

## “THE NEWS OF JESUS’ BIRTH”

Luke 2:8-18, 25-38; Matthew 2:8-18

The manner in which people get the news has taken many forms over the centuries. At one time travelers were one of the best sources of news of what was happening outside a person’s town or village. In Bible times oftentimes runners were used. Remember the story of the two runners who carried the news of Absalom’s defeat and death to David? In the book of Esther we read of swift messengers on horseback who were sent by King Xerxes to deliver his decrees to the 127 provinces of the Medo-Persian Empire.

When Paul was sent to Rome to appeal to Caesar concerning the charges brought against him by the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem, the Jews of Rome had not heard anything about it.

Today, news travels by newspapers, magazines, radio, television, the internet, Facebook, Twitter, and good old-fashioned gossip. There used to be stories about mountain people who still thought Harry Truman was the President. After World War II, occasionally groups of Japanese soldiers would come out of fortified caves and did not know the War had been over for several years. Even today, we can be surprised by news that everyone else has known for months. In the Christmas cards we received this year, we heard about two friends from years ago who died this year but we never heard about it until we read it in a card.

In the Christmas story as we usually hear it, it is usually not clear how long it took for the news of Jesus’ birth to make its way from Bethlehem to Jerusalem, to make its way from the lowliest people in Jewish society to the people in power in the Temple and government.

1.) Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger." (Luke 2:8-12 NKJV)

And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. (Luke 2:16-18 NKJV)

There was an angel who came to Zechariah to tell him that his wife was going to have a baby who would prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. There was an angel who came to Mary to tell her that she would be the one who would carry and give birth to the Savior whom God had promised. There was an angel who came to Joseph to tell him not to be afraid to marry his betrothed Mary because the baby she was carrying was conceived by the Holy Spirit. An angel told Joseph to take Mary and the Baby and go to Egypt to escape the wrath of Herod. An angel came to Joseph to tell him to return to Israel when King Herod died.

The only group of people to whom angels came with the news of Jesus' birth was the shepherds. They were also the first ones whom God told of Jesus' birth. They did not waste time in going to Bethlehem to see this wondrous Child about whose birth myriads of angels sang.

After the shepherds had seen the Holy Child, they spread the news all around. They told about the angel who told them about the Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths lying in a manger. They told about the angel choir. They told what they had seen when they found Joseph, Mary, and the Infant. Everyone who heard the report marveled at it, but no one thought it worth the time and effort to follow the shepherds back to the place where Joseph and Mary were out in the open field with Jesus lying in a manger.

2.) And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said: "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, According to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel." And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him. Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against "(yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem. (Luke 2:25-38 NKJV)

It would have been forty days after the birth of Jesus when Joseph and Mary with the Baby Jesus traveled from Bethlehem to the Temple in Jerusalem to fulfill the requirements of God's Law concerning the birth of Jesus. It was not necessary to go to the Temple for the rites of purification and dedication. However, Joseph must have reasoned that this Child whom the angel had said would save His people from their sins and who would be called Immanuel should receive these rites in the Temple of the Living God.

Simeon was a righteous and devout man, eagerly awaiting the Messiah. The Lord revealed to him by His Spirit that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah. The Spirit led him to the Temple on the day when Mary and Joseph came to present the baby Jesus to the Lord. Simeon took the infant in his arms and praised God.

Anna, a prophet was also in the Temple. She praised God and talked about the baby to everyone waiting for God to rescue Israel.

God gave the news of Jesus' birth to godly people by the ordinary means of grace, the Scriptures and prayer. His Spirit leads us in the same way.

3.) 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 has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him." When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, Are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.'" Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also." When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way... Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men. (Matthew 2:1-12,16 NKJV)

The word translated "wise men" is Magi. They studied the stars and were learned men. They were astrologers and read messages from the alignment of the stars. God used their foolish beliefs to send His message "The King of the Jews is born." God's made a wondrous star to lead them. When they arrived in Jerusalem, the capital of Judaea, they went to the royal residence and asked "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews."

Their question troubled King Herod and all Jerusalem with him. They knew that the message concerned the birth of the Messiah. He called for the chief priests and scribes and asked where the Christ was to be born. Neither Herod nor the Magi were believers. They reacted to the news of Jesus' birth in different ways, just as sinners react to the Gospel in different ways. When the Magi found the young Child Jesus, they worshiped Him. King Herod tried to find Him, and killed many children trying kill Jesus.