

The Christmas Story

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Preacher: Dr. Ralph Carter

[0 : 00] I want to invite all of our children, if you would, to come forward and just make a place here around me. And I want to tell the Christmas story if I can get all of our kids to come.

Do you have any children here tonight who'd like to come? There's two good-looking guys there. And yeah, here comes some more. You've got to give them all just a chance to come.

Grandparents, if you need to come and sit with some of them, that's perfectly fine too. Or sit on a chair beside them, have them sit in your lap. Hi, you can come on over here. You want to come over here and sit with us?

There you go. Good deal. You want to come over here? Need some help? Here, come on.

Let me help you down. There you go. All right. Boy, they just keep coming, don't they? How you doing? You guys excited about tomorrow? What's tomorrow?

[1 : 00] Christmas. All right. Y'all all been good? Good deal. I hope you... Yes, sir. What were you going to say? You been good? Good deal, man.

I'm glad to hear that. I hope I'll be that fortunate. I hope I'll be that fortunate. Hey, I want you to know that there's a whole lot happening tomorrow, right? There's been a whole lot happening up to this point for over 30 days now, getting ready for Christmas.

And it's a big, big, big, big, big deal. You know, here in our country, we celebrate just two of our president's birthdays. And then a man who helped with racial equity, Martin Luther King, we celebrate his birthday.

That's the only three birthdays we celebrate of people who are Americans here in our country. And in other countries around the world, they don't do that. They don't celebrate those guys. Even though they're important to us, not so important to the rest of the world.

But I want to tell you tomorrow, in fact, beginning tonight at midnight all across the world, they'll be celebrating Jesus' birthday in virtually every country around the world.

[2 : 10] That's pretty incredible, isn't it? Think that somebody's that important. And I'll tell you why he's so important. It's because he's God himself, okay? And if man had been planning this event, we would have done it in a big, big way, the way we always do.

We always think bigger is better. And there'd have been billboards announcing he's coming. And there'd have been some real special surgeon there on hand to help with the delivery of Jesus.

They'd have had it in some big hospital like probably most of you were born in. But that's not how God planned it. And I want to just tell you that story, okay? A lot of people think it begins in the town of Bethlehem.

But it really and truly doesn't. In fact, it begins about 15 months before that in a town not far from Bethlehem, about four miles away. It was actually a city.

Bethlehem was a tiny little town. And this city was the city of Jerusalem. They had a temple there. And it was known all over the world, this temple. And there was a man working there that day who didn't typically work there.

[3 : 10] He lived in a town away from there. But his name was Zachariah. He was an old guy, probably even older than me, okay? Those are your older grandparents and great-grandparents probably.

And he was married to a woman named Elizabeth. And they always wanted to have children. They wanted to have children just like you guys. But they never could. And so he's in the temple and he's ministering in this part of the temple known as the holy place.

He's burning incense. And the people were standing outside worshiping. And they were waiting on him to come out because they knew about how long it took. And they thought any minute now he's going to come out. But he didn't come out.

And the reason he didn't come out is because he was having a conversation, ready for this, with an angel. This angel's name was Gabriel. And Gabriel was telling Zachariah something he could hardly believe.

He told Zachariah, Zachariah, I've got good news for you. Your prayers have been heard of God. And God is going to allow your wife to expect a baby. Well, Zachariah was born away.

[4 : 12] He's an old guy. And old guys just typically don't father children. And so he thought, I don't get it. And he said, can you give me a sign? And the angel Gabriel told him, he said, yeah, I'm going to give you a sign.

Here's the sign. You're not going to talk for the next nine months. Until that baby is born, you won't be able to speak a word. And even if you try, he just couldn't say anything.

So he finished his duties. He went outside. When he went outside, all the people said, what's wrong with Zachariah? He's not saying anything. And Zachariah probably just motioned to him. He couldn't talk. He goes back home to his wife.

And sure enough, short time later, she was expecting a baby. Well, that leads me to the second part of the story, okay? About six months after that, in the little town of Nazareth, it was about 70 miles from Jerusalem, okay?

And it's a little town of Nazareth. There's a girl who's engaged to be married. You all probably know some girls who've gotten diamonds. They're engaged, getting ready to be married. My daughter's going to be married next weekend.

[5 : 14] Big, big deal in their life. They're really excited about it. And so she's excited to be married to Joseph. And all of a sudden, one night, an angel, the same angel Gabriel, he comes back to Mary and he tells Mary, Mary, don't be afraid.

I want to tell you something good. He said, you are favored among women. God is going to show you favored. And here's how he's going to do that. He's going to allow you to bear his own son. Wow, Mary couldn't take that in. It's hard to imagine a woman giving birth to the very son of God. But he told her, he said, the Holy Spirit's going to overshadow you and you're going to have this baby and you're going to name him Jesus.

Mary's trying to figure all this out. I mean, is it possible? She said, I haven't ever been with a man. I don't have a husband. I'm not married to Joseph yet. How can this be? And the angel tells her, what's impossible for man is never impossible with God.

And he says, I'm going to tell you something that will help you to believe what I've told you. Over in the town where your relative Elizabeth, you know Elizabeth? That was Zachariah's wife.

[6 : 19] Remember that? He said, over in the town where Zachariah and Elizabeth live, she is right now six months pregnant, which means she was showing. I mean, her stomach was out here.

And so she said, he said, why don't you go see Elizabeth? And so the next morning she gets up and she goes to where Elizabeth was and she knocked at the door. And when she knocks at the door, guess what?

Elizabeth comes to the door and Mary sees her and knows she's expecting this baby. And Elizabeth's so excited. She says, you won't believe it. She said, when the baby inside me heard your voice, he began to jump for joy.

Well, that baby would become John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus, who would come and prepare the way for the Lord. And the Bible says that she stayed with Elizabeth about three months and then she went back home.

When she gets back home, she has to see Joseph because now she knows she's expecting a baby too. And she's got to tell Joseph. And so she sits down with Joseph and tells Joseph.

[7 : 19] And Joseph was a good man. Joseph decided, I don't want to embarrass Mary. I don't want to harm her. What I'm going to do is I'm going to quietly just separate, get legal separation from her. And I'll let her have that baby and I'll go my way.

Well, that night when he goes to bed, God reveals to him in a dream, you don't have to be afraid to marry Mary. She's a good girl and you need to take her as your wife.

And Joseph was a good man. So you know what? The next day he gets up and he marries Mary. He takes her to be his wife. Well, three months pass and then, or six months pass, and then one day this man named Caesar Augustus, who was the Roman emperor, he passes a decree that everybody's got to go to their hometown.

They've got to register to pay their taxes. Well, his hometown, so to speak, was Bethlehem. It was about 70 miles away. And so he loads Mary up on a donkey and he heads down toward Bethlehem. It takes a long time to walk 70 miles, right? That would be about as far as from here to Greenville and back. And y'all have gotten in the car and gone that far, right? Imagine walking that far.

[8 : 32] Well, they walk that far. And when they get there, Mary's ready to have this baby. So Joseph, being a good husband, he starts looking around for a place for her to have this baby.

And all the motels are taken up because all these people have come to Bethlehem in order to register to pay their taxes. So this man who owns this inn, he tells her, he says, I don't know if you'll find this suitable or not, but I've got a livery stable, what we would call a big barn with animals in it. And he said, if you want to have your baby in that barn, you can. And so Joseph and Mary went out to this barn. I'm sure they cleared some animals away, put out some fresh hay, and Mary had that baby.

And when she was born, when the baby was born, Mary had prepared for this. She took some cloth and she wrapped the baby in this white cloth. And there was a feeding trough there. Y'all ever seen a feeding trough?

You've been to a petting zoo and they got feeding troughs? Well, I'm sure they cleaned it out the best they could. And they got some fresh new hay and they put it on it. And probably a piece of cloth, I would imagine, and laid it on top of the hay.

[9 : 39] And then they took that baby Jesus, imagine this, the very Son of God, and they laid Him on that hay. Well, we're almost to the end of the story, but let me tell you, that's not the end.

Not far from there, in a field right outside of town, there were some shepherds. And they were watching their sheep, and it's night. Just imagine if there's no lights in this room, and it's pitch black. And they got a fire, and they're warming themselves by the fire. And they're looking over there, watching their sheep here, and watching their sheep there, hearing them baa, and that kind of thing. And all of a sudden, this angel appears to them.

We don't know who this angel was, but we think it might have been Gabriel again. This is what the angel says. He says, I don't want you to be afraid. He says, it's going to be okay. But to you, in the city of David, a Savior has been born, who is Christ the Lord.

And boy, they were just blown away. And the sky suddenly was just brilliant white. It was like it was daylight. Can you imagine walking out in the middle of the night, and it's night, and just suddenly like that, all of a sudden, it's bright as daylight.

[10 : 45] And that's how it was. Well, as soon as he said that, the angel told him, he said, I want to tell you something. You can find this baby. He's in Bethlehem, and he's in a barn.

And you'll find him in a little feeding trough wrapped in cloth. Well, with that, suddenly, the sky was filled with multitudes of angels.

It was like an army of angels. And they were all singing and saying, glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace, goodwill toward men. And then, suddenly, those angels or those shepherds, they turned to one another, and they said, boy, I'd like to see that, wouldn't you?

How would you all like to have seen that? I would have. And they said, I'd like to see that. And they told us how to find the baby. All we've got to do is go to Bethlehem, and that baby will be there in a little manger wrapped in swaddling clothes.

That's pretty cool, isn't it? Yes, sir. I'll try to. I'll try to.

[11 : 50] Well, I know he's in Bethlehem, and I guess it's in that direction. All right. Hope you find him.

Good to see you. Boy, I don't know what to make about that. I don't know about you, but I would like, I'd like to follow him.

Would you all? I want you to go back to your parents. I want you to go back where your parents are. Don't just go outside, but go to your parents right now, okay? Get up and go to your parents and grandparents. Grandparents, come and get them.

Okay. That's exactly right. That's where I'm getting my information. I'll tell you what.

I don't know about you. I'd like to go follow those shepherds and see if they can find a baby Jesus. Would that be okay with you? Let's all get up and go outside. Good to see you, Paul.

[12 : 57] You doing okay? I'm doing good. I'm doing fine. You doing okay?

Thank you.

Thank you.

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