

Luke 2:1-20 and Four things to Ponder at Christmas

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Date: 24 December 2023

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[0 : 0 0] Hi, my name is George Sinclair. I'm the lead pastor of Church of the Messiah. It is wonderful that you would like to check out some of the sermons done by Church of the Messiah, either by myself or some of the others. Listen, just a couple of things. First of all, would you pray for us that we will open God's Word well to His glory and for the good of people like yourself?

The second thing is, if you aren't connected to a church and if you are a Christian, we really, I would really like to encourage you to find a good local church where they believe the Bible, they preach the gospel, and if you have some trouble finding that, send us an email. We will do what we can to help connect you with a good local church wherever you are. And if you're a non-Christian checking us out, we're really, really, really glad you're doing that. Don't hesitate to send us questions. It helps me actually to know, as I'm preaching, how to deal with the types of things that you're really struggling with. So God bless.

Just invite you to bow your heads in prayer for a moment. Father, we ask, Father, that your Holy Spirit would help us to hear these words and think about these words. And Father, for those of us in Christ, we give you full permission, without qualification, to have these words come into our heart, into the very center of who we are, and form us. And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated.

Amen. So some of you might know this. Probably most of you do. Some of you don't. What we do, one of the, I do my Christmas Eve and Christmas morning sermons a bit differently. The sermon will be punctuated with four mini-movies. I think three of them are about two minutes long, and one of them is about four minutes long. So that's just something to help with the kids, a bit of a not-seeing-me, but something. They're not really super kid things, necessarily, but I don't know, a lot of kids will look at screens, and it just helps break up the service a bit for children. So no big surprise, probably, but most ministers don't like preaching Christmas sermons. Everybody knows the text pretty well. In my case, I don't know, I've preached Christmas sermons for many, many decades. Well, not many decades, for many years. And so often we don't really like preaching on Christmas.

No surprise, probably, if you think about it. But here's the thing. I was thinking about this a lot this week. In fact, I said to my wife, Louise, I love these Christmas stories. I really like them.

[2 : 5 5] And I love pondering them. So it's sort of this odd, I have this odd week. On one hand, it's almost as if I say to myself, oh, goody, I get a chance to meditate and ponder on these wonderful stories.

And every year when I meditate and ponder on them, I see both all familiar things, but I see new things, and I make new connections with my life, or with the rest of the Bible, or with what's going on in the world. So I really enjoy meditating and pondering upon these texts. I just don't necessarily enjoy doing the sermon. So I don't know if my pondering will help you. My week of pondering will help you this morning. But let's see. Let's go. So we're going to be looking at this story from Luke. It's Luke chapter 2, verses 1 to 20. If you don't have your own Bibles with you, there are some Bibles here if you'd like to follow along. If you don't own a Bible, you can keep it. The words will be on the screen.

And, I mean, this always looks sort of fancy, but originally, before this was recognized as being in the Bible, it was written as, and that's what it is, it is an eyewitness-based biography of Jesus.

And it's an eyewitness-based biography of Jesus that was written when there were literally thousands and thousands and thousands of eyewitnesses still alive. In fact, actually, one of the enduring powers of this as a biography is that it survived, that it wasn't just laughed out of all the pubs and tabbouleh houses and hummus houses of Judea. This was written, people would have known about it, eyewitness testimony, and that's what we're reading. And just before we start with Luke chapter 2, verse 1, Luke chapter 2 implies that there was Luke chapter 1. And in chapter 1, the most important thing that happened, there's lots of important things that are said, but one of the important things is that we are told that an angel comes and speaks to Mary, and that, and basically says to Mary that God wants to do a miracle in her womb and create a zygote. I mean, that's not the word they used then, that's the word we would use now. Create a zygote in her womb, which would be attached to her womb. In other words, that she would conceive. But God needed her permission. God needed her to say yes.

She says yes. And so there is now a baby growing within the womb of Mary. And in that announcement, it's sort of said that he's like, he'll have this eternal throne. It's implied that it's God in some way, which the rest of the story will make clear. And now the baby still has to be born, and that's where the story takes up. So if you join with me in Luke chapter 2, verse 1, here's how this ancient eyewitness-based biography of Jesus continues. In those days, a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. I'll explain what that means in a moment. This was the first registration when Cornelius was governor of Syria, and all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem. Why? Well, because he was of the house and lineage of David. He went to be registered with Mary, who was betrothed to him, and she was with child. And we'll just sort of pause there. So on one hand, this is the most familiar story of the world, especially, I mean, good grief, we're in Ottawa. So basically what's going on is the very, very first Caesar, the very first emperor, Augustus. He's reaching the end of his life. He might think he's immortal, or he knows he's going to be dying within a couple of years, or maybe like a lot of people, they think they have another 5, 10, 20 years left. But he does what every government wants.

[6 : 44] They want to make sure nobody's avoiding their taxes. Do I hear an amen? Well, no, that would be an amen in parliament, or the Senate, but not necessarily in a church. They want to do a very normal thing.

They want to make sure there's no tax avoiders anywhere. And so he figures it's just time to get everybody registered. They do it in different ways in different regions. And in the case of Judea, they do it in sort of the way that's familiar to that basically rural area, which is ask people to go back to their ancestral homes. Now, I don't know how many of you are from small towns or rural towns.

I'm from Montreal. And I guess compared to New York City, that's small, but it's not a small place. But I lived in Eganville for seven and a half years. And so I know a little bit about how small towns are like. And small towns know other small town people. They know their families.

And they know them for many, many generations, like quite a few generations. So it's actually a very smart way in a rural area to do it. And so they want people to go back to their ancestral homes, where they can be registered to make sure that the proper tax rolls are maintained. Now, Mary is pregnant.

Well, I'm not putting down bureaucrats here. Far from it. But there are schedules to keep. There are rules to follow. And frankly, if you're pregnant, that's your problem, not our problem.

[8 : 06] Joseph and Mary have to show up at the right place at the right time, even if you're pregnant. And that is where we come to in this particular story. But there is something to ponder in this story. And one of the things that happened to me this week as I was pondering is I realized that a key part of the story is that Mary ponders. So what I'm doing today is I'm not so much giving you four points as four things to ponder in this Christmas story. And if you could put up the first thing that would be wonderful, something to ponder. Who has true world-changing power?

Finite human beings or the triune God who created all things? Something to ponder. Who has true world-changing power? Finite human beings or the triune God who has created all things?

Now, why do I ask that? Well, I ask that because there's this very, very curious bit in the first verse where Caesar Augustus says the whole world has to be taxed. Now, Luke knows that Rome doesn't control the whole world. So Luke isn't making a mistake. What Luke is doing is accurately reflecting how Caesar thinks. I rule the world. I change and control the world. It's how the powerful think.

It's how woke majorities think. It is how the Ayatollahs think. It's maybe how the U.S. thinks. It's how Apple thinks or Microsoft thinks. It's a very, very common thing to see themselves as having this type of world-reaching, world-changing, world-transforming power that everybody needs to recognize. And Rome was definitely making it all recognized here. But if you think about it for a second, we know that there's several things about this. And Luke would have known this very well.

First of all, Luke would have said, you don't actually control the whole world. You think you do, but you don't. And the second thing, us now looking around here, where's the Roman Empire?

[10 : 12] Died a long time ago. And yet, interestingly enough, we are here this morning to remember the birth of a baby during the Roman Empire. The baby's empire vastly outlasted Rome's empire. Now, why is this an important thing for us to ponder? Who has world-changing power? As some of you have heard me talk about it before, the problem that we often think that Christians, we Christians often have, is we think that God is small and other things are big. What can we do about our society? What can we do about the Supreme Court? What can we do about the government? What can we do about capitalism?

What can we do about woke stuff? What can we do about this? What can we do about Putin? What can we do about China? These things are all really, really, really, really, really, really, really big. And frankly, it becomes bigger and bigger in our view. And in our own world, God becomes smaller and smaller and smaller. Or maybe it's our teacher or our boss or our problem or our illness. And these things become bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger. And God becomes smaller and smaller and smaller and smaller. And this story is an opportunity for us to ponder whether that's true. Who actually does have world-changing power? Who has world-reaching, world-changing power?

Who is really, truly big and who is small? Putin will die. Biden will die. Trump will die. Trudeau will die. Jesus is alive. Who has world-changing power? Something to ponder. While we ponder it, let's look at our first mini-movie called The Light of the World.

A brilliant light pierced the darkness on that first Christmas night. It wasn't the immense star so bright that intrigued experts of the night sky to follow it. It wasn't even the multitude of angelic messengers with the light so intense, so radiant, it frightened brave shepherds to fall to their knees. No, this light was far greater, more powerful than every star and every sun. This light was a baby. A tiny newborn wrapped in cloth lying in a manger where animals feed. A baby named Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us. Because Jesus was a gift for each one of us, and he arrived with a purpose to shine light into all dark places. You see, Jesus is the way, the truth and the light. A light that shows us there is no place you can go that can escape God's love. No dark corner where his love cannot find you. A light that has the power to cut through any darkness, to calm the most anxious thoughts, and to fill every heart with unspeakable joy. There is a light that shines brightly in the darkness, and his name is Jesus, light of the world.

If I had a title for the next couple of verses that we're going to read, it would be called The Letdown, or The Profound Disappointment. Let's look at what verses 6 and 7 have to say and why I say it.

[14 : 14] Verse 6, and while they were there, we now have Joseph and Mary in Bethlehem, and while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

Now let's be honest, from a Canadian point of view, that's a letdown. Verse 7, that's all? Like, where's the mighty warriors? Where's the explosions? Where's the chase scene? Where they're chasing people? Where's, you know, where's the really muscular guys and gals? Like, giving it some, like, pizzazz. Like, where's the light show? Where's the crowd? Where's the important people? Where is there a crowd so that at the end of when the baby comes out, Joseph and Mary kiss, and everybody applauds, right? That's how blockbusters like to end, right? Whether it's, you know, the latest Tom Cruise thing or something, the guy and the girl kiss, and people all applaud. Like, this is a very disappointing story. Like, where's the famous person? And the fact of the matter is, our Muslim friends, one of the things our Muslim friends will say to us, is that there's no more glorious written work than the Quran, that you just have to read it, and you're just overwhelmed with how beautiful and wonderfully it's written. And this is very, very plain. Like, it's not, like, there's no

Shakespeare here or anything like that. It's just pretty plain. It's a bit of a letdown. It's too simple. Hollywood would be pulling their hair out and say, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. Let's get some other stuff in there to try to make it look like what it deserves. They have to know it's important.

So here's the second thing to ponder. Second thing to ponder, if you could put it up. Whose criteria should you live by? Canada's criteria in 2023 were the triune God's criteria. Whose criteria should you live by? Canada's criteria in 2023 were the triune God's criteria. Now, just think about it for a second. Most people in Canada live by Canada's criteria in 2023.

And I know I might be this a little bit of a put down, and I apologize for it. But the fact of the matter is that if you live by Canada's criteria in 2023, you'll be living by different criteria by the end of 2024, different criteria gained by the end of 2025, and different criteria gained by 2026.

[16 : 48] You, in fact, are living your life like a cork floating along a stream just going wherever. Ricky Gervais has made piles and piles and piles of money just making fun of it. Like, who would have seen that coming, they say, right? Who would have seen this being canceled? Who would have seen this been put down? And it's going to continue to go on. One of the things that's so going on sort of underneath the surface froth of our culture is the profound attraction of many people to somebody like Jordan Peterson, who's in his talk basically tries to say there are things which in fact are enduring, that are deep. And he roots it in the nature of human beings. He roots it in psychological studies that show these fixed things of us. He roots it in evolutionary biology.

And there's a profound attraction to the Stoics and other types of thinkers that people are realizing you can't just live by the criteria of Canada in 2023. It'll just make your life a mess.

And so there's this attempt to find criteria that are not flighty, always changing. And by Canada's criteria, this story is too simple. But it's not too simple for God. He chose to reveal himself this way. And that's why we need to ponder. Whose criteria are we living by and judging ourselves by and the world by? And if we are just judging everything, including ourselves by the criteria of Canada 2023, I think surely you must realize that's not something that you should be doing. Like it is, it is like buying the cheapest toy in the dollar store and giving it to a kid, which they might delight them for about 10 seconds and then it's in the garbage.

Doesn't it make more sense to live by the criteria of the triune God? And if you think about it, why isn't plain and simple without being simplistic and true and no applause, why isn't that a good way to live? Why isn't that a good way to live? Why isn't that a better criteria? As we ponder it, we'll look at a second mini movie called The Christmas Light.

Picture this. It's a cold winter's night. Snow is gently falling.

[19 : 23] Darkness surrounds you. And you struggle to see. Everything is obscure. Every direction. Meaningless. But suddenly. Light. The night Jesus was born, they tell us that a light appeared in the sky.

A light that not even the greatest of astronomers could identify. A light so bright that even darkness had to flee. A light so powerful that even the worst of what we had done was not only exposed, it was cleansed, it was cleansed, it was cleansed, forgiven, and forgotten.

You see, this is why Jesus came to earth, to give us that light. So that we would have the same joy and the same love and the same light everywhere we go.

And the best news is, this is a light meant for all. It is freely offered. You see, Christmas is more than the warmth of friends and family, more than nostalgia, the gifts and memories.

[20 : 40] It is about the greatest gift ever given. Because a world in darkness has not only seen a great light. No, we have seen the greatest light.

And his name is Jesus. Jesus. These simple verses in 6 and 7, how they go and the baby's just born and wrapped in sloth and clothes and put in a feeding trough for animals.

There's one more thing we can ponder that this story asks us to ponder. Hopefully, you understand, if you don't understand what's big and what's small, you're going to live an unexamined and fearful life.

And if you don't start to think of what criteria you're living by, you're going to be pushed and pulled by the most ephemeral and, in fact, people that you don't even respect.

And this is another thing to ponder. Like, think about the oddness of the story. It's, on one hand, very, very public, yet also, well, not public enough.

[21 : 57] Why is it public but not public enough? Well, just think about this for a second. There are some women here who have given birth. And if you shared around later on how long it took for the, how long you were in labor for your first birth, my best guess is nobody here would say under 15 minutes quietly with no pain.

If you did, we wouldn't believe you. You might, somebody, say for your first baby, oh, it was really quick. It was only eight hours. It was really quick. We were so blessed. Only eight hours. So here's how it works.

People from all over Judea have all come together to Bethlehem. The city, it's small, but it's crowded. And so Mary and Joseph are in an inn, and she goes into labor, which is probably eight hours and probably not quiet.

There's crying from Joseph, not from Mary, probably, and mashing of teeth and all of that type of stuff. And listen, this is how it would work. And some of you who've grown up in small communities, rural communities, you know what it's like.

I mean, on one hand, it's the worst place to live because everybody knows about what's going on. On the other hand, it's the best place to live because when you're in trouble, people come out to help, right? So what is not in the story is what you can definitely know.

[23 : 18] There's a whole pile of other women around Mary at this point in time. And what do men do? Well, they make a fire, probably. And there's some food to eat, and there's conversation, and there's updates, and there's cries, and everybody in Bethlehem knew a baby was born that night.

Everybody in Bethlehem knew there was a baby born that night. If the baby had just been born quietly and privately in a very even smaller town of Nazareth just in Mary's house, and then later on people are talking about the angels and all that type of stuff, they would have just said, you're just making that stuff up.

It's just you and a couple of your family members making up stories. You always think you're better than you are, right? That's how we put people down, right? But this is very public. Everybody knows that there's this baby that's born in Bethlehem on that particular night.

And later on when Jesus becomes famous, and there's these other stories, and after the resurrection there's this, you know, there's the prophecy and all whether or not Jesus was born. Like all of that, it's all become very, very, very public.

But here's the point. If you could put up the third thing to ponder. Something to ponder. Who knows human beings best? You?

[24 : 38] Sorry. Don't mean to insult you. But if I said, I think I'm the one who knows human beings best, you would all laugh at me, right? My family would laugh the loudest, by the way, if I claimed that I know human beings better than anybody else on the planet.

Who knows human beings best? You? Some other person? Some other human being? Or the triune God who created you? You see, if you think about it, this story, it puzzles people.

Many people who would describe themselves as atheists would say, listen, why doesn't God just give it, make it way more obvious? Like, why doesn't he make it obvious? There's this odd thing about how God has revealed himself to human beings.

There's this odd aspect of obviousness and hiddenness, of public and private, of reason and logic and of intuition.

There's this odd balance that goes back and forward with it. You know, you look at the book of Romans and it says that anybody just looks like... I had a... There's a fellow who used to be part of our congregation who was doing his PhD in biochemistry and he said, nobody who understands DNA can believe that we happen by chance.

[25 : 53] Absolutely nobody can think that. And the same fellow said that if you look at the life of a cell, just one single cell, nobody believes it can happen by chance. The more you see the world, the more obvious it is that there's some type of design to it, which implies there's a designer.

And on and on and on. There's this odd mixture in Christianity of stuff which is public, like the crucifixion, like this birth thing, but private in terms of the meaning.

There's this odd mixture. And here's the thing. You might wish that it was just more obvious. And there's other times when...

I don't know. I guess we sort of like the fact that there's something that we have this flash of insight and that's sort of enjoyable and delectable to anybody who has a flash of insight. But this odd mixture of fact and faith, of reason and intuition and illumination, this odd combination, which we would probably want to change, well, let's just ponder of who knows human beings better.

If, in fact, the triune God exists and he has created us, he knows us better than we know ourselves than I know myself.

[27 : 13] And he knows that there's something that's unbelievably important to us as human beings that sort of balances the mystical and the rational, the hidden and the public, the revelation and the search.

To ponder. Who knows us best? God or other people? And has he dealt with us in a way which truly is best for us?

Something to ponder. While we ponder it, we're going to look at something called the other shepherd. Glory to God in the highest.

Peace on earth and a new middle toward men. Tobias!

There you are. Got the coffees. Land of Goshen, that line was long. All right, a couple of coffees.

[28 : 23] Tobias, here's yours with extra goat milk. Had to smell that the whole way here. Thank you so much. And I have a juniper tea. Which one of you guys have the juniper tea with two extra shots of honey, huh?

You look like the juniper. And an extra large boba tea for me because I made the run. And it's all good. Ira, if you will.

Guys? Where's all the sheep? Zeke!

Come back! No thank you! We're not making this up! Oh, you're not making this up? Oh, golly gee then, Eamon! Then maybe I will believe that what? A gaggle of angels came down?

Technically, they're called heavenly hosts. Not the time, Tobias. It's always the time for proper nomenclature. That's the motto I live by. Fine. A heavenly host of little cherubs.

[29 : 26] No, no, no, no. Not little. They were humongous. Yeah, Ira buckled like a newborn lamb. I might have a new concussion. I taste pennies right now.

Okay. Come on, ladies! Sweetpea! Zeke, we're leaving the sheep. Bathsheba! Bathsheba! The angel told us where to find the Messiah.

Yeah. Figures. Figures. Figures the angels would tell you and not me. You want to know why? Because I am always, always, always, always left out of things.

I am left out. Every time! That's not true. It is so true. How about the time that I stayed back and I watched the sheep while you all went to go chase those wolves for that farmer? And what did you get in return? A year's worth of free olive oil!

You guys remember that olive oil? Remember when we put them on those crackers? Oh. Hey! Hey! Hey! How about the time that I missed out on that amazing water spot at the Sea of Galilee? Because I was searching for herbs for Ira's weak stomach.

[30 : 27] Can we just say my stomach was disappointed in me? Fine. Fine. Fine. Fine. Fine. Fine. Then riddle me this. How about the time that my best friend forgot to tell me about Tobias' surprise birthday dinner for some strange oversight of, oh, forgetting that I exist?

I am left out of everything. So why shouldn't I be left out of this? The Messiah. I guess he's just leaving me out, too.

Get off me! Stop it! Not the face!

Leave me alone! Stop! Think! Stop! You stop! Hey! Come here! Listen to me! Listen to me! Listen! I'm sorry. I'm sorry you missed out on so much.

That's on us. But today, in the town of David, the Savior was born to us. All of us. I can't let you miss out on that.

[31 : 34] Well, better not keep that baby waiting. Idea! Pit stop for more boba teas on the way? Not a chance.

Let's catch up with what the eyewitness history said. That was sort of a bit of an addition to it. It continues in verse 8. And in the same region, there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And just sort of pause here for a second. Spielberg would be saying, what? What? These people should be at the shh, at the inn, with the baby, not five miles away.

Like, what's going on? Like, that's what political aides would say to you, right? The prime minister wants to do something, or the leader of the opposition, and the big shebang is five miles away from where they are, and they'd be saying to the aides, like, what are you doing?

That big thing's supposed to be with me. I'm the big thing. But it's five miles away, and it's to the wrong type of guy. It's to lower working class guys doing a lower working class thing, not a whole pile of PhDs or billionaires or artist types or anything like that.

[32 : 52] It's a whole pile of working class guys five miles away. But it continues. 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.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord. And we'll return to that in a moment. So what we're getting here is the story has happened, and now the meaning of the story is being revealed.

But it's five miles away, and it's to the shepherds. Verse 12, and this will be a sign for you. And one of the things which is so wonderful about this sign is it's a sign appropriate to shepherds.

Because shepherds will know where animals are fed. And it's also a wonderful sign because, you know, so it's a lower working class thing. It's not like the owner class.

Like, you know, like how many billionaires know where the gas stations are, right? Probably, like, I'm not putting down Trudeau. Like, he's been prime minister for a while. He probably doesn't know where the gas stations are. Like, he doesn't know where sort of normal things are, where you buy groceries.

[33 : 55] Like, he probably hasn't been to a grocery store in forever unless it's a photo op. And I'm not putting them down. It's just the way a certain class of people are. But here's a perfect sign for lower working class guys.

This will be a sign for you. You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. They know where animals are fed. And that's, like, weird. Like, you can bet a million dollars or a million shekels.

It's the only baby in a feeding trough of animals in Bethlehem. And then something else happens. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest and on earth.

Peace among those with whom he is pleased. Now, verse 11 is almost creed-like. If you look at it again, verse 11, it says, Unto you, in other words, for you, for you.

Because God is for you. If you resist him, of course, you resist him. But he is for you.

[35 : 03] He is for you. And he's for you. And born this day in the city of David is a Savior who is Christ the Lord.

So here is something to ponder. Who is Jesus and does he really matter? Who is Jesus and does he really matter?

Canada, in 2023, there are sort of three types of views of Jesus and whether he matters. For many, it would be, maybe the majority, I don't know, it's just a hobby.

You know, some people, they like playing video games. Some people like going to church. Some people like going to bars.

It's just whatever turns your crank, whatever gives you a little bit of peace and security. Like, if it's good for you, that's fine. As long as just, you know, life moves on. For others, if, as I, I love this line, it's a line from a famous feminist.

[36 : 06] And she said, the original line is, a woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle. I think it was Jermaine Greer who said that. But it's a, it's a very wonderful line that can be borrowed.

And many Christians, many Canadians would just say, I need Jesus like a fish needs a bicycle. Right? Like, it's a little bit lower than a hobby. I can understand video games.

I can understand going to bars. This Jesus thing, like, that doesn't make any sense whatsoever. And then, of course, there's many people who would just see it as toxic. This is the whole source of all of our colonizing problems, all of our backwardness, all of our wars, all becomes from people like Jesus.

But there's something to ponder about this. Like, what if it's true? Like, what if it's true? Like, and why would we think it's true?

We think it's true because of the resurrection, the context of this overarching story from which we get justice and the dignity of human beings and the worth of women and the veneration of life and a concern for true justice.

[37 : 12] What if it's true? What if there really is a savior? What if there's a savior? Like, if you think about it for a second, every human being, if they spend any type of time in reflection, will realize that there's something off about them that doesn't fit.

There's something off about us. What if we have that insight and we really do need Jesus? That he is big and all else is small.

That he has the criteria by which we live. He knows what it's like to be a human being. He is the one who saves. He is the Messiah. He is God himself. What if it's true?

Show the last mini-movie, please. Long lay the world in bleak midwinter pining.

From Adam's fall declining, sorrow mining, hope resigning. Yet this song to heaven inclining. Come, O come, Emmanuel. Ransom captive Israel.

[38 : 37] Descend and all our dark dispel. Be pleased as man with man to dwell. This countdown to the first Noel. They did foretell. The prophets preached, Emmanuel. God with us.

Come to break the spell. So low within that manger lies he who built the starry skies.
Surprise! That's God with us. The royal son.

The second of the three in one. Three is first when counting down. The father, son, and spirit bound. The four all things behind above. A unity, joy, hope, and love.

Then sent by love and filled with joy. God's hope became a baby boy. See him lying on a bed of straw. The little Lord Jesus.

Whom angels adore. And all will surely ask, What for? When Adam's ruin beckoned, God sent down a second.

[39 : 34] Word of the father now in flesh appearing. Christ was volunteering. Human nature commandeering. Adam's life he would redo. This, the meaning of the two.

The second of the three became the second of humanity. And he would do it right. And bear our wrongs. And take our curse where it belongs.

And rise again like morning sun. And ask us all, Will you be one? What child is this? Shares our abyss that we might share in all that's his.

Made one with us that we might be united for eternity. So joy to the world. The Lord is come. Good tidings sing in three, two, one.

I invite you to stand as I read the last few verses of the story.

[40 : 51] When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.

And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph. And they found the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying had been told them concerning this child.

And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. They would have told them that this baby was the Savior, that this baby was the Messiah, that this baby was Lord God himself.

But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told.

Things to ponder. Who is big and who is small? Who knows human beings best? What criteria will we live by?

[41 : 54] Is Jesus the Savior and Messiah and Lord? If he is, well, maybe you want to ask some of us about how you begin to believe in him.

Or learn of him. Or go deeper into him. But the story invites us to believe, to tell, and to ponder.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for Jesus. We ask, Father, that you help us to not just read the story, but to ponder the story.

And, Father, as we ponder the story and the deep truths in that, will you change us and transform us? Help us, Father, to be more solid people living by your criteria, to trust that you understand who we are, to understand, Father, that you are big and the things we come across are small, and that Jesus is our Savior.

He is the fulfillment of your promises, and that he delights not only in saving us, but in being our Lord. Father, grow these truths deeply in our lives, and we ask this in the name of Jesus.

[43 : 03] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.