



It's that time of year again when we all think about Christmas. It is a wonderful time. We think about presents and getting together with friends and family. But is it as wonderful as it should be. I could say and ask, "Is it as wonderful as it used to be?" We all have memories of Christmases of our past. Most of us have good memories of when we were children and the wonderful times of gathering together with family and friends. Some of us, unfortunately, did not have such wonderful Christmas memories. Yes, some of us had some difficult times during this time of year throughout our lives.

Regardless of what memories this time of year arouse within you, the most important memory must be of today... right now!!! The past is past. Yes, we can dwell on the memories – good or bad. However, today is a new day and as a believer in Jesus we no longer are to look back but rather we are to look forward. We are to look at what is ahead of us because of what God did by sending and giving us His gift of love - Jesus.

Oh, we can "look back," but not at our past. Rather we look back to a time two thousand years ago in a very small town called Bethlehem. It was there that everything changed. It was there where everyone's life would totally change or at least they would have the opportunity and the ability to change.

It was there where God sent the Savior of all Mankind to save them from their wretchedness and the ultimate fate of eternal damnation in a place called Gehenna - hell. Yes, we read about this in the scriptures. For those of us who may need to be reminded of this, we read in Luke 2:4-7, *"And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:)"*<sup>5</sup> *To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.*<sup>6</sup> *And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.*<sup>7</sup> *And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn."*

Yes, we read of the famous words as spoken of in Luke 2:7, *"...there was no room for them in the inn."* This may seem like a very subtle statement as found in this story of the birth of Jesus, the Savior of all mankind. However, it is so very apt. It simply tells us that there was no room in the inn. That seems to say it all.

You see there was no room for Mary, Joseph and Jesus at the inn or anywhere else in Bethlehem – except a manger. Everything was filled up with everyone doing what they were supposed to do – register in their home town. After all, that is why Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem in the first place. They had to do their civic duty and register in their "home town." Everyone was simply doing what they were supposed to do as told to them by their government which at that time was the Roman government.

However, as we all know, God was doing something different. The Old Testament scriptures were very clear of the fact that the Messiah was to come out of Bethlehem. God had to arrange for Joseph and Mary to go from where they were living, in Nazareth, to go to where the prophetic word had told the people where Messiah was to come out from – Bethlehem. The Messiah, it was told would be born in a manger. A manger is the birthing place for lambs. Yes, the Lamb of God was going to be born in a place where lambs were birthed – in a manger in the town of Bethlehem.

God in His majestic and miraculous way made a "heathen ruler" of Rome, all of a sudden, decide to order everyone under his authority to go and "register" where they were from. Why else would Mary and Joseph go to Bethlehem? Joseph and Mary were living and were going to settle and live in Nazareth. Joseph had to - actually he was "legally" forced to - go and "register" in Bethlehem. However, God had a plan according to His Word, the scriptures of where Messiah was to be borne. Therefore, all of this had to come about.

As we look at this account of where Messiah was to be born and as we look at everything which transpired with Mary and with Joseph, we notice something very interesting. We are never actually given an exact date in which any of these events took place. I know we celebrate Christmas on December 25, however, we all know that it is simply a date that the early leaders of the Roman Catholic Church came up with much later on in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. The Bible never really gives us an exact date of the birth of the Messiah, Jesus.

However, the Bible is very clear on the exact date in which Jesus died. We know that Jesus died on Passover. We know that the exact date in which Jesus rose from the dead was three days later on another feast day which was Chag ha-Bikkurim. We know that this all took place during the season of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The only other event we are given an exact date is that of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which was on another feast day known as the Feast of Pentecost. Hmmm... Isn't that interesting?

As many of you may know, I am referring us to the feast days as found in Leviticus 23. The "Feasts" were given to the Hebrews by God (YHWH), for the purpose of pointing His people to the "Day of Messiah's" coming - both His first and His second coming. They point to and become a "type" of all the aspects of what Messiah will do in bringing forth restoration of relationship between Man and God, both upon this earth and for eternity.

The feasts/ festivals are "natural" teaching tools that represent and point to "spiritual" truths. Just as all the Law - it points to and shows us truth. God gave the Jewish people these festivals to "celebrate" and to observe. They were never meant to be a means of salvation. They were meant to be a teaching tool and a method of instruction concerning His plan of redemption and salvation which leads to a restoration back to a personal relationship to God. As we know, salvation only comes by faith in the one, true God - Yahweh, and through the "blood of the Lamb," Jesus.

We must grasp and understand that these specific feasts were not to be thought of as "Jewish Feasts." God explicitly declares that these are **His** feasts, "Feasts of **the Lord**," and that it is He that is giving the invitation to everyone to come and partake of them. Leviticus 23:1-4, tells us very clearly that these are "Festivals of the Lord," not "feasts of the Jews." They are God's "feasts." They are for Him and for His purposes.

It is so important to note that these feasts were open for both Jewish people and any non-Jew ("*stranger*") that had accepted and believed in the Hebrew God, Yahweh, as the only true God. (Deuteronomy 16:10-11, 14) God is not just the God of the Jewish people but He is the Lord God of all peoples. He is the "Host" of His festivals and everyone is invited to partake of them.

As believers in Jesus, we experience these feasts now as the "one new man in Christ" – both Jewish people and Gentile people. Ephesians 2:15 tells us, "*... for to make in himself of twain one new man...*" We are no longer two separate people but now, in Jesus as Messiah, our Lord and our Savior, we are now one in Him.

Yes, as we can see through His word that four of the feasts have been accomplished. However, we must never forget but rather we must always be looking forward to the fulfillment of the last three feasts which are still yet to come – the feasts of "Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur and Tabernacles." The feasts are celebrated every year by the Jewish people. However, they will be "spiritually" fulfilled in the very near future. There is much we can say on these three remaining feasts ... but that is for another time.

I would like to return to the fact we mentioned earlier in our discussion which concerned what happened when Joseph and Mary finally arrived in Bethlehem. We read that there were no rooms left in Bethlehem. Yes, we read again of those famous words as spoken of in Luke 2:7, "*...there was no room for them in the inn.*" This may seem like a very subtle statement as found in this story of the birth of Jesus, the Savior of all

mankind. However, it is so very apt. It simply tells us that there was no room in the inn. But could it be saying something much more to us and to every person who would hear and listen to this Good News.

We know that as we read it is referring to the time and place of Mary giving birth to Jesus. We know that everyone was returning to the place of their natural birth. Doesn't that seem to "ring" in our heads a little? Yes, Bethlehem was to be the place of birth for the Messiah of the entire human race to finally behold and embrace. However, could it be saying something more? Hmmm....

We know that Bethlehem was full of people. We know that they were all registering as the emperor had ordered. However, even in the midst of all of the things that were going on we see God was always in the midst. The people were oblivious, unfortunately, to what was truly happening. The Messiah, their Savior, their true source of life was right there in the midst of them. Yet they were all blinded to that truth.

We see that God declared the birth of our Messiah by the angelic choir that declared it out in the skies over the fields that were covered with the sheep, lambs and shepherds. The shepherds heard the angelic choir and went and sought and found the new born King. There was a "star" that was seen by the Magi in a far away land, most likely in Persia, which caused them to travel two years to finally get to the place where Jesus was now living in Bethlehem, two years after His birth. Why didn't anyone else hear or see these things. After all, both of these things were in the heavens where anyone who would "look up" would be able to see them. Hey... the star was in the sky for over two years yet no one noticed. Hmmm....

Yes, those who were truly looking for the coming of their Savior, found Him, saw Him and believed in Him. However, I cannot stop thinking about everyone else that was in Bethlehem or even in that region at that very moment in time. Why did only a few see him? Why did the Magi come and travel to see this newborn King? Why didn't anyone else recognize and seize the moment and see the King of kings and Lord of lords?

I believe the answer for that time is the same as the answer for today. People are simply not looking for their Savior. They are too busy with the cares and concerns of this world. Jesus said it so plainly in one of His first parables – the "Parable of the Seed Sown." As we know the Sower, who represents God the Father, sowed the seed (His Word which was and is Jesus) in four different "soils."

There was the seed that was sown "by the wayside" which represented the hearts of those that could care less and did not even want to hear about the Word of God. It is a heart that is not at all open to receiving anything concerning God's love, forgiveness, grace, mercy or peace. We see that the devil (represented by the fowls of the air) comes immediately to take any hint of the Word away so that the individual will stay in their darkness and deception. Still, however, God gave them the opportunity to hear and receive the word. They simply refused it.

There is the seed sown onto "rocky soil." This is a heart that when it first hears the message of the Gospel it thinks it sounds wonderful. Their ears "receive" it but yet their heart is not truly prepared to fully receive it. Their faith in the truth is very shallow and when the "heat of persecution" comes for being a follower of Christ, their heart is revealed and they immediately walk away from it.

There is the seed that is sown in "thorny soil." This is a heart that when it first hears the message of the Gospel it also thinks it sounds wonderful. Their ears "receive" it but, again, their heart was never truly prepared to fully receive it. The devil knows the various "buttons" to push for this type of heart. According to Jesus, these "buttons" all involve the "cares and concerns of this world."

This could mean things such as: the thoughts of gain or wealth, looking for a mate, fame, honor, position or anything else that becomes the priority of the individual heart instead of God. Actually, it simply reveals that these things were always a “priority” in that person's heart. The devil just knows how to expose it. The result, again, is a decision to walk away from the Good News of salvation in Jesus.

Lastly, we read of the seed that fell on the "good soil." This is a heart that is prepared and ready to receive the Good News of salvation through Jesus. They receive it with joy. It is real and it is steadfast. Their life has been changed. They have become a “new creature in and through Christ.”

So here we are. We have heard and we know the story in the Bible that tells us concerning the birth of Jesus. We have heard and read of Jesus as found in the four Gospel accounts. The question we must always be willing to answer with a resounding “YES” is this - Do I believe that Jesus is the Son of God, who came in the flesh, lived on this earth, took the punishment for all my sins, died on that cross? Do I believe that He then took my punishment and went to a place called hell but then defeated the enemy (the devil and all the forces of darkness) and then resurrected and is now seated at the right hand of the Father waiting to return once more to rule and reign on this earth for 1000 years?

Do you believe in the only Lord and Savior of all Man? Do you believe in Jesus? Do you believe everything that He did and in everything that He will do? Or will you be like those who were in Bethlehem on that glorious evening. The Savior came. He was right in front of them. However, they had no room for Him. Their mind was not on Him – it was on other things.

During this time of year we all have our minds on many things and in many different places. I encourage each of us to truly make our hearts the place where Jesus can be “birthed” in and make His dwelling place forever. If you have never truly asked Him to come into your life, your heart, than now is the time. Please, accept, believe and receive Him this very minute. Do not put it off. Give Him place in your “inn” - your heart, today.

If you truly know Him then share that gift, the true gift of new life, with everyone you know – both in the words you speak and in your actions as a true child of God with His love beaming forth onto others. Jesus truly is the reason for the season. He is the reason for the life that we now live. Jesus is the reason for the new life given to us by a loving Heavenly Father so that we can live for eternity as His child - a child of the Most High God.

From Trish and myself, we pray that this season truly brings you all into “new life in Christ.”  
God bless you.