
CHRISTMAS: It's coming this Friday. Jesus' original coming came 2020 years ago. When Jesus came to this earth His arrival was announced by Angels. Watch this with me...

Wow!!!! "Share the Gift!" I love that image...



Indeed, Jesus is **God's gift to the world:** "For God so loved the world, He gave Jesus" at Christmas. Listen, Jesus came to a world of darkness because of SIN. This world was without hope and without peace and then Jesus came! He came on a mission. A mission to destroy sin and to dispel the darkness. The Apostle Matthew recorded our plight in Matthew 4, verse 16:

Matthew 4:16-17

¹⁶ the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned." ¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

The song we heard, "Angels from the Realms of Glory," has a set of lyrics that speak to this thought:

**Sinners, wrung with true repentance,
Doomed for guilt to endless pains,
Justice now revokes the sentence,
Mercy calls you; break your chains.**

Jesus revoked the sentence of sin and He broke the chains of sin! The Jesus of Christmas is the Jesus of Easter and you see, Jesus Christ is the most important gift that any human could ever receive. He is the greatest gift you could possibly receive...and that's what we'll see today, this Sunday before Christmas!

Turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 15. If you've been with us, you remember the church at Corinth was a mess. So much so, that there were even those in the church who were questioning if Jesus had really risen from the dead. Now we know none of the people in Corinth had witnessed the resurrection Jesus. After all, it had happened some 20 years earlier, and Jerusalem was over 800 miles from Corinth. But, they were choosing NOT to believe the evidence. Do you remember the 7 evidences of the resurrection from last week?

7 Evidences of the Resurrection

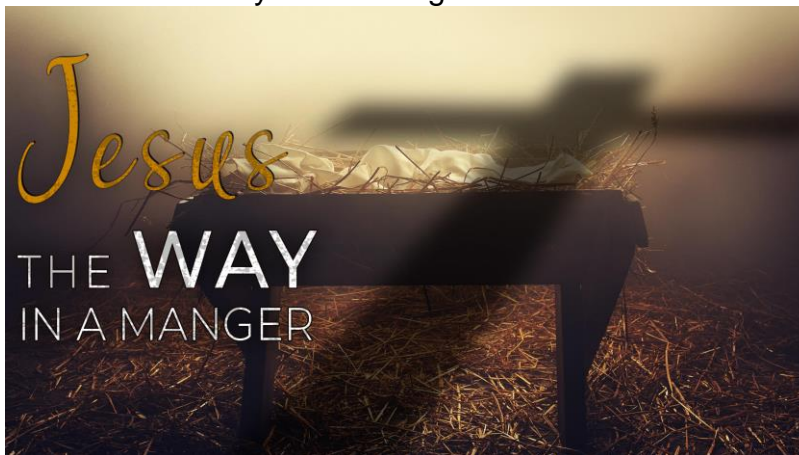
1. **Fulfilled Prophecies**
 2. **The Lethalness of Roman Crucifixion**
 3. **The Empty Tomb**
 4. **Eyewitness Testimony**
 5. **Historical Evidence**
 6. **Evidence of Personal Experience**
 7. **Today's Date**
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You see, Jesus is alive. He is the Jesus of Christmas and the Jesus of Easter because He got up from the dead and Paul reminds them of this fact.

1 Corinthians 15:12-19

¹²Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. ¹⁵We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. ¹⁶For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁷And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. ¹⁸Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹If in Christ we have hope^[b] in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

Church family on this Sunday before Christmas, we are not a people to be MOST PITIED...no, we're a people who can celebrate the Jesus of Christmas and the Jesus of Easter BECAUSE of the facts of the evidence of the resurrection. Jesus IS ALIVE and today, we're going to remember once again the amazing and miraculous appearance of Jesus, as He came to this as a baby at Christmas. How? By singing wonderful, familiar Christmas songs, carols, hymns. We're going to celebrate how Jesus became "The Way in the Manger." That's our series title:



We're going to see THIS fact through the lyrics and melodies of some of the greatest Christmas songs ever written...and I've gotten some help from our Praise Team and their families via video. I've even gotten help from Tim Miller, our new Worship Director by way of video all the way from California. But, I also need your help. I need you to sing today. You will get very little out of this message if you don't sing...and the easy part is that all of the songs we're going to sing today are very, very familiar. Will you sing? I hope you will!

Now, let's set the scene. Before Jesus came, for centuries the world waited for the coming of the Messiah...the Son of God. Would He come? The nation of Israel cried out for His coming for centuries. The song "O Come, O Come Emmanuel," (God with us) makes this clear. See the lyrics...

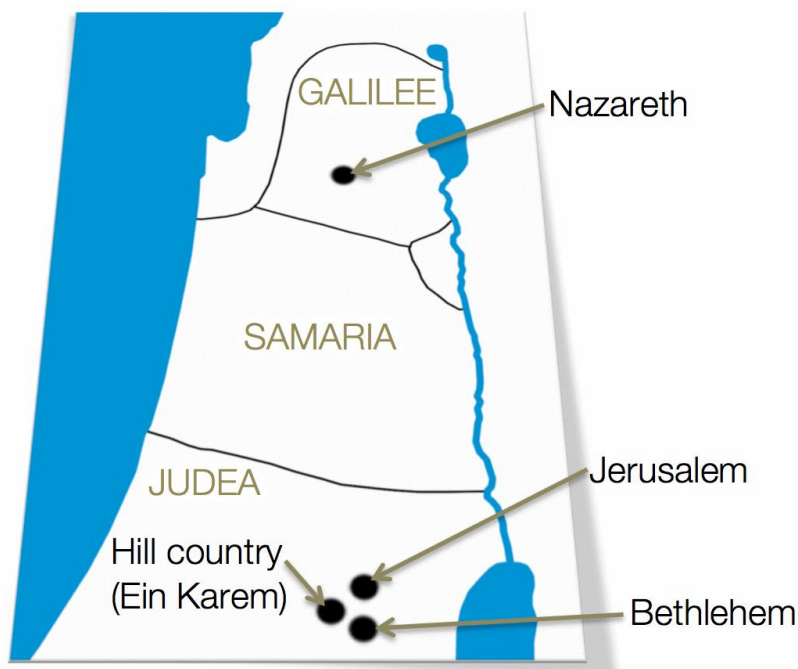
O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here,
Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny;
From depths of hell Thy people save,
And give them victory o'er the grave.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Dayspring, from on high,
And cheer us by Thy drawing nigh;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

Now, Tim is going to lead us as we sing this beautiful, old song together. Don't miss the hope that comes through these words:

Jesus brought light into the darkness...indeed, He dispersed the gloomy clouds of night and put death's dark shadows to flight. And that's exactly what Paul was saying to the Corinthians...Jesus is alive and we can rejoice! "Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel. Shall come to thee Israel." We're waiting again...but, He's coming again. Oh yes, He came, and where did Jesus come? What town? Here...



Bethlehem. (See the bottom of the map). Joseph and Mary travelled a little over 90 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem. You see, Rome had called for a census, which meant more taxes and everyone had to go to their ancestral home town to register and to pay the tax. For Joseph, being a descendant of King David, that meant Bethlehem. Which reminds us of the song: "O Little Town of Bethlehem." Seth and Ashely Rhoades are going to lead us in this wonderful song as Seth's mom, Pam plays the piano. Sing along...

That's such a beautiful song! I want to show you the last two verses. Take a look...

**O holy Child of Bethlehem
Descend to us, we pray
Cast out our sin and enter in
Be born to us today**

**No ear may hear His coming
But in this world of sin
Where meek souls will receive him still
The dear Christ enters in**

And that's my prayer for you this Christmas... "Jesus will enter in." Will you receive Him? Yes, Jesus was born in Bethlehem...in a nasty stable in a cave outside of an overcrowded Inn that was packed to the brim. And He was born. See the depiction...



What a night that must have been for Joseph and Mary and I believe it's the beautiful Christmas hymn, "Silent Night," that sums it up best. Some of my children and grandchildren are going to lead us as we sing. Sing with the Isaacs and Browns...

Now we know in that stable in that cave...there wasn't a baby crib. So, where did Mary lay baby Jesus? An animal feeding trough...a manger.



That's all they had. And what song does that remind us of? "Away In A Manger." This Christmas carol has been around since the late nineteenth century. It's one of the most popular carols of all time. Let's sing along with the Gold's family as they lead us...

Now Joseph and Mary would NOT be the only ones in that stable that Christmas night when Jesus was born. Who else came? Shepherds, of course... But, where were these Shepherds to begin with:



Out in the fields, watching over their flocks by night, right? They were likely warming by a fire and minding their own business. Until what? An angel appeared...



Can you imagine the scene? This scene was conveyed by the old Cornish hymn called, "The First Noel." The word, "Noel" in Latin means "born of God." Steve Bryan's family is going to remind us how the angels came to the shepherds to tell them the good news.

What a scene...see it again...



Can you fathom the wonderment and the amazement! Think about what those angels were announcing... They were announcing the Greatest News that had ever been told! HOPE WAS HERE. They were the angels who heralded the truth.

I want you to see the words to “Hark the Herald Angels Sing:”

**Hark! The herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King!
Peace on earth and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled."**

**Joyful, all ye nations rise,
Join the triumph of the skies,
With angelic host proclaim:
"Christ is born in Bethlehem."
Hark! The herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King!"**

It's a powerful song. The Farmer is going to lead us!

I love the lyrics from the last verse...

**Mild He lays His glory by,
Born that man no more may die,
Born to raise the sons of earth,
Born to give them second birth.
Hark! The herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King!"**

But listen, to have the second birth, to be saved, your heart must receive Jesus. Isaac Watts understood this fact. He wrote a hymn in 1719 that we sing at Christmas...but, it's not about Christmas. It's based on 98th Psalm, which is a psalm about the Second Coming of Jesus. It's called, “Joy to the World.” And yes, Jesus will bring joy to the world when He comes again to rule and reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. But, in order for us to know that joy, we must do as Watts says in that song. “Let every heart _____ what?” “Prepare Him room.” Have you? Have you invited Jesus to save you...decided to follow Him? It's the only way you can know true joy! **The Moore family is going to lead us as we sing together.**

The Apostle Paul told the people at Corinth that the coming of Jesus and His subsequent resurrection was of the "FIRST IMPORTANCE." And today, as people of faith in Jesus, we celebrate as the FAITHFUL. For you see, as the Faithful Ones, we can SING in triumph and that's the very idea of the song: "O Come All Ye Faithful." The Shropshire family is going to lead us in this song of adoration:

Why did Jesus come? Because of sin and death. Death meant separation from Him forever, and so, He came to offer a way of escape...



The Way in a Manger. Jesus was born to die and rise again...the Christmas Jesus had to come so He could be the Easter Jesus. He rose from the dead proving He had the power over sin, death, Hell and the grave. So what do we do now? I want to show you by way of the Gentry-Gentlemen's Trio what we must do as they sing: "O Holy Night."

See it again. The words of Jesus:

Matthew 25:40b

"Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me."

That's our job now... Who is the woman who is alone with two kids in your life? Maybe it doesn't look exactly like that scenario...but, the Holy Spirit is showing you someone...a need...maybe a situation where you can be the hands and feet of Jesus. What about it? Will you do what He tells you? Will you:



Share the Gift. We end where we started... Will we share the Jesus of Christmas with a lost and dying world? Look for opportunities to be Jesus? Share the gift of Jesus this Christmas...

“The people who dwelled in darkness have seen a great light!” Now let’s go be that light!