

A Family Christmas

Christmas is a time when families love to get together to celebrate the birth of the Saviour. Family members who have been away from home make every effort to return and meet with their loved ones. What a great blessing it is for parents to have their children, some of whom are married with families of their own, gathered together at the table on Christmas Day.

The whole Christmas season is centred around a particular family. Approximately two thousand years ago a man named Joseph and his wife Mary travelled from their home in Nazareth to register in a census in the city of Bethlehem. While they were there Mary gave birth to a baby boy. She had no idea that the birth of her Son, Jesus, would be celebrated throughout the world by countless people for many generations and that this family would be remembered each time people celebrated Christmas. The story of this family is recorded for us in the Scriptures.

Mary was a young virgin who was engaged to be married to Joseph. One day the angel Gabriel appeared to her and informed her that she had been especially chosen by God to give birth to His Son. He told her that the conception of the child in her womb would be as a result of the intervention of the Holy Spirit. This young woman did not fully understand the implications of what might happen. However, she realised God had a personal interest in her as an individual, so she was prepared to trust Him concerning what was to come.

Mary loved Joseph and planned to marry him. But now she was faced with a very difficult situation. How could she tell him that she had conceived a child? How would he respond? Would he cancel all the wedding plans? What about her parents? What about Joseph's parents and family? How would they respond? What about all her friends? What would they think of her now? What about all the neighbours? Wouldn't some people just love to spread gossip and scandal?

However, none of these issues prevented Mary from submitting herself into God's hands and trusting Him for the future. Her unconditional surrender to the Lord is summed up in her own words: **'Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true." And then the angel left her.'**¹

Joseph was the local village carpenter, but he could trace his ancestry right back to King David. When Mary informed him that she was pregnant Joseph must have come to the conclusion that she had been unfaithful to him. Consequently, he could not envisage taking her home to live with him in the usual marriage relationship. But while he was thinking these things over an angel appeared to him in a dream and informed him that it was by the power of the Holy Spirit, and not in the natural way, that Mary had conceived.

Any doubts Joseph might have had concerning Mary's faithfulness to him disappeared when he realised that the child who was to be born to her was not the son of a human father. This child was God's own Son. In fact He was Emmanuel, God the Son. Joseph must have marvelled when he realised that the child to whom Mary would give birth would be the long-awaited Saviour.

Jesus was born in a stable in Bethlehem. An angel announced the news of His birth to a group of shepherds and said to them, **"The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!"**² There was great rejoicing when **'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners'**.³

The child Jesus was reared in the family home in the town of Nazareth. When He reached the age of thirty He began His ministry. He left people in no doubt concerning the work He had come to do. Jesus said, 'For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost.⁴ I will not judge those who hear me but don't obey me, for I have come to save the world and not to judge it.⁵ God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.'⁶

The last words Jesus spoke to His mother were uttered from the cross. Joseph died some time before the crucifixion and Mary now needed someone to take care of her for the remainder of her life. Jesus committed His mother into the care of the apostle John who would be like a son to her. Jesus was now about to die and leave His mother. Thirty three years earlier she had rejoiced as she cradled Him as an infant in her arms. But now this loving mother's heart was breaking as she watched her Son suffering on a cross.

Jesus was dying as a substitute for sinners. He took the guilt of our sins upon Himself and bore the punishment we deserved. Referring to Jesus, the prophet Isaiah wrote, 'But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the LORD laid on him the sins of us all'.⁷

By paying the penalty for our sins Jesus secured for us a Pardon. This Pardon will be put to the account of all who repent of their sins and put their faith in Christ.

On the first Christmas, Joseph knocked on the door of a house in Bethlehem, seeking accommodation. However, there was no room in the Inn for Joseph and his wife, Mary, who was about to give birth to Jesus. 'She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them'.⁸

Friend, did you know that Jesus said, "Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends."⁹ Could it be that, this Christmas, Jesus is knocking on your door, on the door of your heart? Is there room in your life for the Saviour? Why not invite Him in today?

Do not delay,
'For God says,
"At just the right time, I heard you.
On the day of salvation, I helped you."
Indeed, the "right time" is now. Today is the day of salvation'.¹⁰

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Scripture References

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| 1: Luke 1 v 38 | 6: John 3 v 17 |
| 2: Luke 2 v 11 | 7: Isaiah 53 vs 5, 6 |
| 3: 1Timothy 1 v 15 | 8: Luke 2 v 7 |
| 4: Luke 19 v 10 | 9: Revelation 3 v 20 |
| 5: John 12 v 47 | 10: 2 Corinthians 6 v 2 |

