

THE SIMPLE CHRISTMAS STORY

... is more than a story and is not very simple
WEFC December 21, 2008

The simple Christmas story is more than a story and it is not at all very simple.

It is incredible!

It is one stupendous claim after another.

... and when we consider the events that are noted in the Bible, there are some real brain stretchers.

A little boy came home from Sunday School all excited. His mom was excited that HE was excited. "What was the lesson about?" she asked.

"Oh, Moses and how the Israelites got away from the Egyptians," the little boy said.

Being a good and creative mom, she answered, "Oh great! Now how did that story go?"

"Well, Mom," the little boy began, "you know those Israelites were in Egypt and the Pharaoh had them good. He wasn't being such a nice guy and all. So Moses got ticked off. And Mom, do you remember the special robe Moses had?"

"No," his mom said, raising an eyebrow, "I don't quite remember that."

"Well, see, Moses had this special robe and inside it was the electronic megaphone, and he took it out and said, "Hey, Israelites, let's get outa here! Egyptians, you stay there." And

they took off, and went right out into the desert until they hit up against the Red Sea. They didn't know what to do, ya know? But Moses was a sharp dude so he reached back into his robe and got his walkie-talkie and called to the helicopters to bring down the pontoons ..."

"Pontoons?" his mom repeated.

"Right, and they build this pontoon bridge, see. And then Moses got out his megaphone and said, 'Hey, Israelites over here, and you Egyptians' – the Egyptians had snuck up behind – you ol' Egyptians, you stay right there.' And when the Israelites got to the other side, Moses reached back into his robe, got his walkie-talkie, called to the jet planes, and they came down and bombed the pontoon bridge just before the ol' Egyptians got there."

The little boy caught his breath, and then said, "That's how the Israelites got away."

His mom, as you might imagine, was a little dumbfounded. She said, "Now, is that EXACTLY the way the teacher told you the story?"

The little boy looked somewhat sheepish and said, "Well, Mom, not exactly – but if I told you the way she said it you'd never believed it."

Some events are to incredible for our minds to accept.

Most of us have heard the Christmas Story so many times that, without too much thinking, we just accept it.

... and that is a problem.

We accept and stake our eternal destination on incredible, impossible events.

We rattle off the biblical statement, “With God nothing is impossible,” and that seems to be a blank cheque for anything and everything to happen because we have thrown God into the mix.

There is little that is more incredible and “far-fetched” than what happens surrounding Jesus Christ. Topping the events of His life is mighty difficult.

To believe such things ... have we parked our brains at the gate of intelligence and in our desire for hope accepted that which is beyond reality?

Christmas is a stretch.

Key Thought:

God asks us to believe the impossible in order that we might enter into reality ... primarily the life-transforming relationship with Jesus Christ.

In following Jesus personally we are asked to believe and commit our very lives upon the impossible happening.

Look at the Bible’s details from all over to see just how impossible Christmas was.

The Incredulous Claims ...

1. Near the beginning God initiated talk of Christ’s ultimate “win”

After man had rejected God, God steps forward and indicates with significant clarity that thought there would now be conflict in the world, God would in the end win decisively over the devil.

Genesis 3:15

... I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head and you will strike his heel.

The date these words were conveyed in the hearing of Adam and Eve is unknown.

They were recorded on a document between 1300 – 1400 years before Jesus’ birth.

Few people make plans that far in advance.

Even cultures and societies realize that such pointed and precise planning so far down the road is totally a guess ... not at all a sure thing.

But God’s Word makes it a definite item ... a measurable event ... to be experienced in the life of a person ... this coming “Savior”.

So, after Moses **wrote the fact down**, God tracks with his “promise” for some 1300 years ... and then it becomes a reality.

... keeping your word after 474,500 days is pushing most reasonable limits ... but God comes through.

Near the beginning God initiated talk of Christ’s ultimate “win” ... and it has happened ... with more still to come.

Transition

Note just one further date-matter.

2. The Christ's birthplace specified a "few" years before

Micah, an Old Testament prophet, wrote the following words from God Himself.

Micah 5:2

... you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.

Again, the words are specific

Rather, incredible stuff when you think of the length of time in the process.

The birthplace of the Messiah, the Christ, was not going to be in Jerusalem, nor, heaven forbid, Samaria, not Rome, but of all places a small town, Bethlehem ... about 9 ½ kilometers from Jerusalem.

If your parents lived in Winnipeg, then predicting your place of birth would not be a big thing.

But predicting the birthplace of a specific person some 700 years before they are born ... that is impossible ... unless you are God and have the inside track.

God seems to gently taunt us ... but giving us such incredible information, and with such accuracy, that there are only two ways to explain it ...

- a fluke (but that doesn't make any sense)
- that God is real and knows what He is talking about\

Put this into understandable terms. Let's say a generation is a 40 year period.

In 700 years you see the arrival of some 17 generations.

This translates into picking out where your great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great grandchild would be born (14 "great"s).

That is comparable to saying that one of your offspring is going to be born in Plum Coulee 700 years from now.

This is incredible ... BUT IT HAS TO BE ... because of what we are being asked to risk ... our entire life on this Person.

We need to know beyond any shadow of a doubt that we are standing on facts rooted in reality and history.

This cannot just be a spiritual thing. It has to be more.

... and God comes in and nails things down ... specifically because He asks us for our very life.

Transition

Not only are the events incredible, but His selection of people is less than ideal.

3. God complicates the regular to have us get to the central truth

Matthew 1 opens with a genealogy of Jesus Christ ... not the most exciting stuff to read, but tucked in between those names are some surprising details.

Generally the genealogies in the Old Testament were for the purpose of indicating that the bloodline had not experienced Gentile contamination.

The father's names are the one's listed ... the determining factor to a person's heritage.

We noticed this a couple of years ago, but read ...

Matthew 1:3-6

- 3 Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar, Perez the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram,**
- 4 Ram the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon,**
- 5 Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse,**
- 6 and Jesse the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife,**

Four women are tucked into the list.

... but three of the four were not the kind of people that stand us proud; they are not our community role models.

Their names -

- Tamar, who slept with her father-in-law,
- Rahab, who was a prostitute
- Bathsheba, who had an affair with David

The fourth woman mentioned was not of Jewish descent, though she was a godly and good woman, Ruth.

Three of the four were tabloid worthy.

These were not the names that you would want to publish in an official document, if at all it could be avoided.

These were some of the skeletons in the closet, the scandals that smeared the purity of Christ ... or at least that is what we would think.

King David, who was one of the greatest leaders of the nation of Israel, had a ...

- great-great-great grandmother who was a Canaanite
- a Jerichoite great-great grandmother
- a Moabite great-grandmother
- a Hittite "wife" (through Uriah)

... and Jesus comes through King David's line!

Who is this Savior of ours? ... and why document the dirty stuff in His background?

How does this “detail” make Him more credible? Does it not seem to make Him more “human” rather than “divine”?

We can take that as a negative on Jesus ... that He comes through rather a rather flawed line.

But there is a flipside to this.

God did not just come FOR sinners, but THROUGH sinners ... and stayed sinless.

God takes the risk that we will get the right picture from His work in humanity.

This is a **God who cares for and works in and through imperfect people.**

His heart is bigger than we might think.

His love seeps into every corner of humanity.

God really is no respecter of person.

... and just because we have not been born into the right family, or in the right community, does not exclude us from God.

God takes in a Tamar, a Rahab, a Ruth and a Bathsheba.

He also has room for the likes of us.

Transition

As we approach the birth of Jesus we get to some of the more abnormal events ... details and happenings that just seem to take us out of the ordinary and into the realm of the ... supernatural.

4. Jesus’ supernatural birth preceded by a supernatural birth that is not quite as spectacular– His relative, John the Baptizer

As we read through **Luke 1** it is clear that John the Baptist would precede the arrival of the Christ ... and be His introducer.

This particular John (not the Gospel author) was a late arrival, a miracle birth to a couple that could not have children.

An angel tells his father to be, Zechariah, that he and his good wife, Elizabeth, were going to have a child.

Zechariah was not very convinced and so the angel got the message through to him by telling him that we would not be able to speak from that point on until the birth of this child.

There it is again!

... an angel, ... a childless couple getting their wish, ... the dad not being able to talk for about a year ... This is incredible stuff.

5. Zechariah speaks when the angel said he would speak

Luke 1:64 indicates that John the Baptist’s dad, spoke after his son’s birth, just as the angel said he would.

The timing is anything but coincidence.

The story just gets bigger ...

Transition:

But it doesn’t stop there.

The historical account grows.

There is more of the angel stuff ... and even more incredible developments.

6. Mary is to give birth to the Christ without any sexual relationship with a man

Luke 1:26-38 relays what happened on that day.

Mary meets an angel who tells her she is going to give birth to the promised Messiah – the Son of the Most High.

... and when Mary wonders out loud how this is going to happen since she has not had any sexual relationship with a man, the angel tells her that the Holy Spirit – God Himself – will make it happen.

... and then this angel – Gabriel – gives that famous line –

... nothing is impossible with God

Luke 1:37

How much more incredible can this get?

... an angel talking to Jesus' relative, then to Jesus' mother?

There are miraculous births (John the Baptist), and then there is the spectacular birth of Jesus Christ ... a Holy Spirit conceived birth.

Transition

Flip back to the book of **Matthew**. There we find Joseph, Mary's husband to be, getting the news that Mary is pregnant ... and he must have been torn apart by her unfaithfulness.

Their coming marriage was doomed.

7. Joseph's impending divorce is overturned by ... who else? ... an angel

Matthew 1:18-25

... The angel confirms what Mary must have tried to convince Joseph of, but he would have nothing of her story.

Like, can it get any better?

8. The world's greatest birth announcement made by ... you guessed it ... angel and company

Jesus is born and the sheep get scared out of their woollies by the angel and the angel choir.

Luke 2:20-14

"Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

Why do we believe this stuff?

Are we not thinking people?

Far-out predictions, angels making announcements, miracles, God becoming man ... what more do we have up our proverbial sleeve?

Who is this Jesus and why would any sane person believe in Him?

Transition

God understood that He was pulling off one incredible event when He assigned His Son to also become a man, to be born into the world's way of living.

So unbelievable is this event that God confirms it with miracle after miracle ... pulling off against all odds ... the history of what we now call Christmas.

It is not a fable, a myth, nor is it the concoction of some creative writer.

The "miracles" continue through His life, and the evidence mounts, increases, grows, and history verifies that this Jesus did exist, is real, and is who He said He was.

This is reality.

This is truth.

This did happen.

This is God working into our lives for a very specific reason.

Key Thought:

God asks us to believe the impossible in order that we might enter into reality ... primarily the life-transforming relationship with Jesus Christ.

God tells us that our lives left to themselves, we left to ourselves are lost and done because of sin.

God sent Jesus to literally save us from the damage we have done and continue to do.

But the point of God's Word is that the Christmas story is God's fact, but it does us no good unless we move beyond the facts.

... and here is what we must get ... or we are left with just a Christmas Story.

God is much more than informational. God wants to look us in the eye, we want to look God back in the eye, and we want to know that we are okay with Him.

We have been wired not for isolation, but friendship, for dynamics to be experienced between one another ... a relationship.

But the relationship with God is different from all other relationships.

The relationship that God comes to offer us is one in which He is

- superior, but yet at our level

- pure, but able to lead us towards cleanness of mind and attitude
- perfect, but willing to work with us who are far from it
- absolute Sovereign, who demands our entire life yet gives us a “new” life which is far better

That relationship often begins with a somewhat conscious choice.

Here is what how it works ... and what may be your next step in your spiritual journey.

Romans 10:17

... faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

On our side of this relationship is something that is labeled FAITH.

FAITH is INFORMATION

- **statement of truth**
- **unchanging reality**
- **does not require our acceptance** (is true whether we accept it or not)
- **objective**

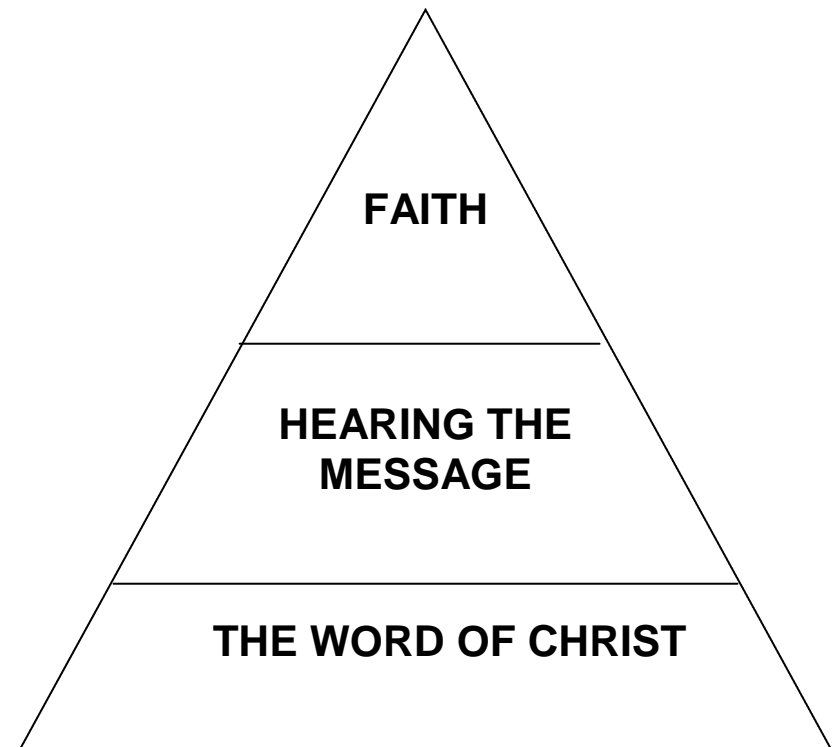
“Our faith indicates that we are ...”

This is the truth stated for us in plain concise terms.

FAITH is also an ATTITUDE

- **our personal response to the information**
- **developing and growing**
- **requires our conscious involvement**
- **personal**

This is the progression of FAITH found in Romans 10:17



our whole depend on this God who make Himself known in Jesus.



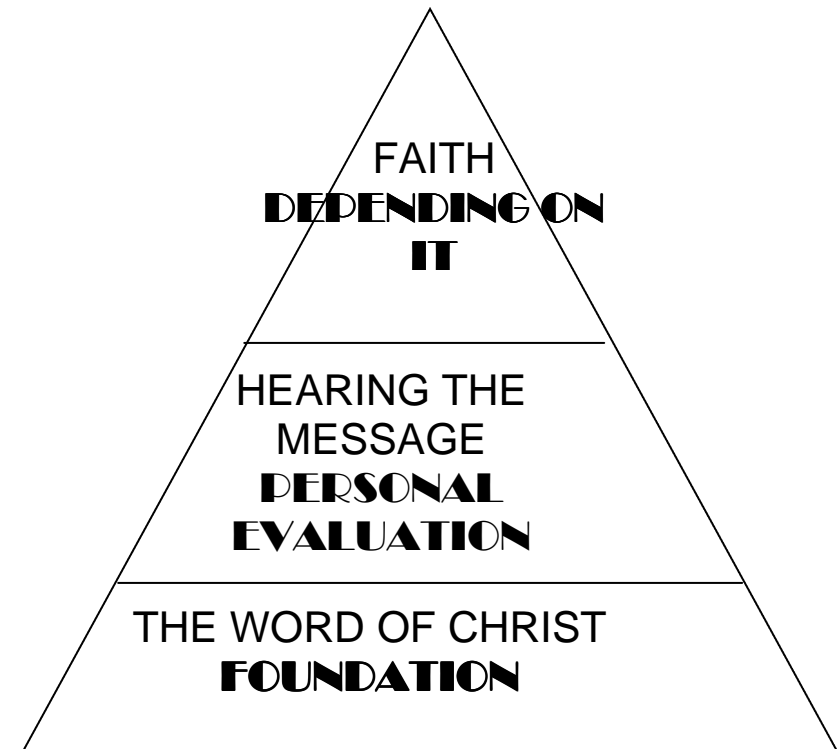
God has spoken, and His Word is OUT THERE, whether we accept it or not.

God wants us to take the INFORMATION OUT THERE, in His Word and test it for its validity, historicity, truthfulness ... It is accepting God's Word as truthful.

But that isn't enough to get it IN US.

God wants us to be committed to Him ... If it is true than this is the way to shape our lives ... and be committed to truth and God's reality.

We see God's Word as the FOUNDATION, Hearing the message as our PERSONAL EVALUATION, and Faith as letting



God wants to deal fully with our sin.

Give it to Him by admitting we have it and want freedom from it.

Accepting that Jesus who was born as a baby was and is God ... and that when He died, His death paid for all of our sin and gives us a new life – everlasting life.

But having it in our brain is not enough.

God wants us to sign on with Him. He want us to depend on Him for our entire life.

That's commitment.

That is entering into a relationship with Him for better, worse, richer, poorer, in sickness or health ...

FAITH requires all three elements, but is never really faith until that third part, that personal part is activated.

That is what we agree to and tell God when we accept Jesus Christ.

Yes, the message is incredible.

Yes, it is a stretch.

But **we believe it because ...**

- **God said it**
- **God has not lied**
- **We have what His Word has written as verified, actual happenings in history**

We never have all the information we would like.

We do not get to personally see Jesus pull off a miracle.

We would all like more proof. It isn't coming.

FAITH is only as good as its FOUNDATION.

It does not matter what we decide to believe, if it isn't true, it will not help.

If we choose not to believe what is true, it doesn't change the truth. We just miss out on it.

God has given us His Word ... a document that has been examined, scrutinized, pulled apart, criticized ... yet its truthfulness stands all investigation.

It will ... It's God's Word.

He speaks the truth.

Today, if you have not taken this step of faith in accepting Jesus as the Savior ... as the Christmas message states, then we would invite you to do so.