideration of the people who came into contact with Jesus at His birth! Joseph and Mary were specially selected by God to take care of this most important person. As Christians, do we have the same care and consideration for Jesus? He was not just another person but was indeed unique, the Creator and the person who holds the universe in His control. He is Lord of each Christian, the One to whom we should be fully obedient in every detail of our lives. The Shepherds could not keep quiet about who had come. Are we willing to tell others of the Saviour? Then we have the wise men who gave their treasures to Jesus. Are we ready to make available our wealth and resources to the Lord?

Let this Christmas time be an occasion to re-evaluate our Christian lives in the light of the Son of God who stepped out of the realms of eternity to live here knowing that His exit out of this world was by way of the cross.

---

**Please Note:**

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1. Large Print copies of this document are also available upon request.