

Did You Forget God the Father?

This week I was reading a sermon by Martin Luther about Christmas. The sermon I was reading was the first of five messages that he gave on Isaiah 9:7. I was curious as to why he preached five sermons on one verse. I know that on occasions some people think I preach too long on a passage of scripture, but try preaching on one verse for five sermons. I was impressed! As I was reading them, I found Martin Luther to be really challenging. Luther wrote and preached in the late 1400's to the mid 1500's AD - a long time ago. In his first message, he said that Christians in his day would hear about Christ's birth, but he complained that they would have almost no heart response.

I have to admit I was surprised. I was thinking that was only true today. But Martin Luther struggled with that kind of response from his congregation in his own day. Christians hear about Christ's birth, and there is almost no

heart response at all. It is like, "Oh, we have done this before." Luther went on to comment that there was no excitement about Christ's birth. The listeners were too preoccupied with other things. Today for some of us, it has become rote also! We have celebrated Christmas before! We have done this how many years in a row? What more can someone say? It is amazing what Christians and non-Christians take for granted when it comes to Christmas. It is most amazing who we ignore at Christmas.

Therefore, I was thinking about titling this message,

"Ignored at Christmas," but I changed it. Now, I suspect that some of you are probably thinking that I am going to talk about some poor soul who is all alone at Christmas, or some heartless person who has ignored others on Christmas such as a Mr. Scrooge! Either you are the one who is ignored, or you are ignoring someone. That is the point. If that is what you are thinking, you are wrong. I am not speaking today about your parents, your grandparents, your other relatives, your neighbors or your friends. I am not talking about the pastor, the elders of the church, or somebody else in the church that maybe you have ignored. No, I am not talking about any of these. The one I am talking about will be mentioned later in the message. So

I would encourage you to read and try to discover who it is I am talking about and who is being ignored.

Sometimes I hear Christians criticize non-Christians because they focus on the unimportant,

such as cookies or candy, eggnog or turkey with cranberry sauce. Or you can name what other kind of food that is important to you. Maybe it is pecan, cherry or pumpkin pie—I do not know. Some of you might be thinking of mistletoe and kissing, love and sex. I do not know. Our televisions are screaming those kinds of messages at this time of the year. I do not know how one actually connects all that with Christmas, but that is what our world is doing. Some of you might be thinking of giving and receiving gifts. Some of you may be thinking about trees and lights, or Santa



Claus and reindeer, or candy canes and the Grinch. Some look forward to the traditional movies of the season about couples falling in love, because those are warm and loving family related stories of this time of the year.

I have to admit that this season I have been listening to different television commentators and what they have to say about Christmas. This morning I caught a commentator saying that Christmas is really about family. Is Christmas really about family? Frankly, I have to admit to you that some Christians are not much different than non-Christians. They think nice thoughts at Christmas time—think nice thoughts about God, Christ and about manger scenes. For them Christmas is about family, and food, and fun. As I was thinking about food and fun and all we do at Christmas time, I started thinking about Ecclesiastes 8:15 which says, “Let us eat, drink, and be merry.” It sounds like what many do this time of the year. Do you know what has happened? Many have missed what Christmas is really all about. The message of Christmas is not about Mary and Joseph. Christmas is not about angels or shepherds. Christmas is not about wise men or King Herod. Christmas is not about Bethlehem or the manger. What so many Christians have missed is that there were two very important persons that first Christmas, and one of them you believe is Jesus Christ.

BIRTH DATE OF JESUS CHRIST. So join with me and turn to Luke 2:1. I want you to discover who it is that we have ignored. We are going to study Luke 2:1-14. In verses 1-7 we are given the time of Christ’s birth. We are also told where He would be born, and numerous other details. Luke 2:1-3 is the beginning of our study. It reads:

Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city. Luke 2:1-3 (NASB)

Now verses 1 and 2 are very important because they give us the date of the events that follow from verse 3 through verse 20. There are two date or time markers. The first one is that there was a decree issued by Caesar Augustus. He

lived roughly from 63 B.C. through A.D. 14. His life overlapped part of Christ’s life including Christ’s birth. Caesar Augustus ruled the Roman Empire starting in 27 B.C., so his reign was from 27 B.C. through A.D. 14. That is what verse 1 tells us.

Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. Luke 2:1 (NASB)

What that verse teaches us is that he issued a decree for a census to be taken. The Greek word for census can also mean “to register.” Usually when we think of a census, we think of something that impacts taxes, something involving money. But the Greek word can also simply mean a registration. We believe that is what was being described here, but the New American Standard refers to it as a census. So Caesar Augustus wanted them to be registered, and the purpose for the registration is to later tax them.

Verse 2 gives us the next date marker. The next date marker is that the census was taken during the reign of the governor Quirinius. Now what is important about Quirinius is that the dates of his governorship help us better understand when Jesus was actually born. Now there is some confusion about the time Quirinius reigned as governor. Some people believe that he reigned between 5 or 6 B.C to 4 B.C. However, the right answer is 3 to 2 B.C. This conclusion is based on the scholarly and phenomenal work published by Jack Finnegan. The title of his book is *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*. If you are a person who is into detail, and you desire precision with unbelievable detail, pick up his book. He does a masterful job of showing that this registration most likely occurred in 3 to 2 B.C. What is even more interesting is that the early church fathers Tertullian and Justin Martyr referred to this registration and urged people to check out the references in Roman archives as proof that the registration occurred. Therefore, note that these events actually occurred. If you had lived at the time, you could have gone to the Roman archives and checked the report and found that this census occurred. It is not a fabricated lie.

The early Church fathers state that Jesus was born some-

time between 3 to 2 B.C., contrary to what many today say is 6 to 4 B.C. There is also evidence from the early Church fathers that Jesus was born near December 25. The alternate date is typically January 6. Those are the two major dates as to when Jesus was born. But I believe that the weight of the evidence tells us that He was born on December 25 and that we celebrate Christmas on the day that He was born.

WHY JESUS WAS BORN ON DECEMBER 25. Verses 1 and 2 tell us when He was born. Is it not incredible that the writer of the gospel of Luke took the pain and effort to give us some date markers so that we can determine when Jesus was born? This raises an interesting question: if Jesus was born about 3 to 2 B.C., why did God the Father pick that date for Christ's birth? Why, after Adam and Eve sinned, was the Messiah not born immediately? In fact if you go to Genesis 4:1, you will find that when Cain was born, Eve said, "The Lord gave me a man child!" She was so excited! There are some who believe she thought that Cain was the Messiah, come to rescue them from their sin. I think that may have been what she was thinking. But she was wrong, Cain later kills his brother—hardly the response of the Messiah. So why was it that the Messiah was not born immediately? Why was the Messiah not Cain? Why did God the Father wait so long to have the Messiah born? The answer is we do not know! What we do know is that He was born somewhere between 3 to 2 B.C. In Galatians 4:4, we are told that He was born in the fullness of time. In Romans 5:6, we are told that He was born at the "right time." God had him born at the ... right time, 3 to 2 B.C. We have no clue as to why that was the right time, but we are told that was in the fulness of time and the right time.

Verses 4-5 now focus on Joseph and Mary.

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, in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child. Luke 2:4-5 (NASB)

Now we are told that Joseph and Mary left Nazareth in Galilee. It was about a 90-mile trip, four to seven days, to travel

to Bethlehem. We are told several interesting things in this passage of scripture. First of all, God the Father planned for Christ to be born in Bethlehem. That is, they went to the city of David, and the city's name was Bethlehem. We are given the reason for the trip. They went there because Joseph was a descendant of David.

WHY CHRIST WAS BORN IN BETHLEHEM. Verse 5 tells us what motivated them to go; it was to be registered. It is interesting that the verse says to register, not to participate in a census. He went "along with Mary, who was engaged to him and was with child." So note that God the Father planned for Christ to be born in Bethlehem. Why is that important? Because Micah 5:2 prophesied that would happen.

*But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
Too little to be among the clans of Judah,
From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel.
His goings forth are from long ago,
From the days of eternity. Micah 5:2 (NASB)*

Now God the Father moved the prophet Micah to write that by the Holy Spirit. That prophecy that one would be born in Bethlehem Ephrathah. Bethlehem Ephrathah was the Bethlehem near Jerusalem. Did you know that there were actually two Bethlehems in Israel? There was one up in Galilee, and one down in Judea. The one down in Judea is about five miles south of Jerusalem. That one is Bethlehem Ephrathah. The prophecy is so specific that it actually tells us that this Bethlehem is not the one in the north! The Bethlehem in the south is where He would be born. Now that is precision in a prophecy. God wants us to get it right. Who is it that is going to be born? First of all we are told that it will be a ruler in Israel. Then we are told that His goings are from long ago, from the days of eternity. The first phrase, "long ago," actually means "antiquity." That means from a long time back. Eternity is how long? As far back as you want to go. There is only one person who qualifies, and He is God, not you or me. There is only One who can possibly be born from eternity, and that One is God.

To review, we are told in Micah 5:2, that Christ was

going to be born in Bethlehem and He was going to have human flesh. But this also tells us that God the Father was faithful. Why? Because He gave us a prophecy that this birth would occur. He said it was going to happen. It helps us to identify the Christ. Since Christ also means Messiah, Luke 2:11 helps us identify the Messiah. Luke was masterful. The Messiah was the one whose birth is described in Luke 2:6-7.

WHY CHRIST WAS VIRGIN BORN. Now we know the date and place of Christ's birth. But what kind of birth did He have? Verses 6 and 7 give us the answer.

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. Luke 2:6-7 (NASB)

The answer is Jesus' birth was a virgin birth. Isaiah 7:14 foretold that He would have a virgin birth. Matthew 1:22-23 says,

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 IMMANUEL," which translated means, "GOD WITH US." Matthew 1:22-23 (NASB)

Now I want you to pay attention to the statement that He would be virgin born. There is a lot of debate as to whether or not Isaiah 7:14 refers to a young woman or a virgin. It is important to know that the Greek word for "virgin" in Matthew 1:22-23 is *the* Greek word that is used for a virgin. If you wanted to refer to a virgin, you would use a particular Greek word, and that Greek word is what is used here. So if you are a little confused about Isaiah, just look at Matthew. Matthew is quoting that Old Testament passage of scripture. He uses the right Greek word to communicate that His birth was from a virgin. Do you know why that is important? It is another sign He was and is the Messiah. Something I did not mention earlier is that the book of Daniel prophesied Christ had to die in the year A.D. 33, and the only way that Christ could have died in A.D. 33 is that He had to be born in A.D. 3-2. So the dating of verses 1 and 2 is important,

and the prophecy in verses 4 and 5 is important. The virgin birth occurs in verses 6 and 7. So there is a complete story here, an incredible story.

God the Father planned Christ's virgin birth. God the Father patiently waited for the right time, unlike how we often behave. God the Father performed it and executed it. He had it occur at the right time. He fulfilled prophecy so we would be able to identify the Messiah, or the Christ. He put it all together—miracle after miracle after miracle.

WHY THE ANGELS VISITED THE SHEPHERDS. Verse 8 says,

In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. Luke 2:8 (NASB)

That is an important verse, because it tells us that there was a group of shepherds out in the field that was called the Shepherds' Field. They were watching their flock at night. Now some people have said, "It could not have occurred in December because it would have been too cold." Did you know that the weather history for Bethlehem is almost identical to the weather history of Tucson, Arizona? How often do we have snow on the ground? Maybe once a year—rarely in December. But for shepherds to be out at night in December is perfectly possible.

Therefore, a group of shepherds were out in the field, and then a miracle is described in verse 9. It was a surprise! It says,

And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. Luke 2:9 (NASB)

I want you to notice that they were frightened. Notice something extremely important in this verse. Verse 9 says "an angel of the Lord." When we encounter the angel of the Lord in the Old Testament, we would immediately say, "Oh, that is a Christophany, an Old Testament appearance of Christ." But this cannot be a Christophany because Christ is a baby in a manger in Bethlehem. Who sent this angel?

God the Father!

I want you to think about something else. Do you know what God the Father did after Christ was born in Bethlehem? God did not pass out cigars to celebrate His birth. There were no gifts being passed out. There were no parties. But there were angels! How exciting can that be? God just sent His angels to make an announcement to some shepherds. He sent angels to make an announcement about the birth of the Messiah! Also notice in verse 9 that the angel stood before the shepherds. Many of the paintings and illustrations of this event place the angel up in the air. But the passage says the angel stood before them on the ground. So just a mental check —“he stood.”

Verses 10-11 reads as follows:

But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. Luke 2:10-11 (NASB)

What does the angel say? The angel tells them there is good news. I like that: “good news of great joy.” And we are told that “today in the city of David . . .” That meant the birth occurred in the city of David (Bethlehem). Next, what does “for you” mean? Who is “you”? I checked it out and the word “you” is plural. So, it referred to every shepherd. It refers to every person. It referred to every person that morning, and every person around the world since. He was born for us. Had you realized that He was born for you?! What does that mean? That means the Father loves you and cares about you. Then who is the He in this verse? He is the Savior. He is the Lord. When the angel said “Savior,” he told us that Christ came to die for our sins, and “Lord” means He is the one that we are to worship.

Now notice verse 12.

“This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest,

And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.” Luke 2:12-14 (NASB)

That is one incredible statement in the pages of scripture. Do you know what we often see on Christmas cards? Historically, we would see “peace on earth” on Christmas cards, but that is occurring less frequently. We often see a part of the verse. If we see anything, it might be “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men.” It stops there. The last part of the verse is eliminated which says, “with whom He is pleased.” “With whom He is pleased,” is who? Christians.

CONCLUSION. Now do you know who we have missed? We have missed the first part of the verse.

“Glory to God in the highest . . .”

Notice who is being praised. Christ is not being praised here in this verse at all. Who is being praised? God in the highest. Who is God in the highest? God the . . . Father. God the Father is the One who is being praised here in verse 14. I want you to notice that the One being praised here is not the Messiah, nor the Christ. The One Who is being praised is God the Father. And why? Because He is the One who loves us, and who is faithful. I am not trying to say Christ is not, but the Father planned all of it. The Father waited and waited for the right time, and *He* performed it. Did you know that Christ tells us in the gospels that the Father sent Him? Christ tells us that the Father sent him. In fact, we are told that the living Father sent Him. Christ came to die because of the Father. Realize the Father was completely involved. God the Father planned for Christmas to occur in Bethlehem. God the Father planned for Christ to be the one who was born in Bethlehem. God the Father was the one who planned for the shepherds to come and celebrate Christ’s birth. God the Father planned for Mary to be the mother of Christ and Joseph to assume the role of the earthly father. So we worship Christ because God the Father wants us to worship Him. We worship Christ because He is the Savior who came to forgive us, and to make us as holy as God is, as white as snow. He is our Lord, the one whom we

are to serve above all others.

So do you know now who has been ignored? God the Father. Who is it that is ignored at Christmas? God the Father, because He put it all together. He waited for just the right time. He performed it. He executed it. He left all the prophecies for us so that we could know who He is. He gave us dates. He gave the shepherds the sign. Christ is the Messiah. Christ is the one who is from long ago, from eternity

past, who came in human flesh to die on a cross, and God the Father put it together and made it happen.

So that is why the angels say, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased." So today, when you share the Christmas story with your family do not forget God the Father. He put it together. He made it all happen. Let us express our thanksgiving by thanking Him and worshipping Him.