

Dec 13, 2009



Early Risers and Alfred Bell Combined Class

The Oaks
Baptist Church
Grand Prairie, Texas

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Lesson Leaders:

Alfred Bell
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Class Leaders:

Joe & Comella Liles (ER)
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O Little Town of Bethlehem

Text: Phillips Brooks, 1835-1893

Music: Lewis H. Redner, 1830-1908

1. O little town of Bethlehem,
how still we see thee lie;
above thy deep and dreamless sleep
the silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
the everlasting light;
the hopes and fears of all the years
are met in thee tonight.
2. For Christ is born of Mary,
and gathered all above,
while mortals sleep, the angels keep
their watch of wondering love.
O morning stars together,
proclaim the holy birth,
and praises sing to God the king,
and peace to all on earth!
3. How silently, how silently,
the wondrous gift is given;
so God imparts to human hearts
the blessings of his heaven.
No ear may hear his coming,
but in this world of sin,
where meek souls will receive him, still
the dear Christ enters in.
4. O holy Child of Bethlehem,
descend to us, we pray;
cast out our sin, and enter in,
be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels
the great glad tidings tell;
o come to us, abide with us,
our Lord Emmanuel!

Christmas Faith

Matt 1:18 - 2:23

Many were those, that first Christmas night, who did not have any idea that the Savior of the World had been born. Most of those who were informed of His birth were troubled by it. Few came to grasp the meaning of the event.

Things have not changed. To truly rejoice at this Christmas time, one must view the event through the eyes of faith, like Mary and Joseph, the shepherds of old, the Magi from the east, and a handful of others. They must look beyond appearances, and see the reality. They must understand the event in terms of the prophecies of the Old Testament Scriptures, and in the light of the revelations given at the time of His birth.

You must believe in the virgin birth. You must believe that He came to save men from their sins. You must believe that He will come again to reign as King of all the earth. All of these truths were made known at the time of the Savior's birth, and those who rejoiced were those who believed them, and believed in Him, falling before a baby, in worship.

Jesus' birth was not just an occasion for the rejoicing of those who received it, by faith. Nor was it even the cause for some being troubled, as those in Jerusalem were disturbed by the news of His birth. It was, for many, the occasion for great tragedy and mourning. In His frantic effort to rid himself of the threat posed by the Messiah, Herod killed infants in Bethlehem, fulfilling yet another Old Testament prophecy, undoubtedly not recognized as such.

How could God allow such tragedy and suffering to accompany the birth of His Son? How could God spare His Son, but allow the sons of other parents to be slaughtered by Herod? How can this text bring us joy?

- God would allow the rulers of Israel to put His Son to death.
- The reality is that these children were delivered, by death, into the hand of God.
- Jesus' words, spoken early in His public ministry at the Sermon on the Mount, suggest to us that it is those who mourn who turn to the Savior for comfort and salvation.

(Both pages are excerpts from "Christmas Faith" by Bob Deffinbaugh)

NOTES AND CROSS-REFERENCES

The Faith of Joseph

Joseph's options from Deuteronomy 22:13-29:

- If he confessed he was not the father, Mary would be condemned as an adulteress.
- If he lied and claimed to be the father, the reputations of all and the qualifications of Jesus as Messiah would be tarnished.
- His action was to take Mary as his wife, to keep her a virgin until after the birth of Jesus, and to serve as the father of our Lord, protecting him from danger.

The source of Joseph's faith:

- a dream
- an angelic message

The content of Joseph's faith:

- Mary was pregnant in a unique and miraculous way-- Jesus was virgin born.
- The virgin birth was a fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14, a text no doubt not viewed as messianic at the time.

(Isa 7:14) Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel. (NKJV)

- The Lord Jesus was destined to save His people from their sins.
- The appearance was the opposite of reality, thus requiring faith:
- The appearance: Mary and Joseph had an illegitimate child, and Jesus was, as such, disqualified from normal access and worship (Deuteronomy 23:2).

(Deut 23:2) "One of illegitimate birth shall not enter the assembly of the Lord; even to the tenth generation none of his descendants shall enter the assembly of the Lord. (NKJV)

- The reality: Jesus was indeed the Son of God, supernaturally conceived by the Holy Spirit, and thus sinless and qualified to become the sin-bearer for the sins of men.
- The appearance would cause many to reject Jesus (John 8:41); the reality was that which men must believe to be saved.

(John 8:39-41) 39 They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. 40 But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this. 41 You do the deeds of your father." (NKJV)

The Faith of the Magi

The source of the revelation which was the basis of the Magi's faith:

- The prophecy of **Micah 5:2**
(Micah 5:2) "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." (NASU)
- The contrast between the Magi and the Jews of Jerusalem:
 - ◇ The Jews had the Old Testament prophecies
 - ◇ The Magi had a star (Num 24:15-17) *
 - ◇ The Jews had 7 miles to Bethlehem
 - ◇ The Magi came from afar
 - ◇ The Jews did not visit Jesus
 - ◇ The Magi did - They worshipped the child, giving expensive gifts (see Isaiah 60:6)
 - ◇ The Jewish king Herod sought to kill Jesus
 - ◇ The Magi came to worship, bearing expensive gifts
- What was it that the Magi believed?
 - ◇ The "King of the Jews was born" (His humanity)
 - ◇ They were actually looking for a baby
 - ◇ He was to be worshipped (His Deity)
 - ◇ They believed in a very supernatural birth

** Some think this star put them in mind of Balaam's prophecy, that a star should come out of Jacob, pointing at a sceptre, that shall rise out of Israel; see Num 24:17. Balaam came from the mountains of the east, and was one of their wise men. Others impute their enquiry to the general expectation entertained at that time, in those eastern parts, of some great prince to appear. Tacitus, in his history (lib. 5), takes notice of it — A persuasion existed in the minds of many that some ancient writings of the priests contained a prediction that about that time an eastern power would prevail, and that persons proceeding from Judea would obtain dominion. Suetonius also, in the life of Vespasian, speaks of it; so that this extraordinary phenomenon was construed as pointing to that king; and we may suppose a divine impression made upon their minds, enabling them to interpret this star as a signal given by Heaven of the birth of Christ. (from Matthew Henry's Commentary)*