

THE ROAD TO BETHLEHEM

I. LIVING THE DREAM

Matthew 1:20: "But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost."

Genesis 37:19: "And they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer cometh."

What motivated Joseph to go through with the wedding to Mary? What motivated Joseph to take Mary on this ninety-mile trip from Nazareth of Galilee to Bethlehem? Joseph was not going to put her away. He was not going to Jerusalem on his own as a footloose and fancy-free bachelor with a group of his friends. No, Joseph was going to take full responsibility now to go on this long and prospectively dangerous journey, with Mary who was due any day now to deliver the child that Joseph was now believing with all his heart to be the Redeemer. Matthew 1:21: "And she shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His name JESUS: for He shall save His people from their sins." Even though they were not physically one flesh, Joseph was going to register them for the required Roman taxation as husband and wife.

As I see these three on the road to Jerusalem: Mary, the unborn Messiah and Joseph, my mind goes back over 1700 years to another dreamer by the same name and the same character: Joseph, the son of Jacob. I would say again, "...Behold, this dreamer cometh!" Let me share with you a biblical checklist of the kind of man God chose to lead such a journey. Micah 6:8: "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" I Corinthians 4:2: "Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful." Joseph fits the requirements:

- A. Joseph does right, no matter what. "...What doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly..." (Micah 6:8a). "Then Joseph her husband, being a just man..." (Matthew 1:19a).
- B. Joseph is merciful under all circumstances. "...And to love mercy..." (Micah 6:8b). "...And not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily" (Matthew 1:19b).
- C. Joseph has such a consistent relationship with his Lord, that he does not misunderstand God's message when revealed to him. "...And to walk humbly with thy God" (Micah 6:8c). "But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a dream saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost...Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us" (Matthew 1:20, 23).
- D. Joseph was a faithful steward. "Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful" (I Corinthians 4:2). "Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS" (Matthew 1:24, 25). Joseph knew that this was not merely a road that led to Jerusalem. It was the road that led to God!

II. LOCATING THE PATHFINDER

Mark 1:1-3: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." Mark is believed to be the oldest of all four Gospels. So, the beginning of the Gospel is verifying the truth of Malachi 3:1; 4:5 and Isaiah 40:1-5, that John the Baptist would come like

Elijah to be the forerunner of our Lord in a six months head start. Luke 1:35-38; John 1:15, 23; Matthew 11:7-14.

III. THE SILENCE HAS ENDED

Micah 5:2: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting."

A little voice, i.e., the birthing cry of the Messiah, in the little town of Bethlehem has ended four hundred years of silence. Hebrews 1:1, 2a: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son..." John 1:17: "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." Galatians 3:24:

"Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith." The world in which Jesus was born was enveloped in darkness. The law had become the end all for the Jews and the philosophy of the Greco-Roman world had spoiled civilization. Colossians 2:8: "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ." The prophet prophesied in Haggai 2:7, "And I will shake all nations, and the Desire of All Nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts." This is a prophecy of the duality of our Lord's first coming and second coming. Christ's very presence in the earth causes quite a shake-up. He will shake up the idolatry, the materialism, the international slave trade, the abuse of women and children and out of control immorality. Down deep in the heart of all peoples of the earth is the desire for the better life, the life that sets captives free and the life that promises a paradise at the end of this brief sojourn. This is where the journey to Bethlehem is heading: to the One who answers every conceivable desire and longing of fallen mankind. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Desire of All Nations, the One that even the unconverted is needing, whether he or she acknowledges this truth. The Lord acknowledged the broken silence when He began His ministry in His hometown: Luke 4:16-20.

IV. THE MUSIC BEGINS

Psalms 137:4: "How shall we sing the LORD's song in a strange land?" Psalm 100:2, 4: "Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing." Psalm 100:4: "Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name."

When the children were carried away into captivity in Babylon, the heathen had heard about the beautiful and worshipful music of the Jews and requested to hear it. But alas, the Jewish people said they had left their song, their harps and (even more telling) their hearts back in the Promised Land. Luke 2:11: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." Luke 2:13: "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying." Although the Bible doesn't specifically say that the angels were singing, we would be hard pressed to imagine they were not, especially as we examine the worship of the Lord in music, which acknowledges the manifested presence of our Lord.

When Mary entered the presence of her cousin Elisabeth, John leaped for joy, while yet unborn. Then Elisabeth burst forth into praise, very much sounding like a psalm. When Elisabeth finished her song, it appears that Mary burst forth in what has been called the Magnificat, which is undeniably a psalm of praise. Remember, a psalm is basically a song. Going back to Luke 1:35: "And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy

thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." Observe the Greek definition of "shadow:" to envelop in a shadow, to overshadow - From a vaporous cloud that casts a shadow the word is transferred to a shining cloud surrounding and enveloping persons with brightness. Used of the Holy Spirit exerting creative energy upon the womb of the virgin Mary and impregnating it (a use of the word which seems to have been drawn from the familiar Old Testament idea of a cloud as symbolizing the immediate presence and power of God).

Compare this with the music that began in the dedication of the original Temple after the Lord manifested Himself: I Kings 8:11: "So that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of the LORD." See also II Chronicles 7:1-6.

That great mystery of praise with music always accompanies the manifestation of God's presence. The prince of preachers of America's Victorian era, Phillips Brooks had visited Bethlehem in 1865 and was so moved that the effect three years later was still working in his heart and so he wrote "O Little Town of Bethlehem." My favorite line from Pastor Brooks' composition is: "The hopes and fears of all the years are met in Thee tonight."

V. THE WONDER OF IT ALL

Luke 2:7-19. This is music appreciation at its best! We often think about beautiful music only appreciated by the sophisticated. But perhaps the most beautiful music ever heard in the earth came when the host of angels burst forth into song above the heads of hard-working shepherds. The Lord wants to place music into your soul if you have never received Christ as Lord and Savior. There is a story involving Ignacy Jan Paderewski that illustrates my point.

VI. THE STAR IS BORN

Matthew 2:1-11. Numbers 24:17B: "...there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel...." Some time later the wise men came to acknowledge that the King of all Kings has come to earth. The three gifts reflect who this Bright and Morning Star (Revelation 22:16) is and why He came: Gold: He is God. Frankincense: He is to be worshipped. Myrrh: He is God come to die for our sins.

VII. MAKE THE JOURNEY PERSONAL

John 1:39: "He saith unto them, Come and see...." These are the words Jesus spoke to two future disciples.

John 1:46: "And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see." These are the words one disciple named Phillip said to another potential disciple, Nathanael.

Isaiah 45:22: "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else."

Christianity doesn't work until it's personal. Allow me to share with you a beautiful story of a little Russian orphan named Misha, which illustrates how powerful making a journey to Bethlehem can really be.

-Pastor Pope-