

message TRANSCRIPT



God's Christmas Gift

by Bayless Conley

Copyright © Answers with Bayless Conley

I want to read the Christmas story from Matthew's account.

Matthew 1:18-2:11 says, "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just *man*, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.' So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: '*Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,*' which is translated, 'God with us.' Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name Jesus. Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.' When Herod the king heard *this*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. So they said to him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: "*But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you shall come a Ruler who will shepherd My people Israel.*"' Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, 'Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found *Him*, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also.' When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh."

It is amazing when you consider, just from the Christmas story, how many different ways God spoke to people about His Son.

God spoke to the wise men through creation—the star. They were observing the heavens, and the star ultimately pointed to exactly where Jesus was. Creation does point to the Lord because He is the One that created everything. Creation was speaking to them about life, about God, and ultimately about God's Son, just like it does with us.

The Bible says in Psalm 19: "The heavens tell of the glory of God. The skies display His marvelous craftsmanship. Day after day they continue to speak; night after night they

make Him known. They speak without a sound or a word. Their voice is silent in the skies. Yet their message has gone out to all the earth and their words to all the world.”

In Romans, chapter 1, it speaks of those who suppress the truth in their own conscience to push truth away from themselves. The Bible says they are without excuse because God speaks to every person's heart about Himself through creation.

Before I gave my heart to the Lord, I was looking for God. I was looking for answers. On more than one occasion I would be camping or backpacking somewhere in the wilderness. I can remember laying on my back, watching enormous clouds drift by, and being stirred very deeply in my conscience. Creation was whispering to me about God. I had not yet found Him, but I knew there had to be a Creator, a Designer, behind creation.

The Book of Job was written thousands of years before the time of Christ. It is thought to be the oldest book in the Bible. In chapter 14, Job was in the forest. He saw a tree that had been cut down, and he began to contemplate the stump. The tree was dead, but at the scent of water a rebirth could occur within that tree. It could sprout again, spawning new life from that which was dead. Job went on to share his contemplation, saying, “And what of man? Is it possible for there to be a rebirth for man? Is a resurrection possible for man? What happens after man dies? Is there the possibility of life after death?” Thousands of years before the time of Christ, we see creation speaking to Job.

Some years back, I got a letter from an inmate who was later released and came to visit the church. He had been in Pelican Bay, which is the most hard-core, maximum-security prison on the West Coast. His mother was a believer, and she prayed for him continually, telling him he needed to trust in Jesus. In his letter, he wrote that he had been tormented with violent dreams every night. Then he started having regular dreams about a man who would just stand there and smile silently at him. When he had those dreams about the man, he said that he just knew somehow that everything would be alright. He was released from Pelican Bay and put in another maximum security prison, which felt like being on vacation by comparison. He sat down to watch a television broadcast with a couple of inmates. It was a Christian broadcast. He wrote that he freaked out because the man in his dreams was there, on TV. It was me. He was watching our broadcast. He prayed at the end of the program, accepted Christ, and got saved. God dealt with him through dreams. God does speak to people in dreams. Some people are so busy and noisy all the time that when they are asleep is God's only chance to communicate with them.

I think about the chief priests and scribes. God spoke to them through the Scriptures about His Son. When Herod said, “Where is He going to be born?” they went to the Scriptures, and the Scriptures spoke of God's Son and His birthplace. Jesus said, Himself, that “the Scriptures testify of Me” in John, chapter 5.

I met a Jewish gentleman in Bible school, a fellow student. He shared that his daughter had first become a Christian. He told me, “You need to understand, in my mind it was the worst thing that could have happened to me and my family. It would have been better in my mind if my daughter had died than become a Christian. I felt like she betrayed me, the family, our religion, and her heritage. She told me, ‘Daddy, I'm still Jewish. I have just found the Messiah.’ She asked if I would please just at least read the

New Testament.' I agreed; so I sat down that night with my drink and a pack of cigarettes, and I was going to start in the Gospel of Matthew." He was strictly reading it just to find all the errors in there so he could prove to his daughter that she had gone off the rails and show her the error of her ways. He said, "I was shocked to find out that Jesus was very Jewish." He began to see all the references to the law and to the prophets. He spent the whole night—reading, drinking, and smoking—and when he got to the end of the Gospel of Matthew, he was convinced that Jesus was the Son of God. He opened his heart and was saved, then ended up in Bible school with me. He went on to become a pastor. God spoke to Him through the Scriptures.

God spoke to Herod through others—the wise men—about the King of the Jews. God does use people. Sometimes he uses strange people, but He uses people. God used a 12-year-old boy to share the gospel with me. I had a lot of major league problems with drug addiction and other things, and in a park one day, a 12-year-old kid talked to me about Jesus and about salvation. It was the first time I had ever heard the gospel story. I ended up getting saved in a little street mission. Sometime later, I was with that little boy and his mother, visiting someone in a hospital. After the visit, the boy disappeared. I was walking around the hospital looking for him, and I came upon a man in a hospital gown, sitting on a little bench outside of his room, sobbing. I approached him, and he said, "Who was that kid? I have never had anybody talk to me about God and Jesus like that!" I felt like saying, "I know what you mean. He did it to me, too!" God uses people.

In Luke's account of the Christmas story, the angel said to the shepherds, "This is going to be a sign to you: You will find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." God sometimes speaks to people about His Son through signs and wonders.

When I was living up in Oregon, we were going to have a Christian concert with one of the old Calvary Chapel bands. We had a poster designed that had a sort of psychedelic Jesus on it. It said, "Jesus Christ Presents" in big letters. I personally went to every business and every shop in town and asked if I could tape it up in their window to advertise. I went into the Owl Coffee House where I used to buy all my coffee beans. I asked the lady who knew me if I could tape the poster up in the window. She looked at the poster and looked at another woman there, and said, "It's a sign!" They had just been talking about Jesus, Christianity, and the claims of Christ before I had walked in. God does speak to people through signs. Do not brush such things aside. Those are meant to point to the Savior.

God spoke to Simeon about the Son, Jesus, through the Holy Spirit. Simeon was a church man. He revered God; he was just; he was devout, but he had never personally met God's Son. The Bible says the Holy Spirit was upon him, and he came into the temple when Mary and Joseph came to have Jesus circumcised. That was where he met the Son of God.

Perhaps you are a church person. You faithfully attend church, and something has whispered to your heart, "There has to be more. There has to be more than the ceremony and ritual, week in and week out." Well, that is the Holy Spirit whispering to your heart. I believe He has brought you to read this today so you can personally meet God's Son.

Christmas is about Jesus. It points to the most amazing tree in history, under which the most significant gift ever given was offered—the gift of salvation, redemption, restoration

of favor with God, and eternal life, purchased by the blood of Jesus, and offered freely at the cross.

Some have not yet received God's Christmas gift because they have never heard. The Bible says, in Romans 10:14, "How shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How shall they believe in Him of whom they have never heard?"

Some have not yet received God's Christmas gift because they are not sure their name is on the package. I guarantee you, your name is on this gift. The shepherds were told by the angels, "I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people." God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him would not perish but have everlasting life. Your name is on the gift.

Some have not yet received God's Christmas gift because they have been put off by the wrapping. Unfortunately, religion, in many instances, has put some pretty bad wrapping on God's gift, and it has turned people away. I think of Mary, when the angel, Gabriel, appeared to her and said, "The Lord is with you. You are blessed." The Bible says she was troubled at his saying it because it went completely cross-grained to everything her religion had taught her. For the most part, the relationship that Israel was supposed to have with God had been turned into a bunch of rules and regulations. They had the Ten Commandments, but they added hundreds of other rules and regulations to them. For example, they took God's commandment about resting on the Sabbath Day, and added regulations about how many steps a person was allowed to walk on the Sabbath Day. They had painted a picture of a very vengeful, angry God that was aloof and distant. The angel's encouraging message rocked Mary. I want to tell you today: God is not mad at you. He loves you. He loves you desperately, no matter what you have done. Even within the genealogy of Jesus Christ, you will find an adulteress, an idolater, a prostitute, and a murderer. All of them came to a place of trust in God. Religion may have put some pretty bad wrapping on God's gift. Look past the wrappings of religion and see a God who knows your name, who loves you desperately, and who wants you to have a relationship with Him.

Some have not yet received God's Christmas gift because they are a bit like Herod, who told the wise men, "Come and tell me when you find Him so I can come and worship Him." That was not Herod's true intent at all. Herod went and had all of the male children two years old and under killed because he did not want another king. He did not want anyone to usurp the authority that he had. Making Jesus Lord is about submitting your life to His Lordship; it is about having Him be the king of your heart—placing Him in charge of your life.

If your life is like a car, then is Jesus in the car of your life? Is He in the trunk, where nobody knows He's there and you never talk to Him unless there is a crisis? Is He in the back seat, where you occasionally acknowledge Him and go through some of the Christian routines, but He really falls into the background of your life? Is He in the passenger seat, where you enjoy open fellowship with Him, but you are still the one driving—determining for yourself where you will go and what you will do with your life? Friend, Jesus belongs in the driver's seat. You need to slip out of the driver's seat and invite Him to take that seat. That is what making Him Lord is all about.

I want to invite you to pray a prayer with me. The Bible says we have been separated from God because of sin, but through Jesus' wonderful sacrifice on the cross, God now

extends to us the free gift of relationship with Himself and eternal life. Let's pray together. Just say,

O God, with all of my heart I believe. I believe that Jesus Christ is Your Son who died upon the cross for me. Jesus, thank you for loving me so much that You would give up Your life to pay for my sins. I believe You have been raised from the dead, and I ask You right now to be my Lord and Savior. I invite You into the driver's seat. From this moment forward, my life is not my own. All I am and all I have I place in Your hands, Jesus. Amen.

Copyright © Answers with Bayless Conley