

'MEN WHO MISSED CHRISTMAS'
(When 'The Reason for The Season' isn't Christ)
The Christmas Story / Luke 1 & Matthew 2

The Un-Wise Men

A holiday joke goes: “*You do know what would have happened if three wise women would have come to Bethlehem instead of three wise men, don't you? They would have asked for directions, arrived on time, helped deliver the baby, cleaned the stable, made a casserole, and brought disposable diapers as a gift.*”

In hindsight, it's easy to see that many of us today would have responded much better, or at least differently, than the original Christmas characters. If Israel's priesthood had been doing their job of teaching God's Word instead of merely presiding over religious pageantry and liturgical tradition, others besides Mary, Joseph, shepherds, old Simeon, Anna, and a few Persian magi would have known what God was up to in Bethlehem!

Who the Baby was and where He was to be born is very clear from **Micah 5:2**. His virgin birth is clear from **Isaiah 7:14** (**Jeremiah 31:22**). His divine character is proclaimed in **Isaiah 9:6** and **Matthew 1:23**. His mission from God is spelled out in **John 1:14**. Wise men and women would have known the prophecies and been ready to meet the Messiah (*Christ*) as soon as Jesus was born if the truth of prophetic Scripture was being taught prior to His coming. Since they were not ready, many men (and women) sadly missed Christmas.

The little town of Bethlehem should have been watching and waiting for Messiah's coming, but like most everyone else, they were terribly misinformed about the most important earth visitation ever. They had been taught that Messiah would come as a triumphant conqueror of Israel's enemies, but the truth was omitted about His rescue mission to save people from their sins (**Genesis 3:15**, **Psalms 22**, **Isaiah 53**, **Daniel 9:24-25**, etc.). The obvious conclusion of two advents by Messiah (*one to save souls and another to salvage the planet*) separated by a long dispensation of time was omitted in the priests' teaching. It's no wonder that Bethlehem's innkeeper and the residents in general, except for a few shepherds, missed Christmas (**Luke 2:7-20**).

Even one to two years later when the magi from Mesopotamia arrived, King Herod and the religious hierarchy in Jerusalem, only 8 miles away from Bethlehem, knew nothing about the arrival of ‘*God come in the flesh*’ (**1 Timothy 3:16**). If it had not been for the miracle star in the sky and multitude of angels personally inviting some shepherds to come and see Christ the Lord, it's possible that nobody would have understood their invitation to ‘*come let us adore Him*’ the night Christ was born.

Not much has changed in twenty centuries since Jesus ascended into heaven with angelic explanation to disciples, “***This same Jesus, Who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven***” (**Acts 1:11**). There is little difference in the state of preparedness today for His second coming than His first! Although a few preachers believe, teach, and declare ‘*it is the end of the Church Age*’ with the second coming of the Lord Jesus imminently at hand, most are silent about prophecy and totally unprepared when He comes again... just like the first time.

It is time to correct the mistakes of the past by being ‘*ready to receive the King*’! May wise men and women be better *innkeepers of their heart*, making room for the Lord Jesus to be born into their hearts by faith (**John 1:12-13**). May wise citizens of the earth, not merely marvel with wonder at sentimental nativity scenes, but like the shepherds, ‘*make haste in coming to hail Lord Jesus, the incarnate deity*’ and receive His gift of forgiveness, salvation and eternal life for Christmas. **PtL**

‘Woe, Little Town of Bethlehem’
(‘The hopes & seers of all the years, were (missed) by thee that night’)
Luke 2:1-14, 17-20

The Innkeeper: ‘No Vacancy’

(When money (materialism) means more than the Messiah)

“So it was, that while they were (in Bethlehem) the days were completed for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn Son and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths and laid Him in a manger (feed trough), because there was no room for them in the inn.” 2:6-7

Bethlehem was busy with people in town for Caesar’s census and, granted there was very limited accommodations, but for a young lady in hard labor ready to give birth, you’d think there was somewhere decent for the delivery.

- What do you think the innkeeper was thinking about?!
- What would you have done?

Lots of people get so busy at Christmas they don’t have time for church, Christ or spiritual things.

- What are some of the things that can crowd out spiritual things at Christmas time, if we aren’t careful?
- How has the materialism of Western culture in our day complicated Christmas?
- Share some ideas on how to prevent materialism from overshadowing Christ.
- Discuss how modern day secularism is a subtle attack of the enemy on Christ.
- Talk about what you intend to do to keep Christ the main point of Christmas.

The Residents – ‘No Vibrancy’

(When spiritual and personal lethargy rules your life)

*“Now when (the shepherds) had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them saying which was told them concerning this Child. And **all those who heard it marveled 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.”* 2:17-20

The shepherd’s response is the right one to the gospel message – hear it, believe it, act upon it with haste, meet and worship Christ. They also went out and shared with others what had happened to them.

- Talk about how this is what real faith is like.

In contrast the Bethlehemites ‘*marveled*’ (*wonderment, fascination, enchantment*) at what the shepherds shared with them that ‘*Jesus, the Savior*’ was in town.

- Do you think many actually went to the manger scene to meet Jesus?
 - *Why or why not?*

Lots of people sentimentally love Christmas but not necessarily Christ as Savior and Lord, then when the holiday is over, like the Bethlehemites, go back to life as usual.

- Talk about whether or not a casual, seasonal, spiritual interest reflects true salvation.
- The shepherds returned to business as usual as well, but dramatically changed too!
- What about them proves their faith was real?
 - Should this be true of all believers?