

**Introduction:** Many of us remember Christmas-time from childhood because of certain special gifts we received, perhaps our first pet, first bicycle without training wheels or first set of Sunday clothes. These gifts, though little in themselves, were memorable to us because of the loving thoughtfulness and sometimes parental sacrifice which lay behind them. How much more, at this time of year, should we as Christians appreciate the costliness of the gift of His own life which the Son of God lay down on our behalf - beginning even at His birth. As we will see in this week's Christmas Bible notes, we should join the prophets and all the angels in marveling anew at the great gift for sinners of the life of the Son of God.

**Monday: read Matthew 2:1-6 and Luke 2:4-7.** There is a tragic picture presented in both the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke of a Savior coming into the world and not being received or honored as He ought to have been. Jerusalem was stirred up by the news of the birth of the Messiah, but none except a few alien Magi and some shepherds made the effort to go and bow the knee at the place of His birth. Worse than that, the very King of God's people Herod, far from receiving the Greater King Christ, made plans to do away with Him with the sword, in what we call from Matthew 2:16-18 'The Slaughter of the Innocents.' In this way the world, whether ignorant of, apathetic or hostile towards the Christ, shows its inexcusable unbelief when confronted with the greatest event in history: the birth of God come in the flesh!

Meditate and Pray: Thank God for opening your eyes to the Glory of the Christmas story when so many refuse to see. To paraphrase James Philip:

*"Christmas is very contemporary. It confronts men. The heart of the Gospel is imbedded in it. And just as in the beginning it meant a knock on a door of an inn in Bethlehem, and a response all too common: "No room here," so now it means the same challenge: "Behold I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in," (Rev. 3:20). It is the Dayspring from on high come to visit us. But with a visitor at the door, you are committed to some kind of response..."*

What has your response to Christ been so far? *"Lord, please impress on us all the importance of responding personally to Jesus Christ, not seeking to put Him off or refusing to answer His knock. Give us grace to open the door and invite Him in, moved by your gracious Holy Spirit and His gift of faith to do so." Amen.*

**Tuesday: read 1 Peter 1:10-11.** In fixing our destination for important trips, general knowledge of locale just will not do. Have you ever had the frustration of successfully navigating thousands of holiday miles only to be stymied by unknown streets in the very neighborhood of the home you want to find? Perhaps it is Grandma's house: so close, but all the one-way streets and confusing turns in the road leave you unable to arrive at your goal. Well, the prophets are better than a 'GPS system' guiding us to the exact place and purpose of Jesus' birth: the cross foreshadowed even in the manger! 1 Peter 1:11 describes what the prophets all pointed to with such clarity: the Spirit in them pointed to the sufferings of Christ... and the glories that would follow!

Meditate and Pray: Thank Jesus once again for His willingness to be born for one purpose: to die. Thank Him that He was willing to forego the normal pleasures of life, refusing to pick the flowers of pleasure and success in this world, in order to go forward to suffer in our place at Calvary. By this commitment to suffering, even from babyhood, Christ won back what Adam had lost! As the philosopher, Pascal said: *"Jesus was in a garden, not of delight as the first Adam, where he lost himself and the whole human race, but in one of agony, where He saved Himself and the whole human race."*

**Wednesday: read 1 Peter 1:10-12; Matthew 2:3-6 and Micah 3:8.** We know from the prophecy of Micah, quoted in Matthew 2:3-6, that Jesus was to be born in lowly Bethlehem. By this prophecy, we are assured that every detail of Christ's birth, including its very place, was controlled by the Spirit of God who spoke through the prophet. Micah did not understand: but he spoke as he was moved by God. Micah 3:8 says: "He was filled with the power of the Spirit of the Lord" and spoke to us by faith of what he did not clearly understand – as 1 Peter 1:12 also implies.

Meditate and Pray: Thank the Lord for His work of inspiring the prophets to so unselfishly serve us in what they said and wrote. Sometimes threatened with death; often scorned by false prophets and unbelievers, these men held onto the Word of the Lord – even though we, not them, would be the main beneficiaries of their prophecies when they were fulfilled in our day. "*Lord, thank you for giving us the great privilege of standing on the shoulders of the prophets and seeing what they could only longingly behold from a distance.*" Amen.

**Thursday: read Luke 9:57-58 and Isaiah 53:1-6.** Jesus wandered this earth as a despised "Man of Sorrows" with no place to lay His head. The road map which the prophets laid out for the Son of God born of the Virgin at Bethlehem was at every step a continual Gethsemane of suffering. When *we* read the prophets, we find page after page of comfort in the Promises of God fulfilled for us by Christ. When *Christ* read those same prophecies, *He* found page after page depicting a Man who suffered every imaginable injustice at the hands of those He came to save. As He grew, He discovered that this Man was He Him! What a knot in the stomach of the young boy Jesus to read of "one from whom men hide their faces" (Isaiah 53:3) and to have an increasing sense that *He* was the One whose afflicted visage would cause men to avert their gaze. When He looked into the mirror of the prophets, it was *His* attractive human appearance which He saw reduced to a mass of bleeding, loving sorrow! But such was Christ's commitment to the prophets that even when their description of His sorrows caused all others to look away, He "set His face like flint" to accept the life which the prophets laid out for Him to live!

Meditate and Pray: It is all true! Christ did suffer as courageously as the best Christmas carols say. Thank Him in the words of this famous carol, hymn # 213 by William Dix:

*What Child is this who, laid to rest  
On Mary's lap is sleeping?  
Whom Angels greet with anthems sweet,  
While shepherds watch are keeping?*

*Nails, spear shall pierce Him through,  
The cross be borne for me, for you.  
Hail, hail the Word made flesh,  
The Babe, the Son of Mary.*

*This, this is Christ the King,  
Whom shepherds guard and Angels sing;  
Haste, haste, to bring Him laud,  
The Babe, the Son of Mary.*

*So bring Him incense, gold and myrrh,  
Come peasant, king to own Him;  
The King of kings salvation brings,  
Let loving hearts enthrone Him.*

*Why lies He in such mean estate,  
Where ox and ass are feeding?  
Good Christians, fear, for sinners here  
The silent Word is pleading.*

*Raise, raise a song on high,  
The virgin sings her lullaby.  
Joy, joy for Christ is born,  
The Babe, the Son of Mary.*

**Friday: read Luke 2:8-20 and 1 Peter 1:12.** Let us end this week with the joy surrounding the birth of Christ. The angels could not understand how the very Son of God should come down and take the form of a Servant to save sinners, and they longed to look deeply into how God would purchase sinners with His own blood! Nevertheless, they sang out of wonder at these things too beautiful and wondrous for them to grasp. Do we have the simplicity of faith to rejoice in the Gospel as the angels did that night on the plains outside of Jerusalem? God grant us that gift of faith to receive the message which makes angels sing.

Meditate and Pray: Thank God for the song of the angels at the Birth of Christ from Luke 2:14: “Glory to God in the Highest.” May the Lord help us by faith to desire this blessing more than any other at this season of the year: the Grace to put God first, and be concerned chiefly with His Glory in the story of the Birth of Christ. As James Philip says:

*“That is the first, and chief note in the Gospel message: not primarily that the needs of men might be met, though the Gospel does in fact do this, but that God’s Holy Name might be honored and magnified among men, and that He should be first, and have the pre-eminence in all things. This is the point of the angels’ song... for it brings God back again into His own world, and gives Him His rightful place.” Amen!*