

PEOPLE MUST KNOW
Luke 2: 15-20; Matthew 28: 16-20

Once upon a time, a long time ago, in a land far, far away, a child was born who would save the world. But much happened to bring the world to that amazing day: this is that story. In the beginning of time, when nothing existed but God, God started painting a canvas of dark skies and bright stars; both would play a role at the birth of Jesus. God also created animals like oxen, camels, and donkeys that would also play a part on that wonderful night. God also made the world include trees and grasses and wild berries and the like. There was enough to sustain life; there was beauty in the landscapes and music from the birds that were created to help announce the dawn of each new day. The world seemed fine except for one thing: no animal or plant could give God praise or pleasure in quite the way that God had hoped. The Lord God made and loved them all, but the Lord God wanted ones who could care for his creation. So God decided to make earthly managers with part of their purpose to praise God, and part to care for one another and creation. God decided that these human workers needed thumbs, and a mind that could reason, and a soul that could honor him. God learned that when people were created, they could give the Holy One praise and joy! But sadly, they could also contribute to the pain to the world. And that they did. From the very first saga of the first man, called Adam, and the first woman, called Eve, to the murderous tale of their children- Cain and Abel- through curiosity, anger, and jealousy, sought to undo life in Eden.

Soon, there went the neighborhood, with people all over town discovering what it was like to make their own choices. What they learned too late was that the temptations of the flesh had consequences, sometimes to their family

or friends, sometimes to themselves, and sometimes to their children's children. God saw that creation would need more attention. They would need saving from their sins! Over the years God lifted up wonderful people who honored the Holy One, men like Abraham and Moses; women like Miriam and Deborah. And to God's joy, there were even prophets who learned about God's heart and let others know when they were on the right track and when they weren't. One of them was named "Isaiah" who was a statesman of Jerusalem, a royal counselor and some would say a poetic genius. With his words like "For unto us a child is born" and "Comfort, comfort ye, my people, saith our God," he brought hope to the cities of Judah in his day. But his gaze must have also been on the horizon of centuries later, when (like a glass slipper that fits the foot of a young woman) Isaiah's words applied perfectly to a baby named Jesus. Again, God raised up a man and a woman who were not tainted by the world or tempted by its glitter. The woman he chose was but a young teenager, and the man somewhat older, according to custom. The girl's heart was innocent and her motives pure; she was devoted in her life and learning so that when an extraordinary thing happened to her one day, she let her faith inform her fear and settle down her own fluttering heart at the brush of an angel's wing, the light of his countenance, and the shock of his announcement. Would she agree to carry and bear a child, a son that would be hers by a divine request? It was just a short time earlier that she was promised and engaged to a man named Joseph. There in the little dusty village of Nazareth, an angel made the divine request of Mary. The implications would ripple through town in such a way that Mary left for three months to visit her cousin, Elizabeth. It was there that she learned that Elizabeth, too, was expecting a baby which was a miracle in and of itself. She was beyond regular child-bearing years,

yet she surprised Mary with the news that she was just 3 months away from having a child herself! Her husband, Zechariah, had already had an angel visit *him*, and he had been unable to speak since the encounter. Upon the birth of their child three months later, Zechariah's voice miraculously returned in time for him to name his son. "His name is John" croaked a grateful Zechariah, and the one known as John the Baptist became the forerunner of God's plan.

As was required every 14 years by Roman Census, all citizens of the Roman Empire had to travel to their hometown to be registered, almost like voting in one's own precinct. That meant, providentially, that Joseph had to be in his hometown, Bethlehem, at the very time Mary was to have her child. In spite of the news that the child would only be his by adoption, he would be the legal father and would not leave his young fiancée behind. So she also made the trip and in so doing, the child of salvation would be born in the very same village where Boaz, a Jew, had loved and married a Moabite named Ruth, from whose line King David was born and in whose line Joseph belonged. Now, as the prophet Micah had proclaimed, Mary's baby would be born in the proper city. Many years earlier, Micah had said: "You, O Bethlehem, who are little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth one who is to be ruler in Israel ... he shall give them up until she who is expecting a child has brought him forth.... He shall be great, to the ends of the earth." So they indeed traveled there certainly because of Roman law and, it seems, to honor God's plan.

As they neared the end of their journey, they came to the farming area where lambs were regularly born: shepherds did not have sheep in corrals, they had them out in the fields, watching for signs that a new lamb would be born.

Little did they know that the one to be called “Lamb of God” would be born that night! But the light of an angel broke the darkness of night and told the shepherds to, just this once, as the old spiritual described it: “leave your ewes and leave their lambs, rise up shepherd and follow;” to go to Bethlehem and see the wondrous sight described by the angel. Dallas Jenkins, who created and produced the wonderful series about Jesus called “The Chosen,” told viewer that swaddling clothes were often used at the birth of lambs. So it was providential that likely in the stable were swaddling clothes that were clean, but were intended to comfort newborn lambs. *How perfect.* The wondrous sight was seen by animals, shepherds, and perhaps others that night. Reading Luke 2:20, Dallas Jenkins interpreted that verse a first shepherd who arrived at the stable and saw the newborn king say to Mary and Joseph “*People should know! People should know!*” And he departed quickly, presumably to tell others. A shepherd, a person of no standing in the world, became one of the first messengers of the good news! And now, on this day after Christmas, *we have become the messengers of the good news!* We are called to go with haste and tell others how important the birth of Jesus was to the world! *People must know!*

Shepherds were poor people. In the 19th century in America, people of color were poor too, working on plantations. It was there that unknown persons of faith came up with a song with a cadence by which they could do their work after Christmas and beyond. The African American spiritual was “Go Tell it On the Mountain” that Jesus Christ is born! They had the right idea! Use a megaphone, use a microphone, use social media, or tell others with your Christmas cards that Jesus Christ is born! That song was first published in 1909 in Hampton, Virginia. Whether someone tells you *People Must Know*,

or *Go tell it on the Mountain*, you know what to do! And even Jesus himself knew as he offered these words to his disciples in Matthew 28:18. You've heard me declare these words at any baptism I perform. Jesus' joins the others in telling his disciples this, Listen! "All authority in and on earth has been given unto me! Go therefore and make disciples of all nations." There it is! Even Jesus believes we should go and tell. This is the opportune time to give your testimony about Jesus to a friend; to write it down and share it when you can, or to simply let it pour from your mouth. We have the story to tell, and we have our own stories to tell about how we let the Christ child have room in our hearts. Any number of Biblical events turned out to be purposeful: the Son of God was born into the home of a man in the right line, with the permission of a girl with a pure heart, in a stable where the son of man began by having no proper place to lay his head. And so it would be throughout his ministry. Today God's story of salvation continues. Let us rejoice that in this Christmas season as salvation is offered once again to us and to the world. May God bless you this day and each day with the Good News: Christ the Savior is Born! *People must know!*

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