



## A MESSY GIFT

DECEMBER 4<sup>TH</sup> & 5<sup>TH</sup>, 2010

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<sup>18</sup> Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way.

**Matthew 1:18a (ESV)**

I love how simple this text is...it's almost humorous in its simplicity...Now the birth of the promised Messiah, the seed, the fulfillment of all prophecy and history, God encased in flesh...was as follows....

Don't misconstrue the simplicity of the text by thinking that its message is simplistic...it's not...it's unbelievably profound...

<sup>1</sup> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. <sup>4</sup> In him was life, and the life was the light of men. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it...<sup>14</sup> And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

**John 1:1-14 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup> And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. <sup>10</sup> And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. <sup>11</sup> For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup> And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." <sup>13</sup> And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup> "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

**Luke 2:8-14 (ESV)**

This is the aspect of the Christmas story that we love. It's warm and fuzzy and we imagine it in a way that probably doesn't resemble the event in almost anyway.

Outcasts of society...working hard for little pay...the white trash of Israel...tired...cold... Overwhelmed by the appearance of not just a single angel but a host...

It is here that we hit the central irony of the Christmas story that I want us to wrestle with. The angels make this amazing declaration – on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!

Really? Really? Where is the peace? As we keep reading in Matthew's account we don't see a whole lot of peace – rather a whole lot of the opposite of peace.

When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup> And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. <sup>20</sup> But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” <sup>22</sup> All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: <sup>23</sup> “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us). <sup>24</sup> When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, <sup>25</sup> but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

### Matthew 1:18-25 (ESV)

It was a very personal move of God to gift Himself to a messy world. For God is becomes a very messy proposition.

*<sup>4</sup> Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup> Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, *did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,* <sup>7</sup> but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

### Philippians 2:4-8 (ESV)

We can't forget that the baby born in the manger was born to become the man who dies on the cross.

It wasn't just messy for Jesus. It was messy for Mary and Joseph...

It was messy for the nation of Israel and its political and religious leaders...



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<sup>1</sup> 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, <sup>2</sup> saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” <sup>3</sup> When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; <sup>4</sup> and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. <sup>5</sup> They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: <sup>6</sup> ‘And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’ ” <sup>7</sup> Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup> And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.” <sup>9</sup> After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. <sup>11</sup> And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. <sup>12</sup> And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

**Matthew 2:1-12 (ESV)**

Think about this. Pagan astrologers are aware of the birth of the Messiah while the Israelite King doesn't even know where he is prophesied to be born. Pagans worship the messiah – described in this chapter as “the child” eight times – while the king of the nation of God's chosen people plots to kill him.

<sup>13</sup> Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” <sup>14</sup> And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt <sup>15</sup> and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called my son.” <sup>16</sup> Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. <sup>17</sup> Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: <sup>18</sup> “A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.”

**Matthew 2:13-18 (ESV)**



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The world Christ was born into was such a mess that His birth threatened the power structures of His day to the degree that the wholesale slaughter of every male child under the age of two in Bethlehem was slaughtered. The “King of the Jews”, the son of David and son of Abraham had to flee to the land of Egypt – the place of captivity and slavery.

**<sup>19</sup> But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, <sup>20</sup> saying, “Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child’s life are dead.” <sup>21</sup> And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. <sup>22</sup> But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. <sup>23</sup> And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled: “He shall be called a Nazarene.”**

**Matthew 2:19-23 (ESV)**

Even when the family is able to return to the Promised Land they return in hiding to the “redneck capital” of Israel.

Where is the peace the angels spoke of to the shepherds?

What do we do with Jesus Himself who declares: <sup>34</sup> **“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.**

**Matthew 10:34 (ESV)**

Jesus means “Yahweh saves” or “Yahweh is salvation.” Jesus came to initiate the ultimate peace of the God who will make all things new by making peace between man and God.

<sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. <sup>14</sup> *For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility*

**Ephesians 2:13-14 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, *making peace by the blood of his cross.*

**Colossians 1:19-20 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, *we have peace with God* through our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Romans 5:1 (ESV)**

<sup>33</sup> I have said these things to you, that *in me you may have peace.* In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

**John 16:33 (ESV)**



<sup>1</sup> Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord! <sup>2</sup> O Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy! <sup>3</sup> If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? <sup>4</sup> But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared. <sup>5</sup> I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; <sup>6</sup> my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning. <sup>7</sup> O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption. <sup>8</sup> And *he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.*

**Psalms 130:1-8 (ESV)**



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