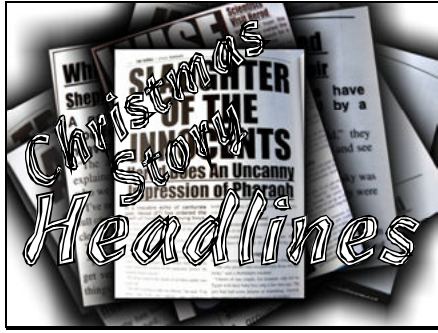


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1



Christmas Story Headlines

(s-c) One of the most probing and relevant questions we ask ourselves is: Does God really love me? The assumed answer is "yes." The follow-up question is "How do we know?" John 3:16 says: God loved the world so much that he gave us his one and only Son ... Christmas is the story about the way God gave us His Son. I cannot explain why God chose to express his love in the way he did, but I can show you how he revealed his love in the story of Christ's birth. The way God shows his love will be perplexing to us. God's love takes us down the back alleys of life where we prefer not to go. Let's follow his trail this morning. The headlines of the major events will be our guide.

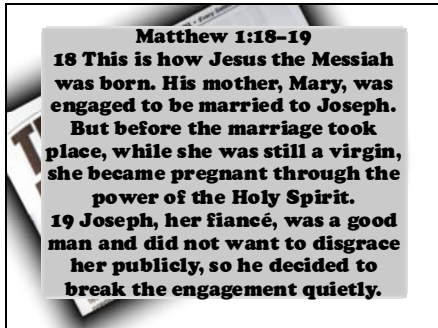
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2



(s-c)Headline: Teenager in Love

Text: Matthew 1:18-19

Slide
3



(s-c) Matthew 1:18-19

18 This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit.

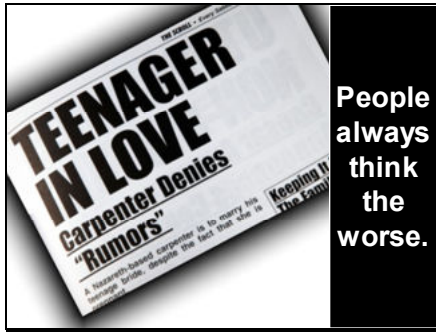
19 Joseph, her fiancé, was a good man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly.

Mary is engaged. Mary is a virgin. Mary has done everything right.

Joseph is a good man. He refuses revenge. Instead he plans to dignify the one who has hurt him despite the devastation she has caused him. He decided to break the engagement (marriage) quietly.

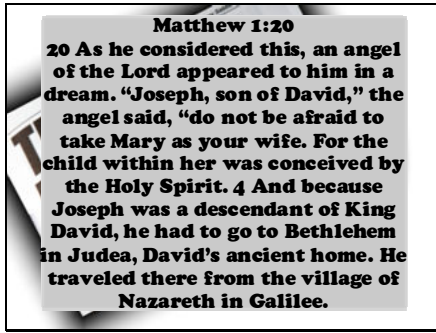
Subtitle: Carpenter denies rumors.

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4



(s-c) Fact of life: People always think the worst.

Slide
5



(s-c) Matthew 1:20

20 As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. "Joseph, son of David," the angel said, "do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit.

- 1) the child in Mary was conceived by the Holy Spirit
- 2) Take Mary as your wife

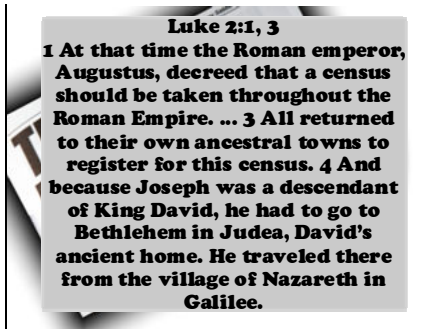
Despite appearances to the contrary, this couple did everything right.

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6



(s-c) Headline: Utter Non-census

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7



(s-c) Luke 2:1

1 At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire.

Luke 2:3

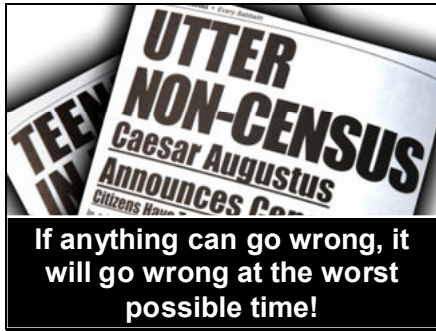
3 All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census.

Problem: Mary was in the last trimester of her pregnancy. The timing was all wrong.

Luke 2:4

And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee.

Slide
8



(s-c) Fact of life: If anything can go wrong, it will go wrong at the worst possible time.
OR Just when you think it can never get worse --- It does.

Joseph's heritage required that he travel to Bethlehem to register for the census. It was a long journey which was followed by a lodging crisis – there was no room in the inn.

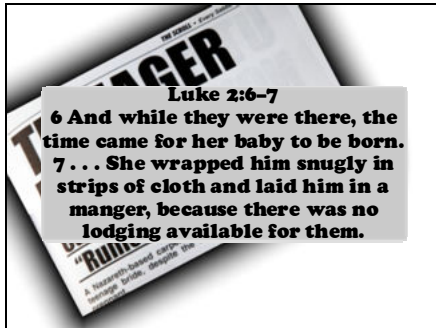
There was no special treatment for doing the will of God. Doing the will of God meant swimming upstream all the way – right to the end.

Slide
9



(s-c) Headline: A Stable Relationship

Slide
10



(s-c) Luke 2:6–7

6 And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. **7 . . .** She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger (an animal's feeding trough), because there was no lodging available for them.

- no room in the inn
- no help in delivery
- poverty, obscurity and to some degree rejection

Slide
11



(s-c) Fact of life: The worst things happen to the best of people.

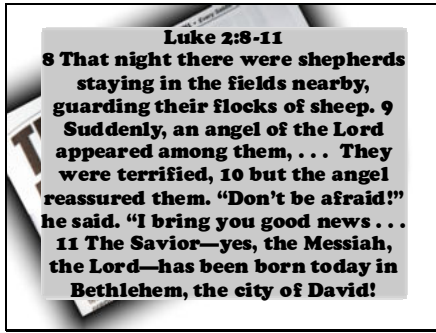
Mary and Joseph just made ends meet. God provided for them exactly what was needed, even though, they were, perhaps, the most righteous couple on earth at the time. At the same time that Mary was caring for her baby in the cave or in the stable, God was launching another strategic maneuver in the fields outside Bethlehem.

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12



(s-c) **Headline:** While shepherds watched – Shepherds serenaded by Holy Choir

Slide
13



(s-c) **Luke 2:9-11**
8 That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. 9 Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, . . . They were terrified, 10 but the angel reassured them. “Don’t be afraid!” he said. “I bring you good news . . . 11 The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!”

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14



(s-c) **Fact of life:** God's greatest exploits are revealed to the least likely people.

Shepherds would be the last group people would believe. They were the unclean peasants of Jewish social circles. They were the marginalized people. People with ambition in life did not aspire to their occupation. You didn't brag about having a shepherd as a friend – unless you were God.

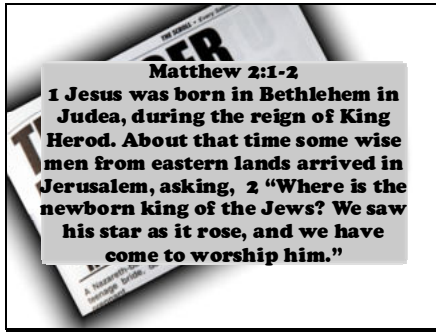
When you go back to Matthew 2 in your Bibles, you have fast forwarded by almost two years.

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(s-c) **Headline:** Wise men look for a star.

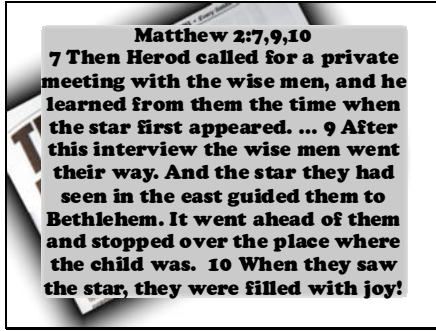
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16



(s-c) Matthew 2:1-2

1 Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, 2 “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him.”

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17



(s-c) Matthew 2:7

7 Then Herod called for a private meeting with the wise men, and he learned from them the time when the star first appeared. ... 9 After this interview the wise men went their way. And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw the star, they were filled with joy!

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18



(s-c) Fact of life: The more you value something the longer it takes to find it.

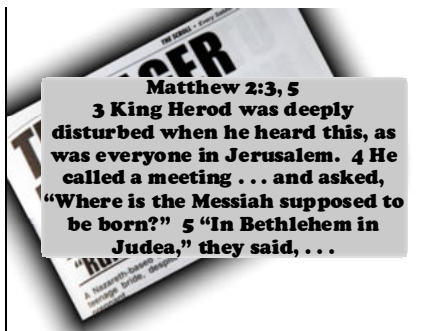
The wise men were searching for the young child for the express purpose of worshiping Him. Despite their desire, they encountered many distractions and detours and had to be persistent in their search. Their long endurance paid off – a valuable rule to remind yourself of when you want to worship but keep getting side-tracked.

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19



(s-c) Headline: Slaughter of the innocents.

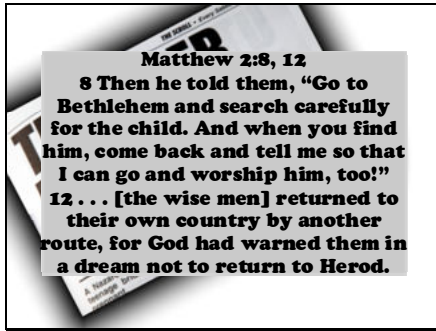
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20



(s-c) Matthew 2:3

3 King Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard this, as was everyone in Jerusalem. 4 He called a meeting . . . and asked, “Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?” 5 “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they said, . . .

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21

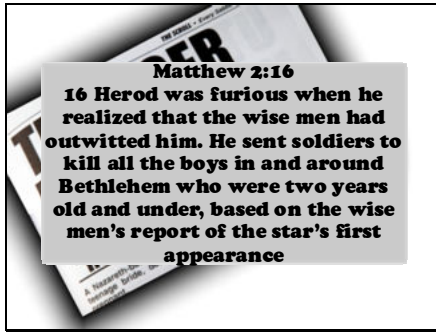


(s-c) Matthew 2:8, 12

8 Then he told them, “Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. And when you find him, come back and tell me so that I can go and worship him, too!”

12 . . . [the wise men] returned to their own country by another route, for God had warned them in a dream not to return to Herod.

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22



(s-c) Matthew 2:16

16 Herod was furious when he realized that the wise men had outwitted him. He sent soldiers to kill all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under, based on the wise men’s report of the star’s first appearance.

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23



(s-c) Fact of life The cruelest people get away with the worst crimes.

God’s way of expressing His love is very perplexing and strange to the way we think love should be expressed. It lets us walk through the back alleys of life. It allows us to experience the shadowy and sinful side of humanity. Sometimes, that side of life becomes so overwhelming that it casts doubt in who we put our faith in. It demoralizes us to the point of wondering if any justice ever will be done.

This is where we are at an advantage. We can look back at the birth of Jesus with hindsight. We can look at the one whom God called his Beloved. We can ask ourselves, did God love Jesus? Absolutely. What kind of life did a loving God allow Jesus to experience? It was a life as cruel and unjust as anyone who has ever lived has experienced. Yet it was a life that was thoroughly smeared with God’s fingerprints and richly beneficial for Jesus and for us.

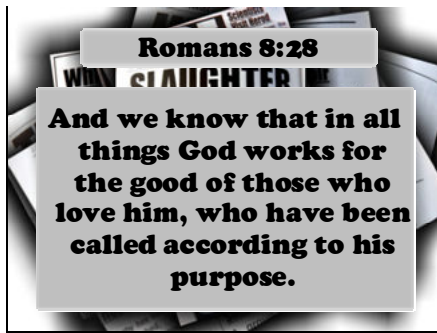
The birth of Jesus set off a sequence of events that would change our world. It was the loudest and longest expression of God’s love.

However, it was a love that had nothing to do with being born with a silver spoon in one’s mouth. But having said that, it did have a silver lining. Let’s look at the silver lining. Despite all the things we have seen in the Christmas narrative, something larger was taking place. It was God making us friends with himself. It was God

setting us free from our addiction to sin.

The essence of God's love and the essence of the Christmas story is captured in another verse: Romans 8:28. This is what Jesus knew!

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24



(s-c) Romans 8:28

28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Looking at the life of Jesus – this was true.

Mary and Joseph survived the tense circumstances and the unexpected upheavals. The impoverished conditions of Jesus' family in no way put him at a disadvantage in ministry. There were times of awe and times of celebration. There were times of shock and disbelief. People like Herod bully others and thrive. Sin and sorrow infest the ground. BUT Jesus accomplished all that he came to do.

There are some lessons to be learned:

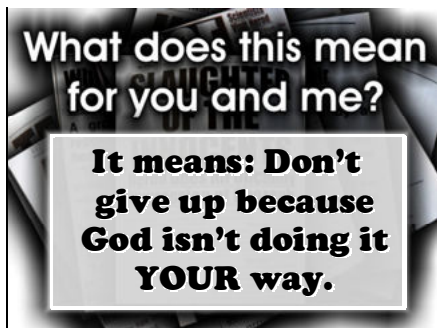
1. When people think the worse, remember that God knows the truth.
2. When the timing is all wrong, it is God who sets the clock.
3. When the best people are facing the worst fate, God is at work for their good.

Are you a Mary or a Joseph who have done everything right, but have earned a bad rap?

Are your circumstances adding insult to your injuries?

Do you ever get frustrated by the ease which evildoers implement their plans and escape their punishment?

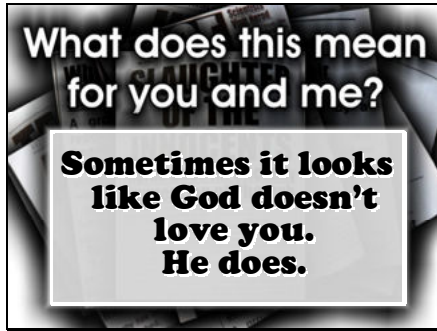
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(s-c) What does this mean for you and me?

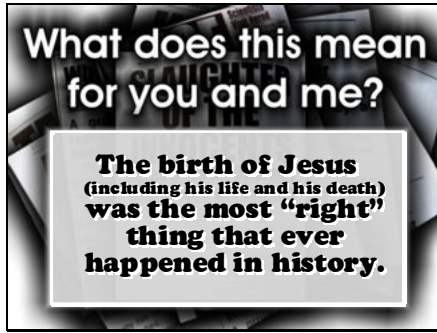
1. It means: Don't give up because God isn't doing it your way.

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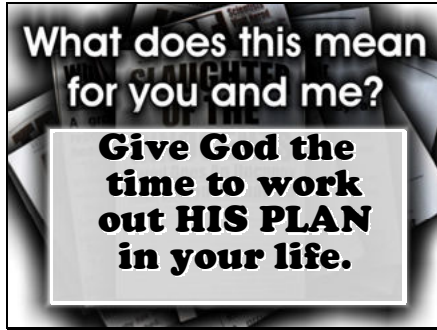
(s-c) 2. Sometimes it looks like God doesn't love you. He may even be misunderstood as your enemy. Be assured: He loves you. He really does.

Slide
27



(s-c) 3. The birth of Jesus (including his life and his death) was the most "right" thing that ever happened in history. His death, though it was cruel and undeserved was the right thing that we needed for redemption.

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28



(s-c) 4. Give God the time to work out his plan in your life.

[Source: Newspaper Headlines adapted from The Tabloid Bible by Nick Page by Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, KY. 1998. pp.109-110 & pp. 112-114]