

The Christmas MIRACLE!

Have any of you opened any of your gifts yet? Raise your hand if you have opened some of your gifts by now.

Giving and getting presents are what Christmas is all about. And today is the day we once again tell the story of the most generous gift the world has ever received. Today's the day we celebrate the gift of Jesus, God's Son sent into the world to save the world. He's the most generous gift because He changes not just your Christmas day but your every day.

The story's been told for 2000 years, and no matter how busy people are, the whole world stops to listen. I think that's because it's a mundane story that is also full of mystery and miracle. It has this phenomenal mix.

On one hand you've got a man and woman in love with each other. Heard that one before. They get engaged. Check. Got it. And after they decide to take the "till death do us part" journey, they both find out Mary's pregnant – and Joseph's not the dad. Sadly, I've heard this one before, too. Like most men, Joseph figures this relationship's not going to work, getting off on the wrong foot and all, so he decides to break the engagement quietly.

But then he has a dream and changes his mind because in the dream, an angel reveals to him that the baby growing in Mary is God's son, supernaturally put there by God himself. Yeah, right.

However, Joseph is a man of faith. He knows the world consists of mystery and miracles which he cannot logically explain. He believes the dream. Moves forward with plan A.

Mary had received the same miraculous message also from an angel but face-to-face – I guess if you're the one carrying God's son, you deserve more than a dream. And even though it didn't make sense to her on a lot of levels, she, a woman of faith, believed the message, bore the son and hops on a donkey for some IRS headcount 80 miles from home, normally a 4-day journey but a

“great-with-child” woman on a donkey, I’m thinking it took a little longer.

They’re waiting with the crowds in Bethlehem when she goes into labor. Has the baby. All the guest rooms are full. They find a barn with a feed trough, wrap the baby in some scraps of cloth and lay him there.

So thus far, I’m counting 3, maybe 4 miracles. You’ve got (1) how the baby got in Mary in the first place, divine intervention – we call it incarnation, God becoming flesh. (2) You got the angel appearing to Mary. That’s not every day. (3) Then there’s Joseph’s divine dream. Can’t chalk that up to pizza. (4) And if you look at Joseph’s response, the fact that he stuck with her, if that happened today, we’d all say, “*That’s a miracle.*”

But there’s more... Before you know it, a whole bunch of shepherds are out taking care of sheep when, yes, (5) another angel appeared, only this time, he’s real shiny, scares the b-jeebers out of them. Tells them to chill out because he’s got good news of great joy, that when they go to Bethlehem and find a baby lying in a manger, they will have found the newborn savior of the world, the king everyone had been waiting for. (6) To drive home the point, a whole crew of angels show up to join in the birth announcement, saying, “***Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!***” *Luke 2:14 (ESV)*

Since it’s not every night you get that kind of wake-up call, the shepherds head over to Bethlehem, find everything like the angels said, and tell Mary and the whole world about the angels and what they said.

And Mary holds everything close, wondering what it all means and how her life was about to change. And it should be obvious to all of us that *anytime the Christmas baby sets up shop in your life, your life changes.*

I wonder how often Mary mulled over those miracles. There’s more. (7) A little while after this, some wisemen would show up and tell how they had followed a miraculous star to find Jesus, and then

(8) another angel would warn Joseph to move the family to Egypt so Jesus wouldn't die as an infant.

Who knows what other miracles Mary mulled over. Maybe Jesus could hit every 3-pointer he attempted, even from half-court. No clue.

But I do know that when you're on the Mary side of the miracles, it changes your outlook. We see Mary's outlook is changed when, 30 years later, Jesus is a grown man and He and Mary go to a wedding and they run out of wine. Mary comes to Jesus and says, "They're out of wine." Jesus says, "So?" And like a mom who lived with miracles all the time, she simply turns to the servants and says, "Do whatever He tells you." And sure enough, He turns all of the water into wine.

Mind you, this was before Jesus, now a fully grown man, restored the sight of blind men and restored the legs of lame men. Expecting miracles was Mary's norm, before Jesus healed deaf people, leprous people, and crazy demon-possessed people. Seeing miracles was common before Jesus ever walked on water, quieted a stormy sea, and miraculously told a woman her entire life story over a cup of water. Before Jesus fed 5000 people with five loaves and two fish, and told his followers that when they celebrated the Lord's Supper, He was literally feeding them Himself. That's a scratch your head miracle.

Before all of that, Mary had already seen enough to understand that whatever the situation, Jesus is going to do a miracle. She's so used to miracles surrounding him that she now expects them. They're the new norm when you live with Jesus. What happens in Bethlehem doesn't stay in Bethlehem.

You and I, though, we forget that. We don't believe that. If we see a miracle, we usually try to explain it away.

One time I was praying over a man near-death. I asked God to give him strong faith and peace as he was soon to be taken home to heaven. And – oh yeah, heal him instead if that's what God wanted to do. I went home expecting him to die sometime in the middle of the night. The next morning, he's awake, out of bed, eating bacon

and eggs, reading the newspaper, feeling great. He was miraculously better. Not just a little, a lot. I couldn't understand it. Docs couldn't explain it. Here's an old man helping a pastor see a miracle.

Another time, I was walking through a barren field, praying that the city government would sell that land to our church. Can you imagine? A city government selling 20 acres of land to church that will take it off the tax rolls? Yeah, right! I don't think so! But, it happened. No shady deals or under the table bribes. It happened. Just a miracle.

Miracles are not our norm. We're more practical and explainable. We go for the natural. Miracles, though, are supernatural, and therefore, we dole them out maybe – what -- once in a lifetime? Yet we bump up against things beyond our control, out of our hands, and without thinking, we hope for a miracle. ▪ When the grades don't add up to passing, we need a miracle. ▪ When she's turned you down every other time you've asked her out, boy, you really need a miracle. ▪ Some of need a health miracle. ▪ Some of us want a marriage miracle. ▪ Others are struggling to have outgo equal inflow and we need a financial miracle.

What we're really saying is we need God to do something that only God can do. We need Him to act because it's beyond us.

Do you realize that virtually everything that happens in the course of your day is beyond your control?

The Christmas story is about a God who came from beyond you, to be just like you, and rescue you.

The biggest miracle of Christmas is that Jesus came to earth in the first place simply because of you. And because He came to earth, God is now pleased with you. That's a miracle. That's a miracle because I know what I'm like. And you're just like me.

You may like to pretend that God is happy with all of your junk or that you don't need fixing or healing, or that God is blind or

ignorant or just doesn't care. The Bible tells us God definitely cares and He's not excited, in the good sense with our default mode of thinking and living. Our factory settings from birth are that we just think all about ourselves, and we live for old number one, and we reject – no, we quietly despise – God for having the right to be in charge of us.

Jesus came because what's broken with the world is exactly what's broken with you. The sin that causes high school kids to kill other high school kids, and husbands to beat wives, and children to disobey parents – the sin that causes people to not be able to cope with life so they seek to escape by getting high from drugs or booze – the sin that causes me to lie to you so that you think I just forgot to take out the trash when in reality, I just didn't want to...the sin that has destroyed marriages and friendships, that causes you to not want your relatives to visit or wishes your ex was swimming with the fishes...the sin that festers over being wronged and now looks like bitterness or anger or depression...the sin that causes you to be mean without cause, to criticize without cause ... the sin that moves people to despair, to give up hope and take their own lives – **whatever is wrong in your world and everything that is wrong in you, Jesus came to fix that.** To stand in your place and give you grace. To take the punishment for your disobedience and forgive you. To make amends for the selfish heart you can't cover up in a makeover or new suit. To remove your sin from you so that it is no longer held against you. To live perfectly because you can't and frankly, don't even want to.

Jesus came because you are valuable in God's sight. You are the diamond on the engagement ring. You are the photo on His home screen. He loves you dearly. More than you love yourself.

See, **the biggest miracle of Christmas is that** Jesus isn't the reason for the season. You are. **You and I are why the baby was born.** The baby Christ child might be at the center of Christmas, but the reason for the season is you! He came for you.

And **the biggest, most incredible Christmas miracle that continues year-long is that because of Jesus and the work He**

did, God is pleased with you. God loved you so much He sent Jesus into Mary, and placed Mary in Bethlehem, and from Bethlehem the miracles never ceased. The miracle of Christmas is that God came to live with man so that man can live with Jesus. And when you live with Jesus, you should be expecting miracles because that's what He brings.

What if, starting tomorrow, you expected Jesus to work mystery and miracles in your mundane? Not in some cheesy way but in a way that said, "The Jesus of Christmas is my God and when He works in the world, miracles happen." What if I lived my life that way? What if daily, as I got up and ready for the day, I invited Jesus into my day and then looked for Him?

What if every day I asked the Christmas Jesus who started the world on a new path to start my marriage on a new, forgiveness-rich path? What if I give Him entry into the family when everything's going well, not just when it's all gone to pot? What if I asked Him how to spend the money while it's still there, instead of waiting until there's nothing there? What if – everyday -- I anticipated the Christmas baby doing His thing, bringing His miraculous to my mundane?

I know that for some of us, we're here because it's a special occasion, and your family might be thinking, "It's a miracle he's here or she's here."

Me, I'm just thinking Jesus is at work. The Christmas baby is doing His thing. **He changed the world almost 2000 years ago and wants to change your world today.**

My prayer is that you'll let him. That you'll receive the baby Jesus as the Savior born for you, to forgive you and restore you and give you a life full of miracles and mystery.

Merry Christmas!