

Luke 2:7

7 And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

There are many great nights mentioned in the Bible. Some of them are laden with tragedy and others are bright with hope.

It was a great night when God sent His death angel down into Egypt. This meant tragedy for the Egyptians, because the firstborn in every house died that night. But it meant salvation for the Israelites, because they were safe behind the blood of a lamb without blemish. This was a picture of the salvation which we enjoy in Christ Jesus.

It was a great night when Jacob slept beneath the stars and dreamed of a ladder reaching up to heaven, with the angels ascending and descending upon that ladder.

It was a great night when Belshazzar feasted in the palace, and saw writing upon the wall saying, "Thou art weighed in the balances and found wanting." That night Belshazzar met his death.

It was a great night which Daniel spent in the lions' den, protected by the Almighty Hand of God.

It was a great night when Nicodemus came to Jesus and Jesus uttered that great eternal truth, "Ye must be born again."

It was a great night when Jesus prayed in Gethsemane saying, "Not my will, but thine be done."

It was a great night when Paul and his companions were shipwrecked and when God saved all who were on board the ship.

It was a great night when Peter denied Jesus and it was greater still when he went out and wept bitter tears of repentance.

But the greatest and grandest night of all was the night when Jesus was born. He was born to be our savior, born to die for our sins, born to save us, born that we might be reborn, born to take us home to Heaven some day!

As the day wears away and the sun goes down and as that night comes on, we see a man approaching the little town of Bethlehem. He is leading a donkey and on that donkey sits a young woman. The man is Joseph and the woman is Mary.

These two people are keepers of a great secret. Some months before this time an angel had appeared to Mary. He had told her that she was to bear a child, that God would be the Father of this child, and that she would be the mother. You see, God wanted His Son to come into the world and go through all the experiences of man and finally die for man's sin.

But Mary was puzzled when the angel gave her this news. She may have been as young as 12 or 13 at that time, and she had never had sexual relations with any man. The angel told her that the Holy Spirit would miraculously form the child in her womb. So Mary bowed her head and said, "I am the handmaiden of the Lord. Be it unto me according to thy word."

Then the angel went to Joseph and said to him, "Mary is to bear a Son and His name shall be called Jesus. Go ahead and marry her for the child that she will bear will be born through the power of the Holy Spirit."

Now we see Joseph and Mary going from one inn to another, but every place is crowded. The Roman Emperor Caesar had commanded that everyone was to return to the town in which they had been born to be taxed. Bethlehem was overflowing with people.

Finally, Joseph and Mary found a resting place in a stable. Mary's time had come and that night Christ was born. While the cattle calmly munched their hay and the stars twinkled in the sky like they did on any other night, the Son of God quietly came into the world as a baby, the first child in the family of a poor Hebrew carpenter.

But, at the same time, the angels were seen in the heavens declaring, "Glory to God in the highest". What a night it was! It was the night which has meant more than any other night. This was the grandest night of all time, the night when Christ was born.

When was Jesus born? We find the answer in Galatians 4:4 where it says that He came "in the fulness of time." Why didn't he come a hundred years earlier or a hundred years later? Because God has a program for the world. He is always exactly on time. He sent His Son into the world at the exact moment that it was the best time for him to come.

Let's look at God's promises concerning our Savior! The whole thing started in the Garden of Eden. Man had just fallen into sin and had brought the awful consequence of death into the world. Because the serpent had been used by Satan to tempt them, God cursed the serpent and said that the seed of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent. In other words, Christ would someday crush Satan.

When Abraham came, God told him that through his descendents all the nations of the earth would be blessed. Jesus was the one destined to bless all nations. And true to this promise, history shows that Jesus has done so.

When David came, he sang of a great king whose name would endure forever. The name, Jesus, has been used for two thousand years and as long as God lasts, that precious Name will endure.

Isaiah said, "His Name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." His names denote His offices. Jesus has filled every one of these offices.

We are told that He would come from the tribe of Judah, and the line of David and that He would be born in Bethelhem. Every detail of these Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

The Jews contributed to this fulness of time. They were a covenant people. God had committed His secrets to them. All their sacrifices pointed to the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

The Greeks contributed to this fulness of time. Alexander the Great had conquered the known world. He had spread the Greek language near and far. Now it was time for Jesus to come and for his disciples to go into every nation to preach the Gospel in a language which all men would understand. Language creates a barrier, but the Greeks had broken this barrier. God's timing was perfect.

And the Romans also contributed to this fulness of time. They had crushed the warring nations of earth and imposed their peace, the Pax Romana, on the entire known world. It was a good time for the apostles to go forth preaching Christ. In addition, the Romans had built excellent roads for them to travel on. Roman ships traversed all the known seas so Paul could carry the gospel everywhere. Yes, God's timing was indeed perfect!

Now, look at two groups who participated in the events of that night: the angels and the shepherds.

An angel had come to Zacharias to foretell the birth of Zacharias' son, John the Baptist. An angel appeared to Mary and announced the birth of Jesus. An angel appeared to Joseph and comforted his heart and told him to take Mary as his wife.

Then on this Great Night, an angel appeared to the shepherds saying, "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior which is Christ the Lord." Suddenly the sky was filled with angels declaring, "Peace on earth, good will to men."

Angels are holy and beautiful creatures endowed with supernatural powers and wisdom. They were not born - they were a special creation of God. They never die. They are pure enough to dwell with God and serve Him. They ministered to Christ after Satan tempted Him in the desert, and they strengthened Him in the Garden of Gethsemane before His crucifixion. When He was in the tomb, they rolled the stone away.

Now here is a wonderful thing: God made these heavenly beings to minister to us, His children, also. The angels watch over us every moment. Psalm 34:7 says, "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them."

One day Elisha and his servant were surrounded by the armies of the Kings of Syria. Elisha was not afraid, but his servant was almost scared to death. They Elisha prayed, "Lord, open the young man's eyes." When the servant's eyes were opened, he saw the mountains covered with horses and chariots of fire. No doubt the angels were filling these chariots. God's children are always surrounded by angels.

Now, let's also look at the shepherds. On that glorious night the mighty Caesar slept in his golden canopied bed in Rome, but no one came to him from Heaven to tell him that the Savior had been born. The high priest slept in his palace in Jerusalem, but no angel knocked at his door. God's angel appeared, not to the high and mighty, not to the rich, nor to the learned, but to the poor shepherds who were keeping watch over their flocks by night.

Jesus loves the poor and lowly. It was prophesied that He would preach the Gospel to the poor, and He did! He was so approachable, so meek and lowly that the poorest and the vilest came to Him with assurance.

It is never hard to get through to Jesus. He welcomes all those who come. He says, "Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out." What a wonderful Savior He is! Zacchaeus, the despised tax collector, could approach Him with ease. The poor woman taken in adultery was entirely welcome in His presence. You and I can come also, knowing that He will not cast us out.

The shepherds had a simple, childlike faith. When the angel gave them the message of Christ's birth, they did not exclaim, "What a strange story indeed." They didn't argue about the biological impossibility of a virgin birth. They simply said, "Let us go right now and see this thing which God has brought to pass."

Oh, how blessed are the people who believe what God has said! And how sad are those skeptics who will not believe something they cannot explain, who judge everything by their physical senses, who leave no room for God and His miracles. Miracles are for people who believe in them. A Savior is for the people who know that

they need a Savior. The good news of the Gospel is good news only to those who believe in it.

Christmas has no true meaning except to those who see Christ in it. All the Christmas carols, all the brightly lighted Christmas trees, all the sweet greetings of friends and loved ones, all the feasting, all these are empty unless you know Christ as your Savior!

So we see the shepherds going to see the baby Jesus. So many people ignore Him today. He wants to bless them today and forever, but they don't have any room for Him in their hearts.

After the shepherds had seen Jesus, they spread the glad tidings, telling the glorious story of Jesus to everyone they met. That is what we need to do today.

So, what have we seen today? We have seen Mary and Joseph, completely surrendered to God's will. We have ~~see~~ a waiting world ready for His coming. We have seen the tiny baby in the manger. We have seen the angels declaring His birth. And we have seen the humble shepherds finding Jesus and telling everyone about Him.

Have you found Jesus? Jesus was born to carry your sins to the cross. Jesus was born to save you and guarantee you a place in Heaven. Listen, all that you can ever do will not repay Christ for all that He has done for you.

He asks you to do just one thing - open up your heart, let Him come in, then live for Him every day in such a way that when you come down to the end of your life you can hear Him saying, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

Hallelujah! Amen!

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