

Prophecy Through the Bible – Christmas 2016

Last week I handed you a handout listing 44 of the over 300 prophecies of Christ's Birth and their fulfilling verses. I know there were a few of them you didn't recognize and I want to walk you through some of them today. ***I hope you will read them all.***

This year I am going to do something a little different than I have done before for this lesson on the birth of Christ. We will take a look at the well quoted Christmas Story in Luke, but we will try and make it a little more visual and detailed for you.

Much of our understanding of the details of the Christmas Story is passed down to us from generation to generation and we naturally assume them to be true and accurate. Our understanding is also brought more full by the Christmas Carols we learned and sing this time of year. Songs like ***Away in a Manger***, and ***Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*** are well known to us.

For most of us, this is as detailed as it gets. Wise men, stables, no room in the Inn, smelly animals, no baby bed, just a manger or food trough for animals. We know the number of wise men, we have heard their names and every year at our Cantata we replay this story about the wonder and majesty of the birth of Christ.

We struggle with the physical replay of the events, but what about the spiritual areas? Oh we know about the angels, and the Heavenly hosts singing. We even picture the angels as being young girls in white with wings.

I want to take you to a different understanding today. I will use Biblical texts to show you a different way to think about this beautiful story. I want start in the Old Testament.

In the book of Micah, **Micah 5:2** the Holy Word tells us where the Messiah, the Anointed one, the Christ will come from. This was a very well known prophecy, except by King Herod. All his Jewish advisors knew it well:

Micah 5:2

*² “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among the clans of Judah,
out of you will come for me
one who will be ruler over Israel,
whose origins are from of old,
from ancient times.”*

As you recall, the wise men went to Herod to seek out this new King of the Jews and discovered that He would be born in Bethlehem, and so they went to see him.

But wait a minute...there is a set of verses earlier in Micah that are important as well... Even more specific... ***that*** Bethlehem.

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Micah 4:8

*As for you, watchtower of the flock,
stronghold of Daughter Zion,
the former dominion will be restored to you;
kingship will come to Daughter Jerusalem.”*

This verse seems a little vague but Genesis 35:19-21 helps us

Genesis 35:19-21

¹⁹ So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem). ²⁰ Over her tomb Jacob set up a pillar, and to this day that pillar marks Rachel’s tomb.

²¹ Israel moved on again and pitched his tent beyond Migdal Eder.

A little background... When Jacob was journeying to Jerusalem, his beloved wife Rachel died. He buried her in a tomb and erected a pillar, which you can tour today in Israel. After she died, he moved on and pitched his tent beyond Migdal Eder (or Edar). Now in Hebrew, the word Migdal means “Tower” and the word Eder or Edar means “Flock”. So Migdal Edar means “Tower of the Flock”. So Jacob pitched his tent beyond the Tower of the Flock. *Why is this important...hang on with me a minute more.*

Back to Micah 4:8...This watchtower of the flock is a stronghold of the daughter of Zion, and in this tower the kingship will return to daughter of Jerusalem. This is prophetic-speak to say more specifically that the Messiah, the restored kingship will come through the Migdal Edar, the tower of the Flock.

A little more background is needed...In Bethlehem the temple had their temple flock and temple shepherds. These flocks and shepherds were responsible to raising and caring for the sheep that would become the temple sacrifices. These were no ordinary shepherds (although the song leads us to believe this) but were employed by the temple priests to make sure they always had a full complement of unblemished sheep and goats for the use of the services. As you also may recall, the priests sold these sheep and other unblemished animals to pilgrims coming for Passover. The whole incident in the Temple where Christ turned over the tables of the moneychangers was part of this moneymaking scheme by the Priests.

This temple sheep area was next to what we now visit in Bethlehem and is called Shepherds **Field**. In the times the temple was operating, there was a stone building that was round like a tower, and on the second floor there was a platform for the head shepherd to watch the sheep and guard against any predators...animal or man...that came to steal or kill the sheep. These towers do not exist on the Shepherds field area today but there are records and actual ruins of other towers in Israel. This tower was known as Migdal Edar, or the **Tower of the Flock**.

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The interesting part however is not the 2nd floor watchtower, but that the bottom floor of the tower was the birthing room for the sheep. It was kept clean and ready to use for newborn sheep.

Now I want to go back to Luke Ch 2

Luke 2 (NASB)

Jesus' Birth in Bethlehem

*2 Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. ² This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city. ⁴ 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, ⁵ in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child. ⁶ While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and **she wrapped Him in [swaddling] cloths, and laid Him in a manger**, because there was no room for them in the inn.*

*⁸ In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. ¹⁰ 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: ¹¹ **for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.** ¹² **This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in [swaddling] cloths and lying in a ^[f]manger.**" ¹³ And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,*

*¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased."*

*¹⁵ When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, "Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶ So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. ¹⁷ **When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child.** ¹⁸ And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰ **The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.***

I have always wondered what the **sign** was. A sign is a pointer to something else. When you come to Disney World, the sign only points the way to the Park. The sign is not important other than to tell you that you are going correctly to your destination. The sign here is that they will find the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes

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and lying in a manger. That is all fine and good, but is there anything else? It seems too specific to only be a locator. The angel could have said it will be down by the big tree with a donkey out front, but he didn't.

Now back to the **Tower of the Flock** for another understanding. Because the sheep under the care of the temple shepherds were to be perfect and unblemished so they could serve as the perfect Passover lamb, there was a process they did at **each birth of a perfect lamb**. All animals I guess with long legs thrash around with their legs after birth. In the case of these little lambs, the shepherds wrapped them up with cloth to keep their hoofs from damaging their legs and they laid them in an area so they could relax and gain strength **without damaging themselves**. When the angel told the Shepherds that the **Anointed One** was being born and they would find him wrapped in swaddling cloth and laid in a manger, they knew exactly that it meant He was to be the Passover Lamb of Israel and was the perfect one. No wonder the shepherds were so excited and when they had seen the Christ child they could not wait to get back and tell the story of His birth.

So I come back to my question about the "sign" the angel told the shepherds about. The sign was when they saw the baby boy in swaddling cloth lying in a manger; it pointed them to the real destination and understanding...**that this child was the Lamb of God, born perfect to take away the sin of the world**. This was the Messiah, the Christ, the long awaited Savior/Redeemer of Israel (and the rest of the world). This was why they were excited, this is why they told Mary and Joseph what the angel told them, this is why they went away praising God, glorifying Him for the angel had told them the Truth of God.

Also we won't cover it today, but when Christ was crucified it was right before Passover, and while He was dying on the cross, the Passover Lambs were being killed in the temple. Prophecy all ties together when you understand the Word of God and look for the links. I covered this in the notes I sent this past Easter season as well.

Now I want to add some spiritual content to the mix. Remember later in the Luke story, the wise men decided not to tell Herod about the child and go straight home and bypass Jerusalem. Herod was not happy about that:

Matt 2

⁷ Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared.

⁸ And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him." ⁹ After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over the place where the Child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. ¹¹ After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way.

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The Flight to Egypt

¹³ *Now when they had gone, behold, an angel of the Lord *appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up! Take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him.”*

¹⁴ *So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt. ¹⁵ He remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON.”*

Herod Slaughters Babies

¹⁶ *Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi. ¹⁷ Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled:*

¹⁸ *“A VOICE WAS HEARD IN RAMAH,
WEEPING AND GREAT MOURNING,
RACHEL WEEPING FOR HER CHILDREN;
AND SHE REFUSED TO BE COMFORTED,
BECAUSE THEY WERE NO MORE.”*

¹⁹ *But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord *appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, and said, ²⁰ “Get up, take the Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel; for those who sought the Child’s life are dead.”*

We don’t often tell this part of the story of His Birth. It is a sad commentary on what actually happened. I bring it up because it is part of the prophecy that was fulfilled. **I want to share with you two other passages that dramatize the spiritual side of this story.**

We see the birth of Christ as an **intervention by God** into the events on Earth to fulfill His plan. But I want to add that that Christmas is really an invasion of Christ and the Kingdom of God into the kingdom of darkness and Satan on the Earth. Like Herod, Satan does not go willingly into the night.

We are hearing awful stories of ISIS killing others, and now they are killing babies that are Downs babies and other “imperfect” people to purify and impress their god. In Matt 2:16-18 it says Rachel weeps and mourns for her children because they are no more. This is what happened with Herod killing the innocents and is what is happening all over the world today, including ISIS.

While we don’t really want to see these parts of the story acted out in the Christmas play, we must never forget they are part of the world’s reaction to Christ...both then and now.

I want to bridge you to the future a little.

Revelation 12

The Woman, Israel

12 A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; ² and she was with child; and she *cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth.

The Red Dragon, Satan

³ Then another sign appeared in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems. ⁴ And his tail *swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child.

The Male Child, Christ

⁵ And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne. ⁶ Then the woman fled into the wilderness where she *had a place prepared by God, so that there she would be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

The Angel, Michael

⁷ And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. The dragon and his angels waged war, ⁸ and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven. ⁹ And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. ¹⁰ Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying,

“Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night. ¹¹ And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death. ¹² For this reason, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them. Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has only a short time.”

¹³ And when the dragon saw that he was thrown down to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male child. ¹⁴ But the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place, where she *was nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent. ¹⁵ And the serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, so that he might cause her to be swept away with the flood. ¹⁶ But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and drank up the river which the dragon

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poured out of his mouth. ¹⁷ So the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her children, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus

I know your eyes are glazed over by now, but I wanted you to know that the whole birth story, the crucifixion, the wrath of man and Satan against believers is all laid out in the Bible. We are in the most exciting time in a believer's life to be living. Prophecy is coming true right in front of our eyes if we will but open them to see. Many are puzzled by the events of the world today, but **if** we understand why Jesus came, and the death blow it dealt to Satan and his minions on earth today, we could (would) live more secure and joyous lives.

We know Jesus is coming again...this time for the last Noel. Whether it is this year or next or many years away we need to keep doing what God has called us individually to do for His Kingdom. We are to be salt and light to the world, and be witnesses for Him everywhere we go.

Many people believe we are in the last of the days until He comes again. I also believe that, but I will anticipate and prepare as if it is tomorrow but wait for His perfect timing. I think it might be a little clearer now to understand Jesus' words later in his ministry in Matt1:12

Matthew 11:12(NASB)

¹² From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force.

As you are with your family this season, be thankful that God chose to make a path for all of us to restore the broken relationship with Him and be indwelt by the Holy Spirit to empower and guide us. I am thankful for all of you. **Things are not falling apart, they are falling into place.**

Merry Christmas