

Celebrating The Spirit's Work in Christmas

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[0 : 00] It's great to have you here. Today is a really special morning and I'm really thankful for each one who has put so much time into making this happen.

You're going to get to see all of it in one piece. We've seen it in a lot of different pieces over the last couple weeks. And I'm just thankful for all the leaders, for all the kids, for all the teens, and all their hard work that they've put into this.

Well, this morning we're going to think about Christmas. And ever since I was a kid, I've always had an affinity for Christmas. To quote a really popular song, it's the most wonderful time of the year. I hope a lot of you are with me in that as well.

But as we think about Christmas, it's a time where we come together with our friends, our family, a time where we give gifts, we have parties. But ultimately, Christmas is about Jesus, a time where we remember and celebrate his birth and his coming here to earth and all that that means for us. As Christmas comes each year, usually sometime in November for our family, I begin thinking, man, there's a lot to get ready. I don't know if you feel that way as well. Whether it's decorating the house or putting up the tree, putting out the lights, baking cookies.

[1 : 26] Any of you kids like baking cookies? Yeah, that's what I'm talking about. Any of you kids like eating cookies? Yeah. So there's a lot to do to get ready for Christmas, right? And not to mention all the gifts.

We spend a lot of time making lists and then looking at lists from family, trying to buy the perfect gift for everybody. And really, as we think about it, there's a lot that we do to get ready for Christmas. And I learned when I got married nine and a half years ago that not all families prepare for Christmas in the same way. Did you know that? Go figure. Sometimes it takes getting married to learn these things.

Growing up as a kid, my family, we typically did our shopping, usually we would start early on like the 23rd. That was about the time we started our Christmas shopping. And so there was always this big rush to the finish to try to get the gifts that we wanted and run to different stores because a lot of them were sold out and things like that.

But there was a certain adrenaline that I think we got getting ready for Christmas. Now, when I married my wife, one of the things I saw is, wow, she starts Christmas shopping in like October.

[2 : 33] That's incredible. And I saw that all the intentionality, the planning that she put into Christmas far in advance. And I thought, wow, there's something to be said for this. Now, I'm not here today to tell you that one way or the other is a better way to prepare for Christmas.

But what I am here and what we want to talk about this morning is all that God did to prepare for Christmas. God didn't haphazard his Christmas plans. Jesus wasn't an afterthought or something he tried to squeeze in at the very last minute.

But God, before the foundation of the world, prepared the way for Jesus to come. Before time began, he sovereignly set forth his plan to bring salvation to his people.

And that's what we're going to take a look at today is how the Holy Spirit worked every single detail out. If we look at the book of Galatians, Galatians chapter 4, as we kind of open the beginning of the series of messages, we see that God said he sent Jesus in the fullness of time.

Now, we might ask the question, maybe you've wondered this, why did God send Jesus when he did? Why 2,000 years ago? Certainly, if Jesus came today, he could have billions of followers on Twitter.

[3 : 48] Why 2,000 years ago? Well, while we don't know for sure, we can understand that there was a reason and a purpose for that.

I don't know about you, have you guys ever gone to an arcade and you've seen those games? Wait, I see some hands down here. Chuck E. Cheese's or I don't know, we go to Great Wolf Lodge. They've got a pretty cool arcade there too, right? You guys like arcades.

How many of you guys have ever seen one of those arcade games where there's like this spinning wheel and if you can land a token right on one of those things as it spins around, you get like 100 tickets, right?

It's cool. You guys have seen, you know what I'm talking about. How many of you have wasted hundreds of tokens trying to win 100 tickets, right? It's not easy. And we sit there and we think that somehow if I can just get the timing right and then it, boom, just falls off the edge.

You're like, oh no, one more time, I'll try it again. Well, it's important for us to understand this is not how God planned Jesus' coming. He didn't look into all of the world's history and say, oh, if I can just get it in the right spot.

[4 : 51] Oh, nope, missed it, but that's okay. Jesus was very, God was very intentional in his planning of Jesus' coming. As we look and see in 1 Peter 1.20 tells us that he, Jesus, was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but he was manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory so that your faith and hope are in God.

God knew Jesus before the world was created, before it was founded. Jesus was with God. He was there as a part of the creation process. And before the world was even started, before any of us existed, God had a plan to send Jesus at the perfect time.

Galatians 4.4 tells us that that was the fullness of time that Jesus came. The fullness, when I think of fullness, I tend to think of ripeness. This was just the perfect time.

You guys have probably been this way with fruit before, where you, mangoes are usually the one in our house that can be kind of hit or miss. Our kids love mangoes, but oftentimes when we buy a mango, Titus, I see your big eyes there talking about mangoes.

We love mangoes at our house. And the challenge with mangoes is getting them at just the right ripeness. If you get them too soon, they're really hard and yucky. But if you wait too long, you cut them open in the middle, and they're mushy and smell not very good.

[6 : 15] They don't taste right. But here, this passage tells us that the fullness of time had come. Galatians 4.4-5 says, When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law.

Now, why did God send forth his Son? The rest of the verse tells us, To redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. So this is the idea that God waited for the perfect time in all of human history to send Jesus.

Now, it may be easy for us to think, Well, why didn't he send them way back when Israel was disobeying and was about to go into exile? God could have sent Jesus then. Or why didn't he send them a thousand years ago?

Or why not today? We can challenge those things. But the ultimate truth that we see in God's Word is that it was the fullness of time, the ripeness of time, at just the right time Jesus came.

Now, we can't know all of God's purposes, but we can know that at the time Jesus came, the world was in a really unique place. It was something called the Pax Romana. It's a fancy way to say the Roman peace.

[7 : 18] If you've studied history, you guys know that Rome was a really powerful country, and they conquered all of the known world at that time. And in doing that, they brought peace to the world.

Also, what they brought was the Greek language. So the whole world at that time was connected by a common language and also by a great road system that the Romans built so that they could easily move their army from city to city.

But what that did is it allowed people to be able to travel quickly from place to place. And as we look in the book of Acts, we can see how God used the Roman peace to be a vessel for spreading the truth about Jesus all over the world.

So today, as we think about the Spirit's work in Christmas, as we think about how God has prepared long before the foundation of the world, I want to understand a really important point.

In God's sovereign plan, His time is always perfect. Each of you guys here today came at a certain time. Some of you may have gotten here earlier than you wanted.

[8 : 23] Some of you may have gotten here later than you wanted. But all of you got here exactly when God wanted you to get here, according to His sovereign plan. And so I believe that by the fact

that you're here today, to get to hear this message, as we study from God's Word, as we sing praise to Him, as we hear the kids and the teens lead us in praise, God has brought each one of us here specifically today for a specific purpose.

And we should understand that Jesus, or excuse me, that the Holy Spirit has gone through great preparation in Christmas. And we'll take a look at that further this morning as we study. So turn with me, if you would, to the Gospel of Luke and to the Gospel of Matthew.

So if you've got to get ready to put your finger in two spots in your Bible. We've looked at first to begin this morning as we think about the Holy Spirit's work in preparing for Christmas.

We've looked at the timing. That God sent Jesus in the fullness of time as a part of His plan from before the beginning of the world. I want to look next at some of the preparation that went into who Jesus' parents would be.

Now you think about that in the context of all the people who have lived throughout all of history.

Why Mary? Why Joseph? We're going to look a little bit into the character of Mary and Joseph.

[9:39] Who they were, and maybe in part why God used them. So turn with me to Luke chapter 2 and Matthew chapter 1. We're going to begin in Matthew. But be ready, because we're going to flip back over to Luke 2.

Out of the four Gospels, Matthew and Luke give us the most detail about the birth of Jesus. And so we see here a parallel account of the same thing from two different vantage points.

So beginning in Luke chapter 2, or excuse me, in Matthew chapter 1, verse 18. Now the beginning of Matthew chapter 1, we see the genealogy of Jesus, and so we can understand the heritage of where He came from.

God was really intentional, and we could spend an entire morning just talking about who was in the lineage of Jesus. But for the sake of time, I want to focus in more on the specific character of Joseph and Mary.

Now as we think about Joseph as Jesus' father, it's important to remember that he was Jesus' adopted father. Right? We're in no way saying that Joseph was the true physical father.

[10:49] We know the Bible tells us that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit. But Joseph brought Jesus in as his own son while he was here in this world. And so as we take a look, the first thing I want to consider is the character of Joseph.

Look to Matthew 1, verses 18 and 19. And you'll see here, Matthew tells us, 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.

Now I want to pause here for just a second. There's a little bit of context that we need to understand as 21st century Americans where we could maybe put this off in one side. Back in those days, when someone got engaged, the commitment was significant.

It was almost the same commitment as marriage, just not fully realized. So at this point, Mary and Joseph are engaged. They're going to get married. And you think about, in our culture, how important marriage is and the marriage engagement.

That's a significant life chapter. Even more so back in those days. And young women oftentimes would get betrothed. Some as young as the age of 13. So the youth group, how many of you are 13-year-old girls?

[11:58] Raise your hand. Oh, sorry. Some of the guys are like 13, right? There's just a few. How many of you are between 13 and 15? Raise your hands. Okay. Girls, sorry. Clarify. Just a few of you.

And you're like, I don't want to know this, Pastor Ben. Now all of you dads out there of those girls who are between 13 and 15, how many of you would be comfortable with your daughter getting married right now? Probably how many of you dads with daughters under the age of 18 are going to be comfortable with them getting married?

Probably not. But culturally back then, this was really normal. And so Joseph and Mary were set to get married. And suddenly, out of the blue, Mary finds out she's pregnant.

Now, we're not going to do an anatomy and physiology class this morning, but we all know that God has designed babies to be a product of a husband and wife coming together in a special union.

And so the assumption would be here if Joseph said, well, we're not married, then this isn't my baby. And the text then tells us we get this really interesting scenario that starts to unfold here.

[12 : 58] So you imagine Joseph and Mary, they're planning their wedding, they're excited, and then suddenly, boom, this happens. And Joseph goes, ah, what's going on? I thought I knew you, Mary. I thought I understood this. How could this be that you're going to have a baby and we're not even married?

This can't be my child. What does this mean? We'll look at verse 19 and we understand a little bit more of the character of Joseph. It says, and her husband to be, really here, Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

So we'll look at first this phrase, this description that's used here, Joseph as a just man. Now, we have to understand this was probably something that was heartbreaking news for Joseph.

All of his plans, his hopes, had just been crushed, dashed to the ground. But he was a just man and he knew that this was caused to call off a marriage. If there was unfaithfulness during the betrothal period, this would be a reason to walk away.

And really, that would be the thing he needed to do to honor God. And so being a just man, he had a desire to do the right thing, even though it meant giving up the one he loved and all that he had planned and hoped for.

[14 : 06] As a just man, he knew he needed to do this. Now, culturally in those days, honor and shame were so important. That's very much what we would see in Eastern cultures, like the Chinese culture or other cultures of the East, where you want to do everything possible to bring honor to your family and avoid anything that brings shame.

Well, this would have been a really shameful thing. And it would have been shame not only on Mary, but also on Joseph as her fiance. And he had a decision about how he was going to handle the situation. Joseph could have taken and simply put all the blame on Mary.

He could have made her a spectacle and said, look at this terrible woman. She's been unfaithful.

Look what she's done to me. She's ruined me. And could have really publicly shamed her and tried to push all the shame away from himself and put it onto her.

But instead, look at verse 19. We see a bit about the character of Joseph. He said he was unwilling to put her to shame and he resolved to divorce her quietly. Now we're talking about divorce here.

You might be thinking, wait, Pastor Ben, I thought you said they were engaged. Why is the word divorce here? Well, again, in that day, the word betrothalment or engagement was such a strong commitment that it was considered a divorce to break off an engagement.

[15 : 20] So this is a significant thing that was going to be done. And Joseph knew he had to do this as a just man, but his desire was to do it quietly, to not bring shame to Mary, to not hurt her.

And we can see here, not only was he a just man, but he was a loving and merciful and tender man. We also see that, that part of his character reflected when we look at how he handled Jesus' coming.

Flip over now with me to Luke chapter 2. And we'll see in Luke chapter 2 another aspect of the character of Joseph. So we see that he was just, but he was also loving, kind, and tender.

If you look at Luke chapter 2, look with me at verse 33, and in several places throughout this passage, 33 being a specific one, Luke says, let me turn there.

Luke 2, 33. It says, And his father and mother marveled at what was said about him. You might be thinking, what is so significant about this verse?

[16 : 27] Look at the word there. And his father. Now remember, was Joseph really Jesus' father? No. But this passage, along with other places where we see later on in the chapter, reference to Joseph as Jesus' father show that he was someone who was tender and compassionate.

He didn't treat Jesus as an outsider in his family, but he brought him in as his very own son. And I think that tells us a lot about the character of Joseph. He could have been really bitter.

God, you messed up my plans. This was not the way I would have made this. But instead, not only did he embrace God's plan, but he showed love and kindness in accepting Jesus in.

We also see, flip back to Matthew again, Matthew 1, that Joseph was obedient to God's command. So Joseph finds out that Mary's pregnant. All of his dreams, as he knows, that are dashed to the ground.

He's trying to figure out what's the best way to manage this somewhat of a catastrophe, this social mess that he's got on his hands. And he's pondering, how do I do this? But man, I don't want to hurt Mary in the process.

[17 : 31] And we see in verse 24, or excuse me, in verse 20, while he was considering 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 what 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.

And then we go on further and see in verse 24, when Joseph woke from his sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him. He took his wife. So here, Joseph didn't challenge God's command.

He didn't question it. He accepted it, and he obeyed. And we understand that Joseph not only was a just man, not only was he a loving and kind man, but he was one who was willing to obey God's command.

You can also understand that when we look at how, and we can flip back to Luke again. Sorry, I'm back and forth here. Look back to Luke chapter 2, we see not only did he obey God in not divorcing Mary and marrying her, but he also obeyed in verse 21 of Luke chapter 2.

[18 : 43] It tells us that at the end of eight days, when he, Jesus, was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. Now, it would have been much more typical in those days for the firstborn son to take up the name of the father.

And there certainly, we see that in John the Baptist's birth. Everybody assumed, well, what do you want to name him? Do you want to name him after yourself, Zachariah? And he said, no, his name is John. Zachariah, Jesus' cousin, or Mary's cousin's husband, obeyed God.

And in the same way, we see Joseph's willingness to obey God's command and name the baby Jesus. And Jesus, in the original Hebrew, means the Lord saves. And so not only was he obeying the angel, but he was by faith looking forward to how his adopted son, how this baby, was going to save the world.

Stay in Luke chapter 2 with me, and I want to look at verses 21 through 24 and reflect on this idea how not only was Joseph obedient, but he was faithful to the law.

Look with me at verses 21 through 24. There we see in 21, at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised. So they obeyed the law of Moses by having Jesus circumcised on the eighth day, according to the law.

[20 : 03] Then in verse 22, when the time came for their purification, according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. As it's written in the law of the Lord, every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord and to offer a sacrifice, according to what is said in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons.

So here we see the first sacrifice they offered was a sacrifice for purification. Now, again, 21st century Americans, that doesn't mean a lot to us. Probably not anybody here, or many, if any, have ever gone to the temple to offer a sacrifice for purification.

But the law of Moses instructed that women, after having a child, should go and offer up a sacrifice because of their impurity. Now, in this case, it's interesting because the language here says they offered up a sacrifice for their purification.

So wait, shouldn't this just be for her, just for Mary? What was Joseph's role in this? Why was he a part of this purification? Well, let's think back to where Jesus was born. Remember, this was in a stable in Bethlehem.

There wasn't a nice, warm hospital for baby Jesus to be born, and he was born out in a barn with all the animals. So very likely, Joseph was a very active participant in that birth and in helping.

[21 : 22] And any of you who have kids know that's not a clean process, right? Having a baby is a beautiful thing, but it's a unique experience.

And so here we see also Joseph recognized that he was also ceremonially unclean. And so not only did Mary honor the law, but even Joseph went above and beyond to honor the law of God in this context.

We also see that there was an additional sacrifice where they offered Jesus up to God's service. This really reflects back to a tradition started in Israel with Samuel when he came as a baby.

If you remember the story, Hannah was barren, had no kids, and she said, God, if you give me a child, I will offer him up to serve you. And God answered her prayer, gave her a child, and Samuel became one of the great priests and judges over Israel.

And so in the same way, Mary and Joseph came to offer Jesus up to God for service to him, recognizing that he wasn't really theirs. He was there.

[22 : 23] He was, Jesus was God's. And so they offered him up in the same way. It's so important for us to recognize that Mary and Joseph keeping the Mosaic Law shows that even as a baby, Jesus was brought up in a way that honored God and that was sinless.

No one could say to him in his older age, well, no, you weren't circumcised, or you didn't follow as a child the things of the law. God's sovereignty in choosing the timing of Christ's birth and choosing the parents that would be there in his birth meant that Mary and Joseph were going to be those people that God planned before the creation of time for that purpose.

Now I want to look briefly at Mary, the mother of Jesus. A lot can be said about her, but I want to look just briefly at a few things. If you look with me back a page or so, a chapter in Luke, let's look at Luke 1.38.

And we see here that Mary was willing and obedient to God. So here an angel appears to her and kind of outlines what's about to happen. Hey Mary, you're about to have a baby. And Mary's like, um, you know, I don't know a ton about this, but I need a husband to make that happen and that's not happening yet.

And the angel says, don't worry, it's going to be the baby you're going to have is of the Holy Spirit. And then tells Mary this great news about how he will be Emmanuel, God with us.

[23 : 45] And then we see after all this explanation, Mary says in verse 38, she says, behold, I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be according to me, let it be to me according to your word.

Mary was willing and obedient to do whatever God asked her to do. Even if that cost her own honor, even if that was inconvenient. And even more so, think about what this meant.

Imagine her hearing this news thinking like, how am I going to break this to Joseph? This is going to be an interesting one. She knew that whatever God asked her to do, she was going to be willing to submit to it and that he would take care of the rest.

And we see that. The birth story doesn't end with Mary being a single mother raising Jesus. It ends with God working both in Joseph and Mary together as his parents. We also see that Mary was faithful.

And this was really interesting as I was thinking about this passage and studying this. You know, we often, we see this picture of Mary on a donkey riding up to Bethlehem and they're going there to register for the census. But the reality is most scholars indicate that there actually wouldn't have been any need for Mary to go to Bethlehem to register.

[24 : 54] That was Joseph's hometown, not hers, and they weren't yet married at this point. And so we think about this. Now, any of you moms out there know, imagine your 39th or 40th week of pregnancy.

We just recently experienced that this summer with Naomi, our daughter, who's four months old. And my wife is amazing. But I would not have asked her to go on a long journey in that 39th or 40th week riding on a horse or walking miles and miles and who knows what kind of conditions, right? But this was something Joseph was required to do by law. And because of his desire to be there for the birth, and I believe because of Mary's desire to be with her husband and to submit to her husband, she came along, even though it wasn't comfortable for her or convenient.

As a matter of fact, it meant her giving birth to her baby away from family, away from the comforts of home. And so we can see that Mary was someone who was really faithful. Lastly, we see that Mary was thoughtful.

She's not a reactionary kind of person. If you look at Luke 2, verse 19, right at the tail end of the shepherds have just come now, the angels have proclaimed the good news to them, they've come rushing in and they're like, whoa, look, it's the baby Jesus, just like the angels told us.

[26 : 08] This is amazing. And they're praising God and they're glorifying God. And Mary could have reacted like, shh, guys, keep it down. The baby's sleeping over here, okay? But instead, the passage tells us as we look at chapter 2, verse 19, that Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her hearts.

And the shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen. So we recognize that Mary was someone who was watching what was happening. She was savoring these moments in her heart of seeing God at work and looking forward to ultimately what he was going to do.

As we close this section, I want to think a little bit about parenting in general and some principles we can see here from Mary and Joseph. And one of those that I want to look at is the fact that faithfulness, not success, was what drove Mary and Joseph as parents.

Think about it. How many of you would feel like you were successful parents if you said, yep, my kid grew up and he was tried as a criminal and executed. Probably not many or if any of us would say that's what our aspiration would be for our child.

I know it's not an aspiration I would have for one of my children. Mary and Joseph got a taste of what Jesus' life was going to be like. We'll see that later as we look at the proclamation that happened in the temple.

[27 : 27] But ultimately, their pursuit was not what they measured success as. They understood that faithfulness to God was the most important thing. So parents here today, I want to encourage you, I want to encourage myself.

How can we learn from Mary and Joseph? Because we think about all the things that God is going to sovereignly bring into our life, things that are far beyond our control, definitely outside of our plans.

How are we going to show faithfulness to God? I think that is one of the strongest things that was marked by Mary and Joseph is faithfulness. And in the same way, my hope, my prayer is that the Spirit would work in our hearts that we might be people who are faithful as we follow God wherever He calls us.

So turn with me again if you will, back to the book of Luke, chapter 2. We're going to be here for the rest of the time so you don't have to be flipping around quite so much.

I want to take a look at this idea as we look at prophetic fulfillment. You could be thinking as we go into this section, boy, you're really going to stay in Luke, chapter 2 and talk about prophetic fulfillment? Aren't you going to be in like Isaiah, Jeremiah, all over the Old Testament?

[28 : 37] And while I could do that, this morning what I really want to do is just focus in on how God fulfilled His Word specifically to one of His faithful servants that we see introduced here in Luke, chapter 2.

So look at Luke, chapter 2, beginning in verse 25. Here we see this scenario. Mary and Joseph have come to the temple. They've brought the baby Jesus up. They've offered all these sacrifices in keeping with the law and everything that they have been commanded to do.

And then after offering these sacrifices, there's this new character that enters the scene, a man named Simeon. And as you read verse 25, you'll see it says, now there's a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and he's described two ways.

This man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. That last part is pretty significant. Oftentimes, we think about the fact that the Holy Spirit as believers has come to indwell in us.

And so, we take for granted the very real presence we have of the Spirit. But before the day of Pentecost came, the Spirit's presence was much more, it was not permanent among those who were followers of God in those days.

[29 : 47] So, for this description to be Simeon whose, the Holy Spirit was upon, was a really significant descriptive for Simeon. And so, we see here that Simeon comes into the temple.

He was a righteous man. This means that his life he had spent seeking to honor God. Now, interestingly enough, out of all the credentials we're given about Simeon, we're not given his age or we're not given his job.

We don't know if he was a priest. We don't really know what he did, but we know who he was. We understand his character. And we see to Simeon here, as you read on in verse 26, we see, it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

Now, remember, the first prophecy about a Messiah coming had been over 400 years earlier to Isaiah. So, this was a really significant thing that God had revealed to Simeon that in his day, before Simeon died, he was going to get to see God's salvation for Israel.

And so, Simeon, this righteous and devout man, was waiting. Now, we know, Paul tells us that not all those who were of Israel were the true Israel. There was a remnant of faithful people within Israel.

[31 : 00] Not just those who outwardly went to the temple or called themselves the Jews, but those who were faithful to God. And likely, Simeon is someone who is representative of the remnant of

