

# The Christmas Story for: Scandal Lovers

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Father, as we think upon your word, we ask that your Holy Spirit would both prompt us to hunger, to know your word, and to know you who have spoken these words, and that not only, Father, will your Holy Spirit create within us this hunger for your word, but that your Holy Spirit will create within us a deep humility as we hear and read your word.

That we would be willing, Father, to accept it as your word to us, that your word, Father, may enter deep into our lives, so that we will bear fruit that brings you great glory.

And this we ask in Jesus' name, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated.  
Actually, we're going to start with a mini-movie, so let's do the first one.

I had to preach on Sunday.

I had to preach last night, and I had to preach now. It can be hard to think of different things to say for all the different services. And I was praying about it a lot, that God would help me out. And this morning, before I came here, I stopped to get a coffee in Starbucks.

[ 1 : 1 9 ]     And the young man who served me, he asked me what I was going to be doing for Christmas. And it's really funny. I mean, I've been a Christian for a long time, and I'm a pastor.

But I hesitated about saying I was going to go to church. It's funny that something within me made me want to hesitate just sharing this simple thing that I was about to go to church. And you know how things go in your mind sometimes?

I mean, I hope it went really quick. I hope I didn't stand there for three minutes looking like a deer caught in the headlights or anything like that. But inside, I have this internal debate. I should tell him I'm going to go to church.

I shouldn't tell him I'm going to church. I should tell him I'm going to church. Anyway, so I tell him I'm going to go to church right now, and then after that, we'll have some family things. And you know, what is it about the gospel that makes us uncomfortable about sharing something as simple as the fact that we go to church?

There's something, I think, perpetually scandalous about the gospel and about the Christian faith. And as Christendom comes to an end, it becomes more scandalous.

[ 2 : 2 7 ]     The interesting thing about it is that this fellow was doing, he was involved in something that in a city like Ottawa would be considered highly scandalous. I had discovered about a year earlier that he was from a tiny place called Round Lake Center.

Put your hands up if you've ever heard of Round Lake Center. Only Louis. Oh, you've heard of it? Maybe because I've mentioned it in a sermon. Oh, yeah, you go camping right there. That's right. So other than the Morides and my wife, none of you have heard of Round Lake Center.

None of you have been to Round Lake Center. He was from Round Lake Center. And I said, I know where Round Lake Center is. I've been there all sorts of times. Anyway, so I asked him what he was doing for Christmas.

And he said, well, we're having a goose. And I said to him, did you shoot it? And he got a bit red. And he said, yes, I did. Because I discovered that like any man who's grown up in a rural area like that, he hunts.

Which, as you know, in a city like Ottawa is often quite scandalous that anybody would go and shoot cute little birds. But why is it that for Christians, we often feel a little bit uncomfortable or embarrassed?

[ 3 : 35 ] Or maybe I'm just overly sensitive about just sharing some very, very casual things about the fact that we follow Jesus. We're going to look at that by looking at this Christmas story.

And I'll just read it to you again. And then we're going to watch another video. Because it's interesting, you know, that video that we just saw, it said that Christmas celebrations, which are now called festival light or holiday celebrations or, you know, whatever in our culture, that our culture jumps into it, but they don't realize that they're jumping into the middle of a story because our culture's forgotten that.

But here's the story again. Now, the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. 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.

She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet.

[ 5 : 00 ] Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us. When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him.

He took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son, and he called his name Jesus. You'll see in this text, did you notice it said that everything that was happening that we remember today fulfilled something that the prophet said that was going to happen.

And that just reminds us that the birth of Jesus didn't just occur out of the blue, although it appeared to be out of the blue to people who didn't know the story, but it was part of centuries of God preparing his people for the Messiah to come.

We'll look at this video, and it sort of gives a bit in an artistic way, gives a bit of a history of God's dealing with his people to prepare them for the coming of the Messiah.

And let's watch. At the heart of this story is a scandal, and it's funny, it wouldn't be considered, part of it wouldn't be considered a scandal nowadays, and part of it would be considered a scandal nowadays.

[ 6 : 33 ] When I was in high school, 100 million years ago, there would occasionally be some young woman in grade 10 or 11 or 12, and she'd disappear for a year, and then she'd come back, and the word would go out that she'd gotten pregnant, and nobody in the school wanted to, the parents didn't want anybody in the school to know that she'd gotten pregnant, so they'd send her away somewhere, have the baby, and then she'd come back as if nothing had happened.

Nowadays, that wouldn't be a particular scandal to people. I think it would still be considered highly scandalous in our culture if you were engaged to be married, and after you were engaged to be married, you slept with somebody other than the person you were engaged to be married to and got pregnant from them.

I think that would probably be considered very scandalous in our culture. And the text is very clear that Joseph believes that that's what Mary's done to him. Joseph believes that Mary has slept with somebody other than himself after they were engaged, and he could have her stoned, killed for adultery, but he decides he's going to try to deal with it very, very quietly.

And then the angel comes and speaks to Joseph and says, basically, that God has done a miracle in the womb of Mary to, well, it's very interesting.

It begins when it says here, now, the birth of Jesus Christ took place. The word for birth is the same word for Genesis. In other words, in math, in the very first book of the Bible, Genesis, that's the same word here.

[ 8 : 11 ] And so what the angel tells Joseph is that God created within the womb of Mary a fertilized egg that was connected to Mary so that she was now pregnant.

In a sense, there's more matter in the universe after the miracle than there was before the miracle because God speaks. And this ovum, fertilized egg, is now in the womb of Mary, connected to Mary, and then the normal laws of pregnancy will take place.

And that's, in effect, what Joseph is told by the angel. And Joseph, obviously, is impressed by having met an angel and goes ahead and does what he's supposed to do.

And that means that all of Jesus' life and all of Mary's life and all of Joseph's life, the taint of scandal would cling to them. Because it would have been a scandalous thing in those days for Joseph to have slept with Mary and made her pregnant before they were married.

And so whether it was Joseph and Mary who had done something scandalous or just Mary, the hint and taint of scandal would have been with them for their whole life.

[ 9 : 36 ] And the hint and taint of scandal was with Jesus his whole life. There's different times in the gospel where he's taunted and his enemies say, well, we know who our father was. You don't know who your father was.

And so scandal always seemed to accompany him. And if you think about it in the life of Jesus as well, that his whole life was marked by willingly entering into different types of scandal.

He would touch a dead body, which was scandalous. He would touch a leper, which was scandalous. He would talk with single women in public places, which was scandalous. He was constantly, in many ways, inviting scandal.

So in many ways, it shouldn't be a surprise if to follow Jesus involves some small degree of scandal or inappropriateness in our culture as well.

And one of the things in our culture that's highly scandalous about this Christmas story is that the Christmas story claims that there is only one God and that not all religions are worshipping the true God.

[ 10 : 41 ] Because at the very, very heart of this story is that God, the one and only God, has come and walked amongst us.

And the implication is that that means that Allah is not God. It means that Krishna is not God. That it means that all of the other religions and spiritualities of the world who claim to tell you who God is, that they're wrong.

Because that the true God came and walked amongst us. And in Canada, that is a highly scandalous and offensive idea. But it's a really important one. Andrew, could you show us this video?

A loving Father giving himself to his children so we can live.

I mean, it's a bit of a mystery. On one hand, what greater gift could God give to us than himself? And on one hand, what greater news could there be than there actually is a God who really does exist?

[ 11 : 54 ] And that he's not distant and he doesn't hate us. But that he loves us and has come among us and dwells among us. And that through Jesus, we can know him and enter into him and be his forever.

Yet, for many in our culture, this is profoundly scandalous. And part of the great scandal as well is that we need to be saved and that we can't save ourselves, that we can't justify ourselves, that we can't make ourselves right with God, that it's deeply offensive to us because we're so addicted to self-justification and self-righteousness that only God can make us right with himself.

And in the text here, it's very, very clear that God comes among us to save us. She will bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

And through the next video. There used to be a man who came to this church and his name was Tom.

I mention his name because he would find the story funny if he was here, because that's the type of man that he was. And he's now in heaven with Jesus.

[ 13 : 27 ] He died, I don't know, eight or nine years ago. He was a very blunt man. He would tell you exactly what was on his mind, even if it was sort of wounding.

And when Louise and I had eight children and he found out that Louise was pregnant again, he said a couple of rude things about, don't you know how to tie things up or turn things off and all that type of stuff?

Don't you think you've had way too many kids? And then when the baby was born and we called him Tom, he thought it was the most hilarious thing in the world. We didn't call him after Tom, but he went around telling people that George, just to show him, went and called the baby Tom.

So he was very blunt. And I was with him for lunch one day. And somehow or another it came up that I had done something to Louise and I'd apologized to Louise for what I'd done.

And Tom said to me, George, you shouldn't have apologized to your wife for that. I would never apologize to my wife for that. And I paused a second and said to him, that's why you're divorced twice.

[ 14 : 37 ] I'm still married to my wife. And he just paused and said, you're right. You know, the fact of the matter is that in marriages or friendships, if we always try to make ourselves righteous and always try to justify ourselves, our marriage or our friendship will die.

Same with a father or a mother with their children. If the mother and the father always try to justify themselves and always make themselves righteous, the relationship dies.

We all understand that if a relationship is to go on, at times we have to humble ourselves. And we have to seek forgiveness. And we need to have the other person accept that we want to be reconciled.

And there's no way to have a relationship apart from that. And it's the exact same thing with God. We need to recognize that with God, we have a deep addiction to self-justification and self-righteousness.

And that the only way to be reconciled to God is to humble ourselves before him and seek his reconciliation.

[ 15 : 53 ] And that's the heart of the gospel. That Jesus came to reconcile us to the father. And that if we humble ourselves and call out to him, that he will not turn us away, but the father who loves us and sent his son to die upon the cross, that he will take us to himself.

But it requires us to humble ourselves and to seek what only God can give us. We're going to close with this video. And then we'll stand and pray.

God didn't leave us to figure this out for ourselves.

Listen once again in closing what the angel told Joseph and what the angel says to us. She will bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus for he will save his people from their sins.

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us.

[ 17 : 04 ] Let's just stand for a moment. Bow our heads in prayer. Father, we give you thanks and praise that your son was willing to be born in the only way that he could be born if he was to be our savior, even though that meant that he would bear scandal throughout his life.

And we give you thanks and praise, Father, that he was willing to die a scandalous death, the death of a condemned slave upon the cross. Father, we ask that you would so draw us to Jesus and help us to walk so closely with him that we would always be unashamed of Jesus and unashamed of his word and unashamed of the gospel and that we might proclaim and bear witness to Jesus with a quiet, humble, prayerful, winsome confidence to our generation and not only bear witness to him in Ottawa, but aid, Father, in bearing witness to Jesus to the very ends of the earth.

Father, we ask this prayer for ourselves and we ask it in the name of Jesus. Amen.