

The Bethlehem Times

Seven Broadcasting Transcripts.

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Day 1: MARY

As you realize, we *have* Christmas because a *baby* was born more than 2,000 years ago. Not many people nowadays bother so much about the baby and the story that goes with it. They may prefer the Father Christmas story - reindeer, gifts, stockings and all that. Others don't even have much time for that - all they are looking forward to is the food and the booze...

But why not have a few moments with that young girl, called Mary? She was already betrothed and most probably looking forward to her wedding to Joseph, the local carpenter, yet, at the same time, having her 'mixed emotions'. Oh, she liked Joseph alright. He seemed to be the really solid type, but getting *married* to him..., that still seemed a daunting prospect.

Mary didn't realize it, but something a thousand times *more* daunting was in store for her - and *well before* the wedding could take place. When it happened..., Mary was totally taken aback. An angel of God actually appeared to her, and he told her she was going to be a mother. Of course, like every girl, Mary too was hoping to be a mother one day, but that was after she'd be married. What the *angel* told her was that she was going to be a mother *before* she'd be married..! And, as if that wasn't shocking enough, she heard the angel say that her baby would be God's Son and that she would conceive, *not* through Joseph or some other man, but that somehow God himself would see to that conception. That extraordinary baby would be the Savior that her people had so long been waiting for, the Messiah no less - and his name was to be Jesus.

Since the event is absolutely unique in human history, we cannot easily enter into Mary's troubled thoughts-and-imaginings after getting the message. But the angel also tells her about Elizabeth, a relative of hers, living in a different town many miles to the south. Elizabeth was *already* expecting a baby - *in her old age* would you believe. Elizabeth had never *had* children and her menopause was now behind her for 30 years or more. Yet here she was, expecting a little boy from Zachariah, her husband, and his name was to be John, he would grow up to be a prophet.

All this too was new to Mary. For a while, this last bit of news takes her thoughts away from her own imminent pregnancy.

Then, pretty soon, Mary decides to go and see Elizabeth - now well over 5 months' pregnant. We don't know *how* Mary travelled, but it was a long and very arduous journey. But what a meeting with Elizabeth when finally she gets there! Mary can't stay more than 3 months - she returns to Nazareth. Her own pregnancy is advancing and there is much to arrange, not least with Joseph. How will *he* react when he finds out she is pregnant?

Well, let's find out tomorrow. In the mean time I *must* underline that this unique baby came into the world for..., that's right, for *you and me!* Thank God He came!

Day 2: THE BABY

Yesterday we did our best to enter Mary's world at the time of having the visit of the angel Gabriel. Ever since that moment, Mary has received plenty of attention from religious folks, right through the centuries - and much of it misplaced. You see, Mary is not really the important one in the story at all, neither is Joseph, or the angel Gabriel, for that matter. The *only* one really important is the *baby* that came into the world at this time - the baby who had a mother..., but not a father, at least not a *human* father... His name was to be 'Jesus'.

Yesterday we left you wondering how things would work out with Joseph. How would *he* take the news that his beloved was expecting a baby that was not *his* baby..? Well, we're happy to report that all worked out really wonderful in the end! But let's keep the details till tomorrow. Today it is the baby's *birth* we are thinking about.

Just about half a year after Mary had returned from Elizabeth's home in the south, she had to face another long journey south, this time to the town of Bethlehem. Circumstances were different in that by now she was happily married to Joseph, but, of course, in a way, things were even more difficult than on the last journey, because this time she was nearly nine months' pregnant.

The occasion of the journey was a decree all the way from Rome, that *every* citizen in the empire had to be officially registered. Not just where they happened to be living, but in the town from which their forefathers hailed. It sure was like stirring up a gigantic ants' nest.

So, we may suppose that Joseph saddled a donkey for Mary, packed a few belongings and... off they went, on their way down south. No, they *didn't* have to mind the cold and the blizzards, because all this didn't happen in bleak midwinter - it was actually in *summer* time. Centuries later certain religious people thought it all seemed to fit better if played out in winter, and so that is what they decided - change around a few dates and *presto*, but, of course, that decision *was* rather an artificial one.

Now, with all these people on the go to get registered, things tended to get chaotic, but finally Joseph and Mary arrived in Bethlehem, the town of their ancestor, King David. By then, however, there was not a free room *anywhere* for them to rest their weary heads. Things got to a critical point - what if the baby decided to arrive this very night? But then someone pointed them to a corner in a stable, and, yes, right there, they managed to accommodate themselves - more or less, that is, with the help of some straw.

They *were* grateful - at least they were settled! But who knows for how long...? Well, the God, who had so wonderfully brought them thus far, would, no doubt, see them through to the end. That *unique* baby could now come into the world - no hospital, no help, no hygiene, but all was ready in this corner of the stable.

And then... (it could have been their second night in Bethlehem...), *there* He was - their very special baby! As they wrapped their precious one in the pieces of material that Mary had brought, she *saw* something from the corner of her eye: a '*feeding trough*' - hmm, she thought, '*just the thing*'. And so, pretty soon, God's Son was soundly asleep in the manger of the animals.

Day 3: JOSEPH

As I promised, today we'll talk a bit about Mary's husband, Joseph.

When Mary came back from visiting Elizabeth after three months, Joseph may have noticed a bit of a bulge - if he didn't, Mary, or somebody, must have told him that she was expecting a baby. Things weren't immediately clear to Joseph and so he was deeply troubled. What to do? Really he should denounce her for immorality - and it would cause a terrible scandal. But Joseph loved Mary, even if he didn't understand what was going on, and so he decided to just separate from her quietly and give her the opportunity to marry the man, whose baby she was carrying.

But as he was working all this out, Joseph had a dream. You see, especially in those times, God sometimes communicated through dreams. The angel, who had spoken to Mary, now appeared to Joseph in that dream and proceeded to explain to him the wonderful things happening. In fact, the angel told him, "***Don't hesitate to get married to Mary***".

And that is what Joseph and Mary did. Many people, relatives and all, may not have been too happy about Joseph marrying a girl whose baby was on the way, and the story about whose baby that really was, seemed a very tall story, indeed! But Joseph was now in this *with* Mary. *Together* they put their lives and their marriage *and* the baby in God's hands.

And fancy..., since the prophets had foretold that the Messiah would be born, *not* in Nazareth, but in *Bethlehem*, something Joseph and Mary had not countenanced at all, God moved the very Emperor in Rome, no less, to decree that everybody in the empire go and get registered in his place of origin.

Yesterday we already saw how in that way everything worked out to perfection, *not* according to man's plans, but according to God's plans! Jesus was born in Bethlehem, just as the Scriptures had foretold!

As time went on, Joseph will have scratched his head more than once: "What is all this getting us into?" Yet, having truly trusted God, he was happy again and again to go along with whatever God's sovereign plans proved to be!

Tomorrow we must spend a thought on those spontaneous visitors who visited the happy family of three in their humble stable - *and* in the dead of night!

May you too know the happiness that all of them experienced!

Day 4: SHEPHERDS

Today we're back in Bethlehem, that is to say on the outskirts of the town - which is where the stable was situated where the baby was born. But right out there, away in the fields and hills, a good number of shepherds are spending the night with their flocks. Which, of course, is one reason how we know it was in *summer* that all this happened.

Anyway, as some of them were sitting around talking together, we can almost overhear them as they mention the age-old theme of the promised Messiah. They couldn't dismiss that promise lightly. There were often readings about it from the Scriptures as they gathered in the synagogue, yet **when** might He be coming? With the whole of the country under the heel of the Roman oppressors, his coming seemed more needed now than ever before. Yet.., not a sign of it.

Of course, what thrilled them endlessly was the Scripture's promise, that the Messiah would be coming out of *Bethlehem* precisely, and that He would be the Ruler of Israel. To them that meant that He was going to be a new King David - only a thousand times mightier - He would be *just* the one to tackle the Roman armies!

Then, as they were deliberating, suddenly they had the fright of their lives - an angel stood before them and all the hills roundabout lit up with his glory. The angel told them not to be afraid, because he brought them **good news of great joy**: the Messiah *had* come! That very night He had come..! If they cared to go and look for him, they would find him as a baby lying in a manger.

Before the angel left, suddenly there was a whole crowd of angels there with him, all of them praising God and saying, "**Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.**"

Then the angels were gone, and as they tried to sit up straight again in the darkness, totally overwhelmed, one of them finally said quietly, "Hey, why don't we go and try and find that baby?" And, of course, that is what they did, they hurried off and, before long, they *found* the stable. As they entered, hesitatingly, *there* was the manger they had been told about, and in it a baby! It *was* the baby! They realized that, *of course*, they'd never find another manger with a baby in it. This *was* the promised Messiah - not quite as they had imagined, but obviously the one and only Messiah who would become the Ruler of Israel.

They didn't understand how it would all work out, but they were content to leave that in God's hands.

They told Joseph and Mary all about their experience and after that night their story was repeated hundreds of times to whoever was interested.

And here *we* are listening to it as well. The wonderful thing is that our lives too can change and be filled with light and wonder and joy as *we* let the living Messiah *into* our lives now.

Day 5: SIMEON

Do you like celebrations? Why not have a look at the way one very interesting character celebrated? He was an elderly gentleman, who lived in Jerusalem - his name was Simeon.

Joseph and Mary, after the baby was born, continued in Bethlehem, where Joseph got himself and Mary duly registered as the authorities demanded. At the same time they were careful to keep the Jewish law also. It stipulated that a new mother had to stay in for a period of 40 days. Then the parents of the new baby would travel to the temple in Jerusalem and there they'd present the baby to God with a sacrifice.

Joseph had by now found more acceptable accommodation in the town of Bethlehem - a proper house. They were even planning on not going back to Nazareth. But when the forty days were up, the three of them set out for Jerusalem - fortunately, it wasn't too far away.

Then the unexpected happened - right there, in the temple courts. A most extraordinary thing - this elderly citizen, Simeon, unexpectedly approaches them. Somehow it was quite obvious to Joseph and Mary that this man didn't mean any harm, and so, when all of a sudden Simeon takes the baby from Mary's arms, they don't try to ward him off. Rather, they stand in awe, as right then and there, Simeon raises his voice and speaks to God - it was obvious that this man was on intimate terms with his Creator.

This is what he said: *"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."*

Then he goes on and has a word with Mary, all concerned about the strange and wonderful future of her baby, and how that future would mean acute suffering, on her part as well. Both Joseph and Mary couldn't stop marveling at all the things that were said about their baby boy, but Mary especially, kept them in her heart. She would remember all of it, word for word, for the rest of her life.

And how interesting that, at least once a year, these things are brought to our attention as well, in fact to the attention of many millions of people. The important question for *us* is then: "Are *we* in tune with what God is doing in the world today, just like Simeon was in his time, and like Joseph or Mary?" Because there is no doubt about it, the loving God who gave his Son to forgive our sins, is still waiting for that most wonderful of all gifts to be received wholeheartedly. Most people have never done so. Will *you* receive Him today?

Day 6: THE MAGI, THE KING AND THE THEOLOGIAN

I bet some of you were wondering *when* we'd get to the wise men from the east - well, we won't leave you in suspense any longer. For that we do have to make a bit of a jump, because the last time we were with that unique family of Joseph, Mary and Jesus, the baby was just 6 weeks old. *This* time he is getting on for two years... and doing very well, living there in Bethlehem with his doting parents.

If radio, TV or newspapers had been available then, Joseph, one day, *might* have picked up some strange news coming from Jerusalem - apparently all of the capital was abuzz with the most unusual thing that had ever happened! Completely unannounced some foreign dignitaries had arrived in the capital - on camelback and all attired as truly exotic and important people. They seemed to be astrologers or magi. Now *that* was strange enough, but even *stranger* was what they managed to communicate. They requested to see the "**King of the Jews who had been born**", saying they had *seen his star in the east and had come to worship him*.

Nobody knew quite *what* to make of this. If a "king" or a "prince" had been born, then *surely* everybody would *know* about it. And so the people in the streets couldn't come up with anything better than to point these strange men to the palace of King Herod, even though it seemed clear enough that this had nothing to do with evil King Herod, who was not even a Jew *himself*.

When Herod learned about these men and their mission, he was truly taken aback, realizing someone must be waiting in the wings to take over his throne and kingdom. Astute as he was, he decided to take his measures - no "King of the Jews" was going to take over *his* throne! Hadn't he already executed a wife and two sons, because they seemed to aspire to his throne? He'd soon find out where this new threat was coming from...

Actually Herod had a 'lead'. Wasn't there a lot of talk among the Jews about a Messiah who was due to come? And hadn't God supposedly said that the Messiah would be their king? Putting two and two together, could this baby the foreigners were talking about, be that long-awaited Messiah? The more Herod considered the possibility, the darker his forebodings. The only thing was: Where could that baby be? If only he knew..., he'd soon get that matter taken care of...

But *wait* a minute! Surely the priests in the temple..., *they* ought to know where the Messiah was supposed to be born! Of course, that was it! - why not ask them?

It didn't take Herod long to summon all the theologians. And, yes, they soon pointed out to him that the Messiah must be born in Bethlehem.

Have you ever wondered about those wise theologians, how they all missed the boat? They knew all about the Messiah having to be born in Bethlehem, but *they* certainly never went there to find him and worship Him.

How about you? Have *you* found him?

Day 7: HEROD AND THE CHILDREN

Last installment of the most wonderful story ever told - even if this last part is not really so wonderful. One detail, at least, is terribly sad, because, like it or not, we'll have to go back to evil King Herod. We left him with the theologians of the day, and now we find it was the turn of the magi to be called in. When Herod inquired from them about the celestial phenomenon they had seen, he found out it was already getting on for two years since they saw that star.

So, in the nicest tone of voice that he could muster, he told them that the child was supposed to be in Bethlehem, *but*, please, he said, as soon as you've found him, let me know exactly where, because *I too* want to go and worship him..!

Well, you know the story, the magi did, indeed, find the house where the family were living. They worshipped Jesus and left their gifts of great value, but *then* God directed them in a dream *not* to return to Jerusalem. So, bypassing Jerusalem where Herod was anxiously waiting, they soon crossed the border and were on their way home.

Meanwhile, in Bethlehem, Joseph *also* had a dream - again it was an angel speaking to him, this time putting him on red alert: Herod was about to kill the child! Told to get up immediately and start out for Egypt, staying there until further notice, Joseph saddled his donkey, quickly got some food and belongings together for the long, long journey, and off they were.

When Herod - impatiently waiting for the return of the magi - realized that he had been outwitted by them, he nearly exploded. But thinking he might still control the situation, he ordered all the little boys of Bethlehem and its vicinity, up to the age of two, to be slaughtered...! Ruthlessly! What inconsolable despair of the mothers and their families...!

It is the type of thing that has happened so often, throughout history. And not only in the ancient past; right now these things are rife in the Middle East, while in the West, precious babies are killed off even in their mother's womb - by the millions! Herod, at that time, simply reflected his master's reality and intent, that of the Prince of the World. Satan was furious about the coming of the Messiah into his domain, and wanted him liquidated at any cost. The Savior, however, would not lay down his life until his time had come.

The priests of the temple and King Herod kept God at arm's length and didn't allow Him to touch their hearts. But all those who *did* allow God to touch their hearts became a tremendous help and blessing. Just think again of Joseph and Mary, of the shepherds, of Simeon and of the magi. Their light is still shining brightly today, even if the darkness of this world-under-Satan is worse than it ever was before.

Before *you* can touch someone's life with blessing, you will have to allow *Him* to touch your heart with blessing!

MESSIAH COMING!

Messiah laid down his life at 33 - that was at Calvary - yet He didn't remain dead. He rose victoriously from the dead and went back to heaven. Mission accomplished! He had attained eternal victory over Satan, over sin and over death, providing total 'redemption' for every sin-sick member of humanity!

That may not be apparent in the world around us, but... He is coming back! On that day (which is dawning on us now), He will establish himself in Jerusalem and sit on King David's throne as **King of Kings** and ruler of the world.

Just think of it - every single prophecy and promise relating to his *first* coming, as a baby, and relating to his life and death and resurrection and ascension, was fulfilled to the letter! When it comes to his Second Coming, all the relevant prophecies and promises - and there are many of them - must *also* be fulfilled! They *will* be fulfilled! That fulfillment is upon us, in *our* life time - **are you ready?**

Now is the time to let God touch *your* heart - let him show you what Messiah, the Savior, did for you! Your life will take on totally new dimensions!

**"FOR TO US A CHILD IS BORN,
TO US A SON IS GIVEN,
AND THE GOVERNMENT WILL BE ON HIS SHOULDERS.
AND HE WILL BE CALLED
WONDERFUL COUNSELOR, MIGHTY GOD,
EVERLASTING FATHER, PRINCE OF PEACE.
OF THE INCREASE OF HIS GOVERNMENT AND PEACE
THERE WILL BE NO END.
HE WILL REIGN ON DAVID'S THRONE
AND OVER HIS KINGDOM!"**

Isaiah 9.