



# CHRISTMAS 2021

I am sure most of you are thinking about plans for Christmas so these notes will be shorter than usual. They are written so that people can use them individually or in your group settings. Hopefully they will help us all have some time to reflect on the events of the first Christmas. These notes should keep you going through December and on into the New Year. They are all taken from the gospel accounts and reflect the different approaches the gospel writers took to explain the birth of Jesus.

## The Word became Flesh      John 1:1 to 18 (December 12<sup>th</sup>)

John does not record any of the events in Bethlehem. He is interested in the bigger picture. His repeat of the phrase 'in the beginning' reveals his emphasis. He is saying 'the Word' existed before the **creation** of the world. In Genesis 1 God breathes life into the people he has made in his image. John's gospel will record the **re-creation** of women and men corrupted by sin resulting from the fall.

Read the first two verses of John. What does it mean when John says the Word was WITH God, it WAS God and it was IN THE BEGINNING with God?  
What does this tell us about the person of Jesus?

John wants you to read the whole of his gospel in the light of these two verses. The person in his account is both God and man and the Word (Gk. Logos) that both spoke creation into being and speaks of salvation to his image-made children. His word spoke creation into being 'from nothing' (Gk. ex nihilo) and now, in human form, he speaks life into the rebellious creatures that we are.

God's **Word** in creation that was so powerful in what it made. is the same **Word** that Jesus speaks in our Bible.  
Should this change our view of the words that are written in our Bible today?  
How powerful is God's word?

The entry of God's word into the world is described as 'light in the darkness' (v5 & 9). The darkness is said to be hostile to this light (v5 & 10f) but can never 'overcome' it or 'put it out'.

If God's true word can never be quenched, how can we make sure it is seen so that 'all men might believe' (v7)?  
Where do you see that the light of God's word is needed in our 21<sup>st</sup> century world?

The climactic verse of this passage is verse 14 – 'the WORD became flesh and made his dwelling with us'. John says we see the glory of the Father walking on planet earth who is 'full of grace and truth'

You may like to reflect on this. The pre-creation God of the universe walks around our world and brings life and hope to 'as many who believed in his name'. He gave them 'the right to be children of God' (v12). Be thankful that God's son entering the world was the means of our salvation.

## Born in Bethlehem      Luke 2:1 to 21 (December 25<sup>th</sup>)

Luke was writing for the whole world. He believed the gospel of Jesus was for every man and woman. If anybody was asked who was the most important person in the world it would be Caesar. So, Luke begins his birth account with a mention of Caesar being the current emperor and completes the historical setting with the governor of Syria. This fixes the birth of Jesus around BC 6 to 4.

How important is it for the birth of Jesus to be fixed in history?

Luke gives us even more background with the census. These were common in the Roman empire so they could assess your taxes. The Romans allowed everyone to go to their ancestral home – Joseph was in the line of David. The new King arrives to start the Kingdom of God and is born in the city of the greatest king of Israel. Yet the actual setting in Bethlehem is very humble. No palace – not even a room for the Kings of Kings

Why is a humble birth important?

The world into which Luke was writing had a very powerful leader – huge contrast to Caesar

What does this birth account say about Jesus' purpose?

Luke's purpose in writing his gospel is to convince the known world that Jesus is the King. You may have thought that, if he was writing to convince the great leaders of the world that they should follow Jesus, he would not have listed the first respondents as a bunch of local shepherds.

Why did Luke use the story of the shepherds to convince the world that Jesus had come for them?

Why were the shepherds terrified?

After calming their fears, the angels tell the shepherds the reason for the birth (v11). They also get clear directions to look for a baby in a manger.

Why was it important for them to see the baby?

It must have been quite a night for men who were used to spending their nights guarding sheep. But they clearly couldn't sleep because they spread the word about what they had witnessed. When God is at work people are often amazed.

There is no record of the starting of a movement in Bethlehem. Did the amazement wear off?

Should the shepherd's passion to spread the word rub off on us?

Spend some time thinking about Mary's thoughts after she had given birth. (v19)

### **Where is the King? Matthew 2:1 to 12 (January 2<sup>nd</sup>)**

Just as it is surprising to find the shepherds in Luke's gospel so it is to find the wise men here in Matthew. Matthew was writing for a predominantly Jewish audience yet he records the coming of wise men from way beyond Judea. This points us to the fact that King Jesus is not just for the Jews – he was born in Judea but his purpose is to reach the whole of mankind. He was their longed-for Messiah but he was to be a blessing to the whole world (cf Genesis 12:1 f).

How do you think the Magi knew they were looking for the 'King of the Jews'?

The origin of 'Magi' is probably Persian (an ancient priestly group maybe following Zoroaster)

Many Jews did not return from exile in Babylon so the Magi could have met people who remained in Babylon

What persuaded them to make the long journey?

The Romans installed local figures to rule for them – Herod was not a Jew but was chosen to rule the province of Judea – he dies in BC4 which again fixes the birth of Jesus between BC 6 and 4. Many believe that the Magi arrived in Jerusalem as much as 2 years after the birth of Jesus.

It would seem that Herod knew of the star symbolism announcing the Messiah. But he knew he was not the rightful heir to David's kingdom. He was disturbed by this threat from the east?

But why was the whole of Jerusalem disturbed? (v3) 'Jerusalem' probably refers to the religious and political leadership of Judea.

You would have expected the leaders of Israel to celebrate the coming of their promised Messiah – why didn't they?

When the Magi saw the baby, it seems that all the political deviance of Herod was forgotten. The description of the star movement implies it was supernatural. Interpret the gifts as you will. It could be gold for kingship, incense for his deity and myrrh for his sacrificial death. Others would simply say that the gifts represent what eastern magi would bring to a king. It is unlikely they had an understanding of Jesus as son of God and sacrificial Messiah,

But the gifts give us reason to reflect that the baby of Bethlehem became the Jesus of Calvary and the empty tomb. Take time to reflect of God's amazing gift of his son for our salvation