

The Other Side
of
Christmas

*We see a wooden manger:
God saw a wooden Cross*

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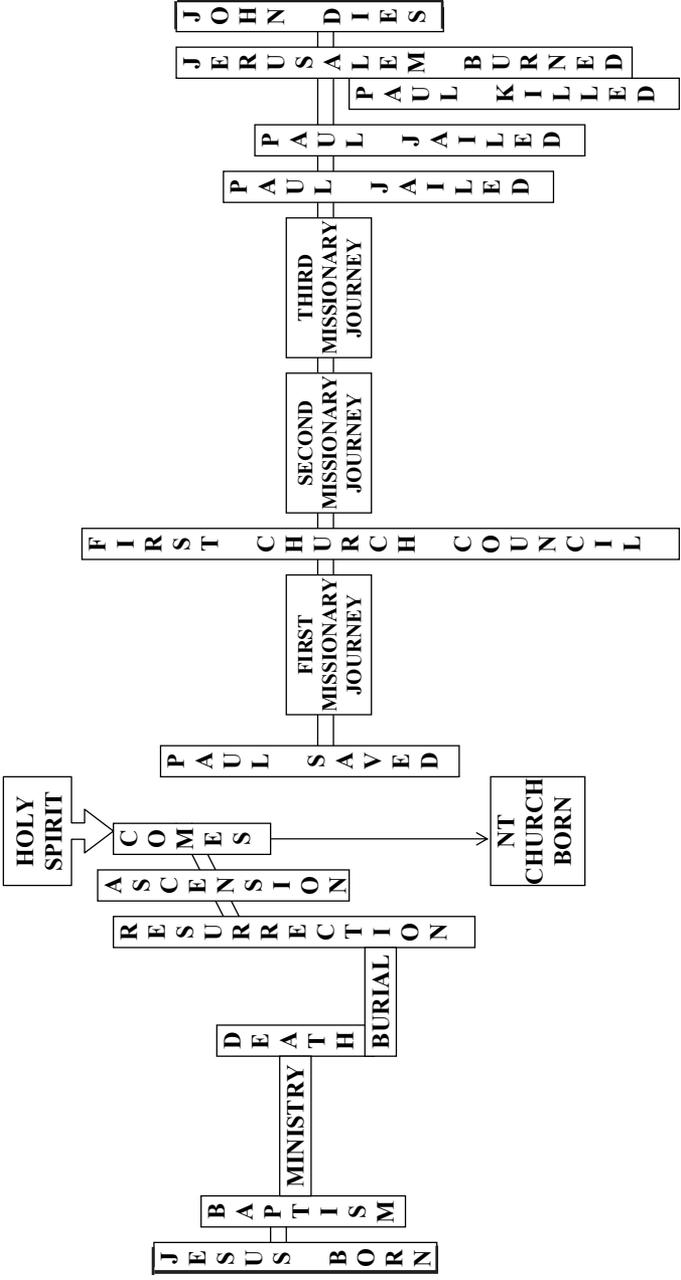
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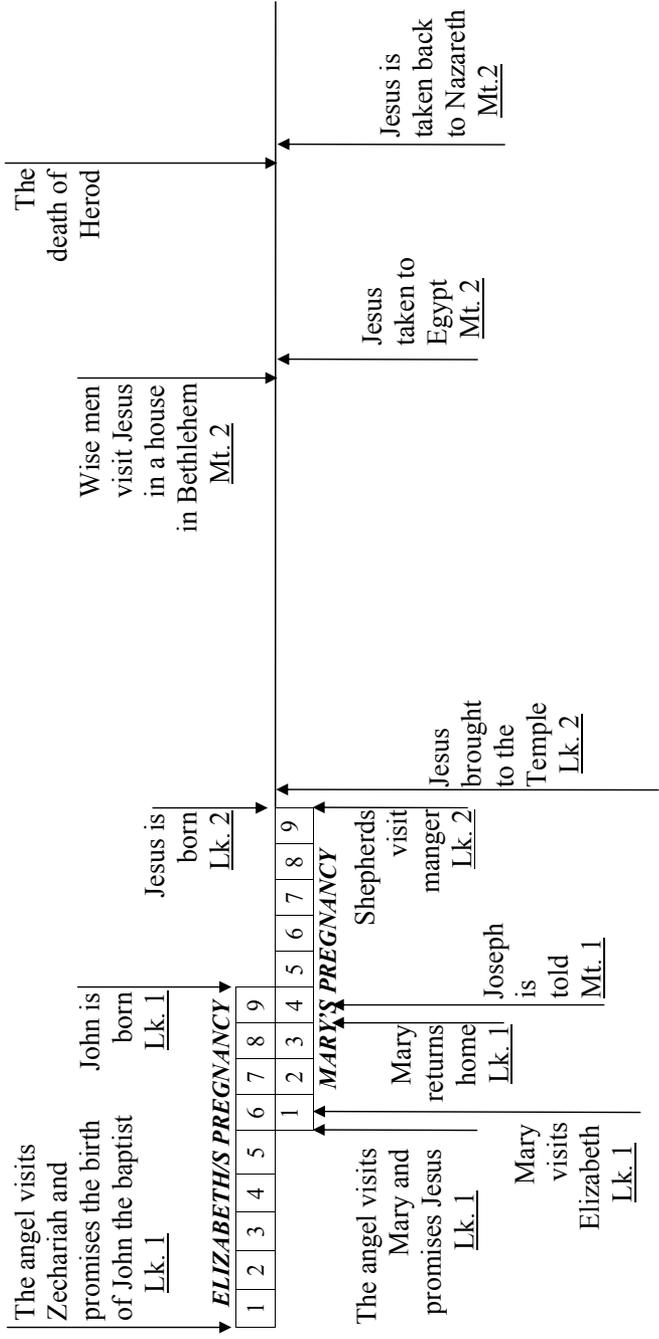
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THE NEW TESTAMENT AT A GLANCE



THE CHRISTMAS STORY OUTLINED



THE FOUR GOSPELS

INTERPRETED LIFE OF CHRIST

JOHN

*Written to **WORLD**
showing Christ as
GOD*

- Jesus' teaching emphasized
- 21 chapters
- More than half of this book is not found elsewhere
- No mention of Jesus' birth
- ½ of the book on Passion Week

HISTORICAL LIFE OF CHRIST

LUKE

*Written to **GREEKS**
showing Christ as
PERFECT MAN*

- Humanity of Jesus emphasized
- 24 chapters
- Much on Jesus' public life
- 2 chapters on Jesus' birth
- ¼ of the book on Passion Week

MARK

*Written to **ROMANS**
showing Christ as
SERVANT GOD*

- Brief and simple
- Vivid details
- 16 chapters
- Much on Jesus' public life
- No mention of Jesus' birth
- 1/3 of the book on Passion Week

MATTHEW

*Written to **JEW**s
showing Christ as
KING of Israel*

- Many quotations from OT
- 28 chapters
- Much on Jesus' rejection by the Jews
- 2 chapters on Jesus' birth
- 1/3 of the book on Passion Week

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called “SYNOPTIC” Gospels (meaning “to see together”) because they view Christ’s life from the same basic viewpoint.



BACKGROUND TO THE CHRISTMAS STORY

You are about to embark on a study of what is the very heart of God— His restoration of His people to Himself.

Keep in mind at all times the Gospel is not about us, it is about God. We are the recipients of that Gospel love. The Bible is God's message first and foremost about Him. He wants us to know Him— Who He is and what He has done, which enables us to love Him more. The Bible is not a book about people, places, and events. Rather, it is about what God has done THROUGH people, places, and events. God's philosophy of history is found in Psalm 110:1: The Lord says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool." Our Lord knows His plan for the entire future, and He will carry it out according to His will. Jesus came, not at the last minute, or as a whim, but at an appointed time— appointed and known by God from all eternity.

The Christmas story is all about God. The apostle Paul puts it this way: But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. (Gal.4.4-5)

The story doesn't begin with Jesus' birth; it begins in eternity past. Long before God created anything, He already knew what He would do for man in spite of man's personally offending God by his sin in the garden.

When this event occurred, God's plan was announced to man telling him there would be One Who would come in the future to restore the broken relationship between God and His people. (Gen.3.15)

Throughout the Old Testament, God revealed more and more about this plan. A plan well crafted, detail after detail was revealed to His people in such places as the Tabernacle and in the sacrifices. This began in the 15th century BC.

In the 9th century BC, God revealed to Isaiah more specific details about the coming Messiah. He told about the virgin birth (7.14) and the names He would be called (9.6).

In the 4th century BC God spoke for the last time. He told Malachi: Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to the fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction. (Mal.4.5-6)

The next word heard from God came through the angel Gabriel to the priest Zechariah.

LESSON ONE

I. Getting Started

In studying history, we usually ask about people, places, and dates. However, studying the Bible requires us to ask a different question:

What is God teaching us about Himself...

- ...as He worked through the angel Gabriel
- ...as He worked through Zechariah and Elizabeth
- ...as He worked through Mary and Joseph
- ...as He worked through the shepherds
- ...as He worked through Herod
- ...as He worked through the wise men?

These are some of the questions we will be answering throughout this study.

As you begin this study, what is it you would like to learn about this story that would help you in your walk with Jesus?

II. Discovering Christmas

ZECHARIAH AND ELIZABETH (Luke 1.5-25)

1. It had been 400 years since Malachi put down his pen. God had been “silent” since that time. That is, He had not spoken through any prophets with any message for His people, but that was about to change.

2. How many facts about Elizabeth and Zechariah can we learn from Luke 1.5-7?

Elizabeth	Zechariah

3. A cross reference on *the division of Abijah* (1.5) takes us to 1 Chron.24.10.

Who fixed these *divisions*?

How many were there?

How often would ZECHARIAH serve?

GABRIEL (Luke 1.5-25)

1. In 1.9, suppose this lot had not fallen to ZECHARIAH at this time—would he have missed Gabriel?

2. Where does Gabriel stand when he appears? Mark on the diagram of the Temple (the page before Lesson One) where he stood. Give your reasoning.

3. How personal was Gabriel's message (1.13-14)? Listen carefully. What does he say?

When exactly was his prayer heard? Why did God wait so long to answer? See Gal.4.4.

4. In Gabriel's message to Zechariah in 1.13-17, what can you learn about John?

His lifestyle

a. He must refrain from _____ (1.15).
And he will be filled _____.

b. What connection is there between not drinking and being filled with the Holy Spirit? (See Eph.5.18.)

Why would it have been important for John to refrain from wine and strong drink?

Being filled with the Spirit is often not clearly understood. There are two works of the Spirit of God often confused in the Church today. The first is the work of the Spirit regarding salvation, and the other is His empowering work. The saving work of the Spirit **does not change from the OT to the NT!** This MUST be clearly understood. What does change is His empowering. In the OT He comes and goes with people. David said, “take not thy Holy Spirit from me” in Ps.51.11. He does not mean, “take not thy salvation from me,” but “do not take the divine empowering from me so I cannot do this job as king as you have anointed me.” The Spirit comes and goes in this way in the OT with certain prophets, priests, and kings. In the NT, this empowering comes and stays in every believer.

c. In what ways might John be referred to as a reformer? (1.16-17)

What does Mal.3.1a tell us about this?

His mission

d. John’s mission will accomplish what three things?

- 1) He will _____ many of the children of Israel to the _____ (1.16).
- 2) He will _____ the hearts of the _____ to the _____ and the _____ to the wisdom of the _____ (1.17).
- 3) He will go _____ (1.17).

In your own words, what is God's mission for John?

5. In light of what Gabriel tells Zechariah about John, why do you think Zechariah was punished for his question (1.18-20)?

Names of people in the OT were significant as to their meaning.

Elizabeth means "God is my oath".

Zechariah means "Jehovah remembers" – Does this help you understand why he was punished?

6. From your understanding of the way God works, why do you think Elizabeth was barren in the first place?

In the Jewish culture barrenness was considered to be caused by sin. Some of the rejoicing would have come from this exciting change in Elizabeth's stigma.

III. What do I do with all of this?

God had not spoken in 400 years. During that time people prayed for the coming of the Messiah.

Zechariah and Elizabeth spent their entire married life wanting a child. However, apparently they had stopped praying, thinking God was with-

holding their hearts desire. What do you think that did to their view of God?

We have a tendency to think silence equals God not answering.

God did answer, but only in His time.

Have you been longing and praying for something God has seemingly ignored?

IV. How does this make me more like Jesus?

If you answered “yes” to the above question, how is that altering your view of who God is and how He treats us as His children?

How will a proper understanding of God, sovereignly working in and through *you*, change your heart about Him?