

Christmas Message - The Babe of Bethlehem

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[0 : 00] We'll be looking at Matthew chapter 1, verses 18 to 25. Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows.

When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit.

And Joseph, her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly.

But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife.

For the child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

[1 : 29] Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet. behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which translated means God with us.

And Joseph awoke from his sleep, and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife, but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a son, and he called his name Jesus.

Well, there was a change in the scripture reading this morning because there had been a change in the message.

And the message that I was going to bring this morning, we will bring next Sunday morning instead.

And there are only two of the four gospels that mention anything about the birth of our Lord, Matthew is one, from which Gary just read, and the other is Luke, by the physician, Dr. Luke.

So if you would turn to his expression of that birth in Luke's gospel chapter 2, we will commence with some thoughts that we have for the morning.

[3 : 11] Neither Mark nor John make any reference to the birth of Christ, and I think it is partly due to the fact that the gospel of Mark presents the Lord Jesus Christ as a servant.

He is the servant savior. For even the son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. Mark tells us in 10:45.

And then, John, and of course, Mark is presenting our Lord as a servant, and nobody is terribly concerned about the genealogy or the birth line of a servant. So, it's omitted.

And when you come to John's gospel, the birth is not recorded there either because John presents the Lord Jesus Christ in his deity, in his godhood.

So, in his godhood, he of course has no beginning. He is the eternal son of God, and that leaves us with Matthew who presents Christ as a king, and Luke who presents him in his humanity.

[4 : 16] And I think it is not a coincidence that God chose a physician to describe the birth in human terms because no one is as familiar with these bodies of ours as is a physician.

So, Dr. Luke is called upon to provide his account. And we read about it beginning in chapter 2 of Luke's gospel. And I suspect there are tens of thousands of churches all over the country who are asking their people to turn to Luke chapter 2.

It is a very endearing account. Came about in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth.

This, of course, was primarily concerning the Mediterranean world because it was over this area of geography that Rome ruled.

And Caesar Augustus, and Caesar is actually a title rather than a name. It's a title like king or queen. So, the Caesar at this particular time was a man by the name of Augustus.

[5 : 26] And he has decreed that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth for the simple reason that Rome ruled the world and exacted taxes from everybody over which she ruled.

And in order to accurately assess the tax situation, you had to know who was where and how many there were. So, the census is required and on the basis of that census, Caesar Augustus would then hand down a quota for all of his tax collectors throughout all of the land to meet.

And once they met that quota, they would send that sum of money off to the coffers of Rome. And that's how the government of Rome was supported. So, this was a thing that they were not terribly unfamiliar with.

And we are told that it was first taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all were proceeding to register for the census, everyone to his own city.

And the reason they were proceeding to do that is because it was not optional. You will register for the census or you will pay a price for your lack of cooperation that you will certainly not enjoy.

[6 : 45] And most of these people had good enough sense to know you don't buck Rome. and run around to tell about it. You can't fight City Hall. And in this case, City Hall was the larger Mediterranean world.

And it was not considered an optional thing. Joseph and Mary were not in a position to say, ah, census, menses. Let's just skip it. They won't know the difference. Well, trust me, they would have somehow found out.

And they weren't about to pay that price. So, they are law-abiding to the extent that they have to be while they are under the boot of an oppressor like Rome. You go along to get along because you don't have a choice.

So, here, this dear girl, teenage girl probably, we aren't given an exact age, but it is possible that she could have been as young as 17, 18 years of age.

And she is great with child. This is no time to be making a trip on the back of a donkey lasting some 60 miles, taking approximately three full days of an arduous journey and pregnant on top of it.

[7 : 58] About nine months pregnant or close to that. So, we read in verse 4, verse 3, that they were all proceeding to register for the census, everyone to his own city.

And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David.

So, everybody had to return to their place of lineage or their place of family origin. And in this case, Joseph, the legal father, the adopted father, if you will, of Jesus, Joseph, was of the tribe of Judah. And Judah was the fourth son of Jacob, and that is the royal line. Mary, the girl to whom he is engaged, is also from the tribe of Judah.

And her ancestry descends from David the king through Nathan. And Joseph's line descends from David the king through Solomon.

[9 : 20] So, both Joseph and Mary are direct descendants of David the king. And, of course, David is a direct descendant of Judah, a thousand years earlier, the fourth born son.

So, we've got the royal line here, and it is converging upon David, and then out of David, there are two separate lines. Luke gives us the genealogy of Mary, and Matthew gives us the genealogy of Joseph.

And this is why, as you compare the two genealogies, you see similarities, because they had certain ancestors in common, and you see also dissimilarities. And it's a fascinating thing to study that in and of itself.

So, they are going in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him and was with child, and it came about that while they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth.

And she gave birth to her firstborn son, and she wrapped him in cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. And in the same region, there were some shepherds, staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night.

[10 : 32] An angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone round them, and they were terribly frightened. Of course they are, because, as I pointed out in some venues in the past, the thing that always scared people about the appearance of angels, is the fact that they always seem to come from nowhere.

Even though they were often garbed and looked like a human being, looked like a man, no one had opportunity to adjust themselves to the presence of an angel, as you would be able to if you saw one in a distance and they came walking up to you, all the while you are mentally preparing yourself for their close proximity.

But with the appearance of an angel, it's always different. You never see them coming. All at once you are looking in a certain area where there is nothing, and then, just like that, appearing out of nowhere.

Where there was nobody, there is somebody. That's enough to startle anybody out of their wits, and that's exactly the effect that it has when the angel appeared to Mary, when the angel appeared to the shepherds, when the angel appeared to Joseph, when the angel appeared to Zacharias as he was serving in the temple, the father of John the Baptist.

Everybody is scared witless, so the first thing the angel is always obligated to say is, it's okay, it's okay, fear not, fear not, fear not, don't be afraid, because they were afraid, they were scared witless, and so would you be, so would I.

[12:07] So these angels are terribly frightened, and the angel said to them, do not be afraid, or fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy, which shall be for all the people.

I've often wondered, why do you suppose God chose this ragtag bunch of shepherds to make this incredible announcement to?

Do you have any idea how shepherds were regarded in the Bible? Culturally speaking, they were not looked upon with much favor at all. In fact, they had a rather nefarious reputation of being thieves and liars and so on.

In fact, it was such that the testimony of a shepherd was not admissible in court. How's that for a put down? And these people were relegated to pretty much a second class citizen status.

In fact, remember when, and it was that way culturally throughout the whole Mediterranean, remember when Joseph was down in Egypt and he wanted to bring his whole clan down there of 70 souls, recall they all went down to Egypt, and Pharaoh, out of gratitude to Joseph for his salvation of the nation of Egypt, granted them this choice piece of real estate called the land of Goshen, and they settled there, and Joseph tells his brothers, don't tell Pharaoh that you guys are a bunch of shepherds.

[13:39] Okay? Just keep that under your hat, because the Egyptians didn't look very kindly upon shepherds either. So here we've got this ragtag bunch of people, shepherds, who are looked upon as people from the other side of the tracks, out keeping their flocks by night, and this angel appears to the lowly shepherds.

I bring you good news of a great joy, which shall be for all the people. for today, in the city of David, this is Bethlehem, 500 years earlier, designated as the birthplace of the Messiah.

But thou, Bethlehem, Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me, who shall be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.

What do you make of that? The angel says, Bethlehem, city of David, well, of course, he's going to be born in Bethlehem.

He is David's greater son. He will be called the son of David, the son of God. And it is there in this city of Bethlehem, by the way, the name Bethlehem in Hebrew means the house of bread.

[15:11] How fitting for the one who would designate himself as the bread of life to be born in Bethlehem of Judah.

Beautiful thing. And Micah said that in chapter 5, 500 years before Christ was born. He said, this is where it's going to happen.

In David's city, in Bethlehem. And the event that is going to take place there, it is being described in this chapter, is the most incredible, far-reaching, consequential thing that has ever happened in the history of the universe.

God is the incarnation. This is God becoming a human being. The enfleshment of deity.

Astounding. And these shepherds don't have any clue as to what this, but they knew about a Messiah because, you see, you go all the way back to Genesis 3, and God promised a remedy for sin because it is sin that brings all of the havoc, all of the death, disease, conflict, all of the negatives visited upon humanity all stem from this one thing, this sin factor.

[16:40] It's thrown everything into disarray. It has upset everything. It has overturned everything. It has changed that which God pronounced very good into chaos and ruin and destruction and heartache and disease and death and poverty.

All of the negatives that plague mankind stem from this one sinful act. And God promised in chapter 3 and verse 15 of Genesis, I'm going to fix it.

I'm going to send someone who will fix it. And then he chose Noah and his three sons as survivors and one son of Noah named Shem would be that line through which this Messiah would come and it converges down and you follow the genealogy in Genesis and you'll see that eventually a descendant of Noah by the name of Abram comes along and Abram will be the one to whom God will make the most monumental promises that have ever been made.

No one has ever been on the receiving end of a promise like God made to Abraham. Through you and your seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed and I will make you the father of many nations.

Wow! God never made a promise like that to anyone. Abraham is the key figure. Are you aware that next to the person of Jesus Christ Abraham is the most mentioned person in all of the Bible?

[18:31] Second only to our Lord because he is so key. He is so strategic. He is the only one in all of Scripture who is called the friend of God.

And Abraham was addressed face to face with the Christophany. That's next week's message. It is a beautiful thing and it busies it busies our Lord Jesus Christ before Bethlehem. It puts him to work in several scenarios as a Christophany appearing in the Old Testament.

Way before Bethlehem ever happened. It's a fascinating thing. I can scarcely wait to share it with you. But now we have to tend to the business at hand and that's in Luke 2. So they are told how they will identify this baby.

In verse 12 he will be this will be a sign for you. You will find a baby wrapped in cloths. Some translations render this swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.

[19:39] The swaddling cloths were strips of cloths. Strips of material that would be wrapped and bound around the baby. Binding it tightly almost like a mummy.

And there's nothing in scripture that requires this but this was an age old tradition among the Orientals that if you swaddled your child when they were born you literally wrap them tightly. It not only provided them with a feeling of security and closeness and being bound in after having exited their mother's womb where they already had that feeling. Now they're out in this naked out in this big open empty world.

So the swaddling clothes it was perceived did something psychologically and emotionally for the child and they believed that it also made the child potentially to grow up straight and true. in his lifestyle and in his values etc. Of course that was probably an old wives tale. There's nothing biblically to support it but this is what they believed and they swaddled the child.

[20:48] When Ezekiel excoriates his people for their sin and their disobedience I think it's in Ezekiel chapter 16 he really takes off on them and he tells them off and he says you were not swaddled at all neither were you salted which means you were rotten from the beginning and that's how Ezekiel described God's covenant people and it wasn't a very complimentary thing thou was not salted at all neither was thou swaddled and the salting if you can imagine this and I talked to a group about this not recently just recently if you can imagine taking salt and rubbing it into the skin of a newborn I imagine that produced some crying don't you think few things sensitive as the skin of a newborn baby and to take salt and rub it into that body all over while that baby is probably whang and crying and squirming but we know that salt is a medicinal agent also and a preservative and it could serve to perhaps counter any kind of infection and

I don't know that this is not required anywhere in scripture but again it's a cultural thing and sometimes people do things that may be foolish and even counterproductive but like they say they call them old wives tales they've been around forever and they do it and it was considered if you salt them then they will grow up with a capability of speaking well let your speech be seasoned with salt our Lord said and that too is no guarantee but but they believe that and it meant that you would grow up to be a person whose words would be true and they could be taken at face value but we know that there were probably a lot of babies salted that turned out to be terrific liars so that doesn't prove anything but anyway they believe that and they practice that so the salting and the swaddling went hand in hand and I suspect that Jesus we know he was swaddled and he was probably salted too even though the scripture doesn't say that and he might have just as soon passed that part of the ceremony but he probably didn't escape it so we read then in verse 12 that you will find the baby lying in the manger this of course is the animal feeding trough and suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying and by the way they are saying they are not singing and all of our

Christmas carols well not all of them but a bunch of them have angels singing but no place in the Bible does it say that angels sing but they do talk and they do say things and here the angels are saying something and they are praising God and saying glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased and it came about when the angel had gone away from them into heaven that the shepherds began saying to one another I love this expression let us go straight to Bethlehem then does this mean that they're not going to stop off at McDonald's on the way that's right they they were in a hurry to get there after all try to imagine try to put yourself in the position of these shepherds do you know how long these people have been promised and waiting for a Messiah 4,000 years 4,000 years have passed since Genesis 3 when God promised that he would send a Messiah and every generation came and died and a new generation came and died off and a new one came every generation thought surely this would be the generation when the Messiah comes just like us in our generation how many past generations have told themselves surely this will be the generation when the rapture occurs we are going to be here we're going to be the ones when the Lord comes well we've only waited half as long for the second coming as the Jews waited for the first coming and to get this announcement from such an authoritative source as these angels appearing to these shepherds and these guys are absolutely beside themselves they know as well as any Jew knows that this Messiah has been promised and promised and promised and promised and promised and when is God going to make good on it no doubt some people probably thought you know I think we've got this whole thing all wrong I don't think there is going to be I don't think that it's meant to be taken literally I think that the Messiah is going to come in some other form or shape or something and not as an actual person probably some people have given up on it and now to these lowly shepherds this absolutely phenomenal message is delivered a Savior which is Christ the Lord we are witnessing history of all history this is something no wonder they came in haste couldn't wait to get there got to see this for themselves got the word from an authoritative source wow let us go straight to Bethlehem then and see this thing which has happened which the Lord has made known to us they came in haste and found their way to Mary and Joseph and the baby as he lay in the manger how different do you think he might have looked I don't think he looked very different at all I think about the only thing you would absolutely be compelled to say as you look at the Son of God lying there in that manger yes sir it sure is a baby he probably looked very ordinary I can assure you this he did not have a halo around him like all of the artists paint on him you know he looked like just an ordinary baby well of course he was a aren't all babies beautiful of course I'm sure he was a handsome baby but he looked just like baby and and I'm satisfied that when he grew to manhood and you saw Jesus walking with the 12 apostles going someplace you might have been very hard-pressed to pick out which one was Jesus because I think he dressed like them I think he looked very much like them I don't think there was anything particularly striking about him so that you could identify him in a crowd I don't think there was a particular glow around him

[28 : 11] I think he looked very much like an ordinary human being and the baby probably much the same so the way you're going to be able to tell this baby from other babies is that this baby is going to be in swaddling clothes and he'll be lying in a feeding trough that'll help you to identify him otherwise I don't think that they would have known so they come and they find him and when they had seen this they made known the statement which had been told them about this child and all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds but Mary treasured all these things that means she's adding to her mental bank all of these things she is connecting dots and putting this together because this all started nine months ago when the angel appeared to her in chapter one well let's go back let's go back to chapter one and let's just pick up a little bit on this Mary is just adding this she's keeping a mother's heart notebook no doubt because in verse 26 of chapter 1 the sixth month the angel

Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth this is six months before or nine months actually nine months before Bethlehem and when the text says in the sixth month it is talking about the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy Elizabeth and Zacharias are going to be the parents of John the Baptist and Elizabeth and Mary are first cousins and John the Baptist and Jesus will be second cousins and Elizabeth's pregnancy is almost as much a miracle as is Mary's because the text tells us in Luke 1 that she is well beyond childbearing years Elizabeth had already undergone the change of life and Zacharias had already put away his sled he considered his fathering days over so now there's going to be a miraculous pregnancy here that will be six months

underway when the angel announces to Mary that she is in verse 27 a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph of the descendant of David the virgin's name was Mary and coming in he said to her hail favored one the Lord is with you but she was greatly troubled there's that angel appearing thing again and she was at this statement and kept pondering what kind of salutation this might be and the angel said to her do not be afraid fear not Mary you have found favor with God and behold you will conceive in your womb and bear a son and you shall name him Jesus I can I can just try to put yourself in Mary's position I know it's impossible for us to do it but give it a little thought here you are a teenage girl you've been seeing this man and you are engaged to this man and probably what was a family arranged marriage by the name of

Joseph and you are making plans maybe you've got a hope just underway and things of that nature and all of a sudden this angel appears to you and tells you this story well she is probably beside herself she's greatly troubled upset confused perplexed of course she is she's just stunned by this this is a girl who rightly is in some kind of emotional shock and she's saying as this angel is talking is this really happening am I imagining this am I dreaming she pinches herself is this real who does she know that had ever had an experience like that before nobody this is a first time around and she is appropriately just completely stunned beside her she's in shock you have found favor with God you will conceive in your womb and bear a son and you shall name him Jesus he will be great and will be called the son of the most high and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David David has been dead for a thousand years he is a far removed ancestor of Mary and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever and his kingdom will have no end what is the house of Jacob that's all of Israel Jacob's name is changed to Israel he's saying he will reign over all 12 tribes of Israel and this is reinforced when Peter asked the question we who have followed you what are we going to realize out Jesus said in Matthew 19 you who have followed me in the regeneration when the son of man comes into his glorious throne you also will sit upon the 12 thrones of Israel judging the 12 tribes this David is this key figure and now it is coming down to David's greater son wow this is really something and he will reign over the house of Jacob Israel forever and his kingdom will have no end but you know something it's never had a beginning kingdom has never started and once it does start it will have no end but it's never started the kingdom is in abeyance it's postponed we are not living in the kingdom righteousness does not cover the earth as the waters cover the seas the earth is not given over to the knowledge of the Lord death and disease have not been done away with we're still dealing with those things this is not paradise this is not utopia this is not the kingdom this is not the millennium this is a rough and ready world that is full of heartache and disease and death and deprivation and everything that goes with it because of the ugliness of that thing called sin and all this we're talking about now is designed to address that and this is where it is beginning Mary said to the angel a very innocent question very predictable question how can this be saying I'm going to have a son I'm a virgin I've never known Mary despite the fact that they had no sex education back in those days Mary knew what was involved in making babies she understood that I am a virgin the angel said to her the Holy Spirit the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you and for that reason the Holy Offspring shall be called the Son of God in other words the angel is saying Mary that's not a problem God can take care of that God knows nothing about obstacles He'll take care of that don't you worry and behold even your relative your cousin Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age and she who was called barren is now in her six months you know

[36 : 42] I think it must have been a tad embarrassing for this Elizabeth who was obviously thought of as an old lady busting out like June all over pregnant as big as a house can you imagine what what was she thinking probably some people thought well it can't be a baby it must be a huge tumor can't be a baby but it was a baby and she no wonder no wonder Elizabeth went in seclusion didn't want to be seen out in public for nothing will be impossible with God and Mary said behold the bond slave of the Lord this is a beautiful picture of complete submission be it done to me according to your word and the angel departed from her and this then the scene switches to Zacharias and Elizabeth and these two girls get together

Mary rose and went with haste to the hill country to a city of Judah because the angels told her the angel told Mary your sister your cousin Elizabeth is six months pregnant and she said what Elizabeth is six months pregnant I gotta see this for myself so she goes and enters the house of Zacharias and greets Elizabeth and it came about when Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting the baby this is John John the baptizer to be born the baby leaped in her womb boy I've still never figured

that out what's going on here what possible kind of intelligence could there be in a fetus that is six months along I'll just say this I am not an obstetrician nor the son of an obstetrician but there is a whole lot of stuff that goes on with making babies and babies maturing in the womb and the gestation period that we don't understand most brilliant gynecologist among us doesn't understand the miracle of a birth and of a baby being conceived and born is just mind boggling I don't understand this John the baptist leaping in the womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and she cried out with a loud voice she says blessed among women are you and blessed is the fruit of your womb and how has it happened to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me what is she saying here what does Elizabeth say Elizabeth has gotten the message Mary is carrying the Messiah of the world the Savior of the world and here these two women these two single individuals upon these two relatively insignificant people is all of human history centering upon just absolutely stunning behold when the sound of your greeting reached my ears the baby leaped in my womb for joy that indicates some level of understanding and intelligence that we cannot appreciate and blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord now Mary's getting all of this stuff she's filling her mind with this and now she is just barely underway in her pregnancy but she knows who it involves and what it involves and she knows that her

Messiah son is going to be born six months after Elizabeth delivers her baby she knows that and Mary said in verse 46 my soul exalts the Lord and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior and I've made observations regarding this before and I don't want to spend much time here but it's worthy of pointing out I make a distinction between the soul and the spirit and a great many make them synonymous but I think they are different I believe that the soul is the total of the body and the spirit so for a formula or an equation I think the body the physical body plus the non physical spirit equals the soul this means we do not have a soul we are a soul and as a soul we possess a spirit and a body and Mary is activating both of these she says my soul exalts the Lord the soul is the totality of your being the soul is the whole personhood everything you are is your soul and in that soul you have an immaterial non physical part that is the real you that's the human spirit every human being has a human spirit this is not to be confused with the

Holy Spirit that's entirely different every human being has a human spirit and in that spirit you are able to connect with God's spirit it is that human spirit that dwells within you that is not matter it is immaterial it is that which is regenerated it is that which is saved at the point of salvation when you come to faith in Christ the soul represents the entirety of my being exalts the Lord that's the soul and my spirit has rejoiced in God my savior the spirit is the repository for human emotions you feel everything that you feel in your spirit whether it's sadness depression gladness elation whatever it might be rejoicing disappointment you sense it in your spirit and the way we know what's taking place in your spirit is we read it in your body language and we can see it on your face you communicate through your facial expressions what is happening in your human spirit whether it's sadness elation gladness fear whatever it is you experience it first in your spirit and then your body exhibits that outwardly what you are feeling inwardly

[43 : 50] Mary is saying my spirit has rejoiced in God my savior rejoicing is an emotion it's a feeling it is a feeling that is generated by something that has happened and it produces a certain feelings because we all feel on the basis of the experiences that we have and whatever it is that's taking place around us whatever it is that is impacting us that's what determines how we feel you got a promotion you're glad you're elated interior you're all bubbly and you just lost your best friend in a car accident and you're down and you're depressed and our feelings get jerked around from one thing to another depending on what's happening in our world and that affects your spirit your human spirit is a repository of emotions standards norms values imagination creativity temperament personality all of those things are part and parcel of your human spirit and you exhibit what's going on in your spirit outwardly so Mary is simply saying with my whole being the totality of my personhood

I exalt the Lord and my spirit has rejoiced in God my savior and what she's saying is in my spirit I am bubbling over I am so excited I can hardly contain myself it's a beautiful thing for he has had regard for the humble state of his bond slave for behold from this time on all generations will count me blessed including ours today we add to those who have gone on who have counted her blessed and we affirm that beautiful thing for the mighty one has done great things for me and holy is his name and his mercy is upon generation after generation toward those who fear him he has done

mighty deeds with his arm he has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart he has brought down rulers from their thrones and has exalted those who were humble he has filled the hungry with good things and sent away the rich empty handed and this is all included in what is commonly called the magnificat this is

Mary's response and it is a paean of praise and rejoicing and I want you to notice verse 54 and 5 he God has given help to Israel his servant she's speaking of Israel as the nation not of the man Israel he too has been dead and buried for 1700 years the man Israel or Jacob but this is the nation as he spoke to our fathers oh oh look at this to Abraham Mary remembers she knows what was promised to Abraham to Abraham and his offspring forever and Mary stayed with her about three months and then returned to her home I've often wondered doesn't say that she stayed until the baby

John the Baptist was born doesn't say that just says she stayed three months so this means that when Mary left the presence of Elizabeth to go back to Nazareth Elizabeth was ready to deliver she was nine months along I just can't imagine Mary not saying I want to stay for the baby I want to be here when the baby comes but the text doesn't say anything about that so we simply cannot reach any conclusion but we do know that Elizabeth went ahead and gave birth to John the Baptist and you won't hear anything more from him years and then he makes his entrance announcing the coming of the Messiah now when you come back over to Luke chapter 2 where we were earlier we read in verse 19 that Mary treasured all these things pondering them in her heart what that means is Mary added to what she already had stored away in her heart what the shepherds are telling and she's saying it all comes together it all fits and it's such a beautiful thing such a beautiful thing and the world of course has never been the same the greatest evidence that we have that

Jesus is coming again is the fact that he came the first time just as he was promised and he will come again and I might as well go ahead and say it because we're all thinking maybe this will be the generation that sees the coming of the Lord maybe we will be the ones to be caught away when our Lord appears and takes his bride takes his church home we have the best possible evidence available for believing what we believe about the return of our Lord what an incredible story God becoming flesh dwelling among us I'm eager to share with you what we have next week for the Christophanies we have a very very busy

[49 : 50] Savior before he was ever born in Bethlehem and I think some of the things that we have to point out will be really different but I'm committed to them and to my satisfaction they are demonstrably verifiable so let's pray Father we are once again struck by the simplicity and the profundity both of which are found in this remarkable story and we can only bow the knee to you for your wisdom and for the fulfillment of all that you have promised we see humanity in general and ourselves in particular being completely unworthy of all that you've provided and perhaps that's the most stunning thing about it in that while we were yet sinners you loved us and gave yourself for us we just cannot get over that and we don't want to get over that we bless you for the truth of it in Christ's wonderful name amen