

## THE CHRISTMAS STORY

With every good story there is at the beginning, a setting of the scene, a giving of the backdrop to the story. The Christmas Story, as it is commonly referred to, is the story of the birth of Jesus to Joseph and the virgin Mary. Jesus then, being the Son of God, was sent by God to be the Savior of the world, to all who would believe. Jesus was to be and is now revealed to us, as the Messiah, or in Greek, the Christ which means the Anointed One. He would die on a cross for our sins and take our sins (against God) upon Himself to justify us before God so that we could be forgiven of our sins, and then have fellowship with God, and inherit eternal life through Jesus (the Christ) our Lord.

Jesus summed up God's purpose for Him coming to this earth in **John 3:16-17**, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

The backdrop of the story then, according to the gospel of Luke, starts with the telling of how Gabriel, an angel from God, came to Zacharias the priest and told him that his barren wife would bear a child and that his name would be called John. He would, in the words of the angel Gabriel, "turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, **to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.**" He would be, as it was written by Isaiah the prophet, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord; Make straight in the desert a highway for our God." (**Isaiah 40:3**) The angel Gabriel said to Zacharias, "he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God." (**Luke 1:16**) That is what is referred to as repentance. Later in the story the message that John the Baptist preached was, "repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." In the telling of the story in Luke he was "preaching a baptism of repentance, for the remission of sins." (**Luke 3:3**) He was preparing the way calling for the people to repent (to have a change of mind, to turn to God and away from their sin) and that Jesus would save them of their sins against God, for He is the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One, the Savior of the world, to all who will believe on Him. To all who will cry out, "save me Lord Jesus!" "For whoever calls on the name of the Lord, shall be saved." (**Romans 10:13**)

Later, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a virgin named Mary, who was betrothed to a man named Joseph. The angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. Then the angel said to her,

"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the **Son of the Highest**; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the **Son of God**. Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. **For with God nothing will be impossible.**" Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her." (Luke 1:28-38)

After that, then Mary went to visit the house of Zacharias and Elizabeth, the soon to be mother of John the Baptist. When Mary spoke a greeting to Elizabeth the babe leaped in her womb. It is in the dialogue of Mary and Elizabeth that we have what is called "Mary's Magnificat." She says,

"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in **God my Savior**. For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name. And **His mercy is on those who fear Him** from generation to generation. He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly. **He has filled the hungry with good things**, and the rich He has sent away empty. He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever." (Luke 1:46-55)

Mary's "Magnificat", in Mary's magnifying the Lord, it leads us to ask ourselves a couple of questions. She rejoiced in "God my Savior." I believe in her saying that, yes, she did know that she was to give birth to her Lord and Savior. The first question then is for us. Do we know that Jesus is our Savior? Mary also says that God's

"mercy is on those who fear Him." When Mary said "my soul magnifies the Lord", she could have said, "my soul magnifies MY Lord." She was giving reverence and honor to Whom it is due: God Almighty, Creator of all things, the King of kings and Lord of lords, and the Savior of the world, to all who will believe. Do WE then not only recognize Jesus as our Savior but also as our Lord? After all, if He is our Creator and He is also our Savior, should He not also be our Lord? "He has filled the hungry with good things." Are we then giving God recognition as being God Almighty, our Savior and then do we want more of Him (or less). "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled." (**Matthew 5:6**) The righteousness of God has been revealed to us in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior! Do you or will you say, I want more of you Jesus?!

The next part of the backdrop to the story of the birth of Jesus is going back to the priest Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist. He had not been able to talk after the visit from the angel Gabriel. After the birth of John, Zacharias was

"filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying: "Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited and redeemed His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David, as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, who have been since the world began, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us, to perform the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to our father Abraham: to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might **serve Him without fear [of our enemies], in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life.**" And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." (**Luke 1:67-79**)

That is called Zacharias' Benedictus. Next in the story is Joseph and Mary going to Bethlehem for the census to where there was no room for them in the inn. At that time Mary gave birth and wrapped Him (Jesus) in swaddling cloths and laid Him in a manger. (**Luke 2:7**) then elsewhere, some shepherds were out watching their flock by night and "...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 Savior, 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!" (Luke 2:9-14)

There is more that can be read in this Christmas Story in the gospel according to Luke and also in the gospel according to Matthew. Yet this story is a message of the hope that we have in Christ Jesus our Lord. The Apostle John summed up the story of John the Baptist and Jesus saying, "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:6-14)

Just as we read of the Christmas Story in Jesus the Christ being magnified by God as the blessing to all of mankind we can praise God and rejoice in knowing Jesus, who came to this earth as a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger became for us, our Savior for dying on a cross for our sins and raising from the dead on the third day, conquering death and giving eternal life to all who put their trust in Him.

From Mary's Magnificat we are reminded to magnify the Lord & rejoice in God our Savior. "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4), through Jesus our Savior and Lord, and that God is willing and ready to fill all of those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Thank You Jesus! Then with Zacharias' Benedictus, we can then "serve [God] without fear [of our enemies], in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life."

Therefore, as it is written, let us keep "looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Hebrews 12:2) He has gotten us this far and one day He'll welcome us into our Eternal home.