

Don't Miss Christmas

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[0 : 00] Well, please open your Bibles to Luke chapter 2. Well, it's not too often that we get to celebrate Christmas on a Sunday.

Couldn't think of a more appropriate time for it. But I'm told that the next time that Christmas will fall on a Sunday will be 11 years from now.

If you've been with us this past year, you know we've been studying this remarkable and most fascinating life of Jesus Christ. And one of the things that I always find that is the most fascinating as we get into the study is how many people, even though they understand the text, they hear the words, they hear these first source witnessing accounts of Jesus, they kind of still get Jesus wrong. In fact, I'm sure one could argue that Jesus is probably the most misunderstood individual in the history of the world. Now, don't get me wrong.

Everyone has an opinion of Jesus. But not everyone truly understands Jesus.

[1 : 25] And if we were to draw a common theme from today going back 2,000 years ago, I think we could argue that this is kind of the story of Jesus. Today, many people, even professing believers, have these weird ideas of who Jesus is.

Some believe that Jesus is almost like a genie in a bottle whom we come to when we have a request, right? Christmas time, am I going to get what I want to get?

Others think that Jesus is some type of insurance salesman, that when time gets tough and things are going to burn down, or should I say flood out, Jesus provides them a get out of hell card.

And for others, Jesus is meant to be the best friend that I need when I'm feeling down and I need encouragement. Some today, when asked to describe Jesus, would say that he is a prophet.

He is a moral man, one who taught us the way, the greatest teacher who ever lived. And what's funny is that Jesus was misunderstood just as much today as he did when he walked around Galilee.

[2 : 50] 2,000 years ago, when Jesus Christ asked people whom did they think that he was, they thought he was a prophet sent to deliver them from the tyranny of Rome, much like Moses did for the Egyptians.

With such evidence that we have before us in the Gospels, we have to naturally ask the question, how could so many people over thousands of years and thousands of testimonies still get Jesus wrong?

Well, I think just this morning we will look at the time of his birth, and it will still show us that even at this precious time, the fulfillment of prophecy, people still got Jesus wrong.

And in so doing, reveal to us ways that we can get Jesus wrong as well. Well, I've got a few skill testing questions to see what you know about Christmas.

What day was Jesus born on? Come on, someone say it, please. What? Christmas Day, that is such a cop-out.

[4 : 07] Right? You know, December 25th, right? That's what, well, the one fact we do know is that Jesus was not actually born on December 25th.

Did you know that? Out of all the dates we do know, that wasn't it. Some believe that he was actually born on August 28th, or possibly March 28th, and some have speculated perhaps it was November 18th, or even September 11th.

In fact, we're not sure. But do you know why we came up with? December 25th? Let me instruct you on why it was December 25th.

Well, it happened in, in the 4th century, there was a man who was known as the Bishop of Jerusalem, wanted to know what date Christmas Day was.

So he wrote a letter to the Bishop of Rome to ask him to figure it out. So the Bishop of Rome picked December 25th. Well, the reason was because during that time there was a great pagan holiday which ran from December 17th to December 25th.

[5 : 19] And he felt that things were getting out of hand and were too secular. So he figured that if we just added this Christian holiday at the end of that pagan holiday, we would somehow sanctify that celebration.

Now let me tell you and ask you about some of the Christian traditions that we have. Does anybody know where the Christmas wreath came from?

The wreath that we usually hang around the door? Well, it actually came from a pagan festival where people would actually adorn their home with evergreens, hanging trinkets on them, lighting candles, and sometimes it involved mistletoes and exchanging gifts.

Well, that brings up the whole idea of when did Christmas giving first happen? Well, it happened around that same time, but what they would actually give to one another were little idols of other false gods.

So that's kind of where that whole gift giving. What about mistletoe? Well, that came from the time of the Druids in England. They would gather these up, cut them up with sickles, and they would gather them together, have a celebration, sacrifice an ox, and then pass the mistletoe around while it was in your home.

[6 : 40] If someone walked under it, you would embrace him. How about the manger scene? Well, that was an invention in 13th century, and it was popularized by a man who was known as St. Francis.

How about our Christmas tree? How far back do you think that goes? Well, that actually happened, first came about in the 16th century, when Luther picked up on the idea of a Christmas tree and brought it into the house and placed candles on it to symbolize the sparkling stars in the sky over the forest.

And, of course, the greatest tradition of all, where did Santa Claus come from? Well, to this we have the Dutch to thank. Right?

The Dutch brought him into action by a man by the name of St. Nicholas. He was the white-bearded bishop of Asia Minor who was so popular that they believed that he came back every December 6th and would ride through the streets on a white horse, and all the Dutch kids would put their wooden shoes out on the porch.

And as he came along, he'd put goodies in the shoes for the good kids, and being the practical Dutch that he was, gave a stick to the parents for the bad kids. And the usual Christmas caroling started off in the 14th century, but it also included jesters, musicians, and those who went around with masks on their face.

[8 : 08] And, of course, the most profitable tradition in all of Christmas, Christmas cards. First showed up in London, England, by a man by the name of Sir Henry Cole in 1846, who was the owner of an art shop.

Needless to say, he made a lot of money. What's kind of interesting is that there's really nothing remotely Christian or having really anything to do with the birth of Christ in all these traditions. They're just influences found in a sea of paganism, which makes us ask the question, sometimes it's no wonder why we miss out on the true Christmas.

It's kind of the norm. Well, I want to show you this morning that not only is it hard for us to understand Christmas, but even at the very beginning, it was difficult as well.

So let's take a look at the story in Luke chapter 2. Luke chapter 2. Let me present to you the first person who missed out on Christmas. He's known as the innkeeper, who ran a very unprofitable line of inns when it later came to be known that he turned away Jesus on Christmas Day.

[9 : 41] In those days, a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. There was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria, and all went to be registered, each to his own town.

Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. 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.

Well, the scene is, as tradition would have it, because of the census, this small town outside of Jerusalem was perhaps having a rush on rooms.

Now, remember, back in those times, there was no Motel 6, Holiday Inn, or executive suites. What happened was people would usually offer rooms to their guests or families of friends as they came into town.

[10:51] And they would have created some sort of structure on their property for people coming into the town to recognize that there could be a room to rent. Now, we need to know and understand that the Jewish people are a hospitable people.

Hospitable people. It's still early, Murray. The word usage here almost means a place where you could loose yourself. It was a place where you could be comfortable.

You know you've got a special friend who comes over and has dinner and kind of undoes that belt at the end of the meal, right? Ah, I'm home. And it was this idea that you could come, you could relax, you could be yourself.

It was known to be a safe place to come and be. However, on this night, there was no room. So with the baby on away, Mary and Joseph were forced to take shelter in an eating trough for animals.

Now, what is remarkable here is this young, very young, very pregnant woman shows up at the door. Who could turn her away?

[12:06] You see, Middle Eastern people are known to be caring, hospitable people. They're civilized, intelligent, and educated about human life and are especially defensive about their own people.

But from what we read, the innkeeper didn't even manage to place a call to a midwife or even offer a servant to help. In fact, the words of Scripture tell us that Mary delivered the baby Jesus on her own.

Verse 7, Notice it doesn't even say where Joseph was. Now, I don't know what happened to him. Perhaps he went looking for food, perhaps looking for a midwife, or perhaps he fainted. We do not know. Not sure how much help he could have been, as I'm sure Mary probably would have had more experience with such things.

The text doesn't say, it's interesting, that the innkeeper ignored them because he was mean.

[13:09] He didn't like pregnant teens. So why on earth would they leave this woman alone? Why not ask someone to leave, to make room? We're not sure why the innkeeper acted this way.

But I'm betting that he was busy or perhaps too preoccupied to offer the level of comfort that he normally would have during this time of season. He was most likely busy with other guests.

He wasn't unloving. The text doesn't say he was hostile. The text doesn't say he was unsympathetic. It doesn't say he wasn't indifferent. But he could have perhaps been plainly busy. Does this sound familiar? To how sometimes people treat Christmas just too busy. We can get that way too.

The fact of the matter is, December is the busiest time of month. It's easy to forget why we've come to worship the newborn king. You know who else missed Christmas?

[14:21] Herod the Great. This guy is different. Herod was not ignorant of Christmas. He was what is known to be a well-informed man.

Please look at Matthew chapter 2. And I'll read you a little bit of the story. Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem saying, where is he who was born king of the Jews?

For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him. When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled and all Jerusalem with him.

And assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him in Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet.

And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah. For from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel. Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared.

[15:37] And he sent them to Bethlehem saying, go and search diligently for the child. When you have found him, bring me word that I too may come and worship him.

Now the man we read about here is known as Herod the Great. He is not the same Herod that meets Jesus in his adult life.

This is the father. So here we meet a man that is pretending to want to worship Jesus. Now we need to know from history that Herod is actually a very fearful man.

Herod was in the position of the ruler of Judea at that time because his father had favorable friends in Rome. That Herod actually wasn't a Jew, but he's an Edomite, which is a group of people found south of Jerusalem or of Israel.

And what was really interesting is that he passed himself off as a Jew. He wanted to accept all things Jewish. He wanted the people to believe that he was Jewish.

[16:51] So one of the things, if he wanted to keep this kingdom and the riches that it brought in, he needed to continue to play nice with Rome so that they would eventually allow him to continue ruling.

And Herod, although known to be cruel later in life, also played nice with the Jews to a point. Because what would happen during those times, if the Jews got too rowdy and couldn't control the populace, Rome would send an army, replace the ruler, and put someone else.

That's why when we read later on with Jesus as an adult, we meet this man Pilate, because what happened is, Herod put his other son in that position.

That son was so cruel that all of Israel rose up against him that Rome chucked him out and put in a governor. All right? That's kind of how things worked back then.

But Herod was also known as a political madman. He feared greatly that his throne would be taken away from him. He was known to deal ruthlessly with his enemies, and if there was a rebellion, he stamped it out right away.

[18:04] He was actually afraid of his brother, because his brother had married someone who had a more stronger lineage than he did, and what did he do? Had him killed. He had two sons that he believed that were becoming too strong and powerful.

What did he do? He killed them as well. So so cruel was this man that even in his last days, he arranged that upon his death, a bunch of Jews would be killed, so there would be an appropriate amount of sadness in the land for him.

That's how this man thought. So when we're talking crazy, we're talking crazy with a capital C here, right? But here he finds out that a child is born the king of the Jews.

Now he's experiencing real fear. Verse 9, After listening to the king, the wise men, they went on their way, and behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was.

When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary, his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him.

[19:24] Then opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense, and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

Now when they departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, said, Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child to destroy him.

And Joseph rose and took the child and his mother by night, and departed to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet.

Out of Egypt I called my son. Verse 16, Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem, in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men.

Why did Herod miss Christmas? We might think because of fear or jealousy. There isn't anyone like Herod around here today, is there?

[20:45] What Herod feared, in which many people fear, is that Jesus will take their throne. The fact of the matter is, we all love the baby Jesus.

But the adult Jesus? Now that's kind of hardcore. We've just been studying for the last year, the words of Jesus, about denying oneself, taking up the cross, following him.

The fact is, many Herods fear losing their self-determination. People fear giving up their own plans, their own priorities.

If I accept Jesus, who Jesus claims to be, my values must change. My morals must change. My life must change. It's so easy to love the idea of Jesus, but somehow it's a little bit different to love the reality of Jesus.

[21 : 50] So these type of people, they tend to protect themselves any way they can. What about you? Have you said no to Jesus in your life because you want to call the shots?

You want to follow your moralism to make you feel good? Listen, we live in an age of what is called rugged individualism.

Right? And what's kind of funny, the way of the world today is this whole idea of environmentalism, which everybody's on that bandwagon, so to speak, to make themselves feel good.

I stand for something. I stand for conserving this world. It's not really about loving others, caring for others. We've actually now gotten back to, once again, worshipping the created rather than worshipping the creator.

Because the created doesn't talk, does it? Doesn't stand. It doesn't listen. So it allows me to make up my own system of beliefs.

[23 : 02] The creator, on the other hand, does speak, does listen, and he does act. But sometimes some people think it's easier to be Herod, to be your own Lord, to be the master of your own fate.

I call that type of love, life tragic, because the kingdom of God offers so much more. You know who else missed Christmas?

And this is one of the people that the people sometimes really miss. It's the religious rulers. It's the people that Herod goes to consult with to find out, because these, think about this whole story.

These foreigners have marched into town. They're following this star. They want to know about the king. So Herod wants to know more about this. So he calls in his Jewish experts, the Pharisees and scribes, tell me about Jesus.

These guys know the word so well, they actually describe for him the town where this Messiah would come from. Now, to Herod's credit, he actually believed it.

[24 : 22] But for Herod, it would be a usurper king. But to the people he went and consulted, this was to be their king. He was the one that was supposed to come and worship.

In fact, the text, they even quote Micah 6. And what did they do about it? Nothing. Nothing.

Listen, say what you want about Herod, but he was at least committed to the information that it could be true. There's no record that these men went to see their king.

The king that they've been following all the religious rules of going to the temple season after season after season, celebrating all the festivals season after season after season.

What an empty faith. These people are to be pitied. They were supposed to be waiting on the king, their deliverer, their hope.

[25 : 36] Why did these people miss Christmas? It's because of indifference. They were comfortable with life. They were comfortable with their position.

They had enough money to eat, sleep, possibly earn, own their own home. What more needs could I have? Why rock the boat?

The Bible teaches us that they wanted to keep their status more than anything else. Ultimately, they didn't care.

They knew the prophecy. Having a Messiah was no big deal because they were already made self-righteous. They kept the law.

They believed in their minds they were blameless. so proud of they, of their own position that they were indifferent to the news of Christ or the plight of others.

[26 : 41] They weren't sick, so why would the sick call a doctor? So proud of their works, they would eventually shed the king's blood because he demonstrated that they were not blameless.

See, people miss the true meaning of Christmas because they do not believe they have a need for a savior. You see, a lot of times people accuse Christianity of being a crutch.

I argue that it's not a crutch, but Jesus is the whole hospital. Now, this last group is perhaps the group that should be pitied the most, but these were the people that grew up with Jesus.

These are the people that knew Jesus from the moment he was a child. If you remember the text, Jesus goes into Egypt and he comes out of Egypt and he returns to the city of Nazareth where Joseph was born around his family, his cousins, uncles, and aunts, and all that group of people that lived there.

They would have seen how Jesus lived. The text tells us that Jesus grew up in Nazareth. He grew and became strong, filled with wisdom and favor of God was upon him.

[28 : 03] Jesus grew up in this city. He was known as this city. They knew he was the kid without sin. This was the kid who always honored his parents.

The text in Matthew tells us and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. Jesus enrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed. Is that not what we want our kings to do?

To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. And then Jesus rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant in his home synagogue and sat down.

And the eyes of all the synagogue were fixed on him. This was now the man, Jesus, who grew up in this city whose whole life was known.

[29 : 17] And he simply said, Today the scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing. And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth.

And then they said, Is not this Joseph's son? Jesus told them he was the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy.

Verse 29 tells us, And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built so that they could throw him down the cliff.

Why? Why did these people miss Jesus? Familiarity. Familiarity. There are some people who miss Jesus because they are ignorant.

Some people miss Jesus because of jealousy and fear for their own lives. Others miss Jesus because of prideful indifference. And others, those that knew him since birth, came to see Jesus as not being so special.

[30 : 34] All too often we see this in those children who are raised in Christian homes by parents who live and honor Jesus Christ with their lives and their words and love their children as Christ would call them to.

They know the stories of the Bible. They know the values. But for one reason or another they get turned off God and turned on to self.

It's a story that we hear too many times. In the gospel of Mark 6.6 when this event happened Jesus marveled at their disbelief.

The sad reality is familiarity with the truths of Jesus Christ can breed a very stony heart. So my question are you understanding Christmas?

Are you ignorant? Are you fearful? Are you prideful? Are you indifferent? Perhaps you're too familiar.

[31 : 53] My hope and prayer is that you continue to study the life of Jesus Christ and perhaps understand that the best place for Christmas this season will be on your knees receiving the greatest gift of all and that is the salvation of Jesus Christ which he freely offers you.

Let's pray. Dear Lord, Heavenly Father, even though sometimes we hear a myriad of stories of why people reject you, even knowing the stories of Christmas, even knowing the stories of Easter, the reasons for these myriad of stories are really not all that indifferent.

Usually there's a pride, there's a desire to go one's way, there's a desire to value your thoughts, your mind, your values over everyone others.

but we also know and understand if we're honest with ourselves, if we open up our eyes, we just see this majesty around us. It's very difficult for us to miss this in Squamish, to see the beauty before us.

Even in the flooding and the damage that happens sometimes, there is still exquisite beauty that only could have been made by a master artist.

[33 : 17] the complexity of this life that we have is incredible. From the ways our eyes function and the water works are all just not products of evolution, but products of a God who came and made things good.

Father, to deny all these things is to deny a truth that exists before each and every one. So for on this type of season, we pray that, Lord, you would open up spiritually blind eyes, that you would create a need and desire to know you, that you would pursue such souls in kindness and mercy.

May you continue to bring faith to them, love to God. Whether it be through family or friends, because there is a time where the heart becomes stone and it becomes immovable. And sadly, such a stone is placed in the eternity of hell. God, God, we pray for mercy. We pray for mercy for our own lives.

Father, we come on this Christmas morning, the greatest time of thanksgiving, to ask for your forgiveness, to confess our sins to one another, a desire to grow in the grace of your love.

[34 : 54] Father, we just rejoice at just the gifts that we've given to our loved ones, how much more you desire to give to us.

That the gift you offer is so great that no man can pay. Thank you, Jesus, for paying that price. We ask these things in all your gracious and heavenly name.

Amen.