

A KING IS BORN

JESUS OF NAZARETH



Why the birth of a child, born in very humble circumstances in a relatively unknown village in an out of the way place, still remains one of the greatest events in all of history.

by Greg Trainor
Catholic lay evangelist

Though much anticipated, this was a moment that was a long time in coming. Ever since the fall in sin, mankind awaited the Savior. Some awaited the Savior with prophetic revelation while others, in total ignorance, simply longed for a better life. But the thousands of years of awaiting the Savior had come to an end; Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

A glorious promise. The promise of the coming Savior was made just after the fall in sin. We find it the third chapter of Genesis, right after Adam and Eve were expelled from Paradise: “I will put enmity between you (the serpent) and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will strike at your head, while you strike at his heel.” (v. 15) From among the descendants of Eve would come one that would destroy the power of Satan and rescue the human race from bondage to sin: “...the Son of God was revealed to destroy the

works of the devil.” (1 John 3:8)

From the outset, God’s love and mercy was evident in human history. Banished from paradise, mankind had the promise of a Savior. And so began the long years of waiting. As the years went by, God would speak with a clarity of the Savior that would come. For me, no one speaks of this more succinctly than Pope Leo XIII: “At the very beginning of the world, God had promised him as the conqueror of “the Serpent,” hence, succeeding ages had eagerly looked forward to His coming. The prophets had long and clearly declared that all hope was in him...” (Encyclical *On Jesus Christ Our Redeemer*, 3) Leo continues by pointing out that the Old Testament pointed with a clarity to Jesus as the coming Savior: “The varying fortunes, the achievements, customs, laws, ceremonies and sacrifices of the Chosen People had distinctly and lucidly foreshadowed the truth, that the salvation of mankind was to be accomplished in Him who should be the Priest, Victim, Liberator, Prince of Peace, Teacher of all Nations, Founder of an Eternal Kingdom.”

Pathways to Jesus. The Bible is a wonderful revelation of God’s love made manifest in Jesus as the Savior of the world. I often explain it this way in my preaching: The Old Testament declares: “Look, He is

coming.” The Gospels proclaim: “Look, He is here!” The epistles proclaim the truth in a way to us that says: “Did you see Him clearly?”

So many of the things of the Old Testament are like sign posts pointing the way to Jesus. The Law of Moses, the Jewish feasts and the prophets point the way to one person, one geographic location, and one moment in human history: Jesus of Nazareth and his crucifixion on Calvary’s cross.

I call these Biblical paths to Jesus. Each of these Old Testament themes provides a clear path to Jesus. Collectively, they proclaim the truth of the Gospel like a symphony, the many parts contributing to the overwhelming beauty of the whole. The closer we get to Calvary, the more the paths converge together.

Take me home, country roads.

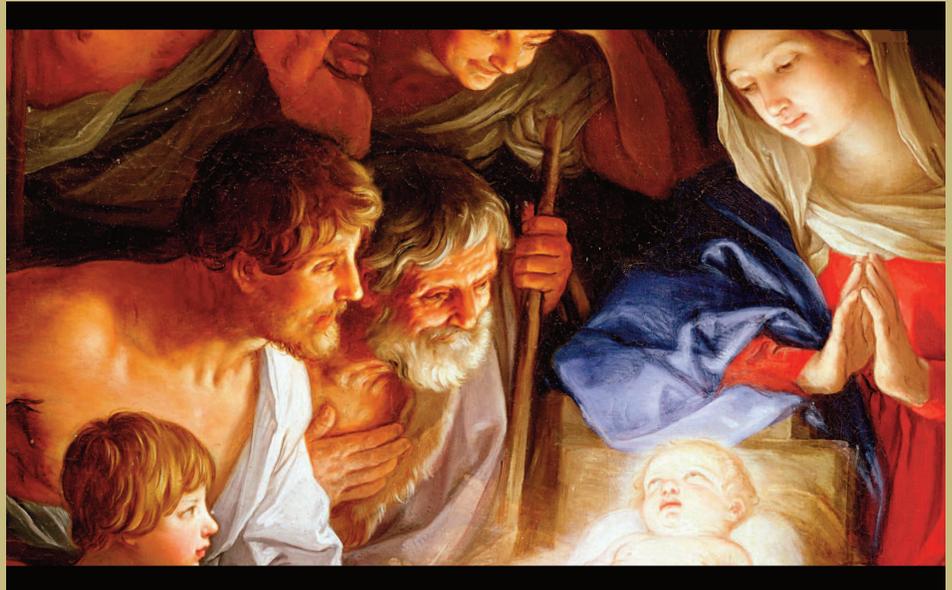
When I think of this, I always am reminded of driving through Texas. When we preach in Texas, we most often fly into San Antonio and drive to our destination. Several times in this past year it meant renting a car and a very long drive through West Texas. It’s not the fastest way to get there, but it certainly is the most economical.

As we start back for the airport, we travel on Texas farm highways with

very little traffic in the predawn hours. I love driving the country roads and seeing the small towns. As you approach San Antonio, the farm roads merge with US highways. By the time you enter the city, it is not uncommon for as many as five highways and state roads to be combined in a single road. So it is with the Biblical truth that points us to Jesus: the closer you get to Calvary, the more these pathways converge. The birth of Christ is a major point of convergence. The pathways show us the meaning and purpose of Jesus' life.

He came for a purpose. The essence of the Gospel is understanding the significance of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. It is essential to understand the purpose of his life. Pope Leo puts this in a few words: "The human race, exiled and disinherited, had for ages been daily hurrying into ruin, involved in the terrible and numberless ills brought about by the sin of our first parents, nor was there any human hope of salvation, when Christ our Lord came down as the Savior from Heaven." Adam and Eve were exiled from Paradise; mankind was disinherited from the Kingdom of heaven. For centuries on end, man lived under the heavy bondage of sin. Yet, there was the hope of a Savior yet to come that would rescue us from sin. When Jesus was born, he came for this purpose: to rescue the world from sin, a world that was without "any human hope of salvation."

A Savior is born. We are familiar with so many details of the Christmas story. Jesus was conceived in the power of the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin. He was both true God and true man. Though he was raised in Nazareth, he was born in Bethlehem because of the census, fulfilling the prophecies of old. With no room at the inn, he was born in a stable. The King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the Word of God entered the human race in the most humbling of circumstances. He was wrapped in swaddling clothes and



Adoration of the Shepherds, detail of the group surrounding Jesus (oil on canvas); Guido Reni, 17th century.

laid in a manger.

The beauty of all of these events is only fully appreciated in light of their purpose. In Jesus, God took on human form to be our Savior: "Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross." (Ephesians 2:6-8)

God's Lamb arrived in Bethlehem.

The Jewish feasts were among the most beautiful of the Old Testament signposts or pathways that pointed the way to Jesus. In Passover and the Day of Atonement, a lamb was sacrificed for the forgiveness of sins. St. Paul wrote: "But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins. It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." (Hebrews 10:3-4)

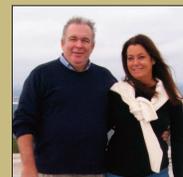
Yet these sacrifices of the Old Testament pointed the way to something more perfect yet to come: Jesus of Nazareth, the Lamb of God. This is the beauty of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. In this little child placed in a manger, the Lamb of God had arrived on the scene.

The angel announced the Savior's arrival to the shepherds in the field:

"The angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." (Luke 2:10-12)

The forefathers of these shepherds had cared for the sacrificial lambs for centuries. It was to them that the first proclamation of the birth of the Savior was given. They came to adore the Lamb of God that would defeat sin in his dying on the cross and win a victory over death in his resurrection.

This is why the Gospel is "good news." Jesus came to do for us what we were unable to do on our own: to take away our sin. It is my prayer for you that the celebration of Christmas will always make you aware of the purpose of the birth of Jesus: to be our Savior from sin.



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