

The Birth of Jesus

The Heart of a Hero

Cambodia has a folk story about a flock of pigeons searching for food. While flying, they saw below much rice, beans and sesame seeds laid out on a slab to dry. The pigeons excitedly cooed, calling each other to fly down. However, the leader of the pigeons urgently warned them to stay away. These seeds are surely bait that people have strewn in order to catch us. If you go, you will die!”

The pigeons did not believe their leader. They were too eager to eat the food. Seeing the birds fly to their death, the leader dove after them, hoping to find a way to save them. While the pigeons were joyfully pecking and eating, a net was thrown over them and they were firmly caught. Feathers flew as each one tried to escape. It was no use. How they wished they had listened to their leader.

Finally they realized he was there with them. They quieted down and listened to his plan. With beaks lifting the net, they would all flap their wings at the same time. As they flapped together up they went along with the net. The leader directed them to the home of some mice who willingly chewed through the net. Excitedly the pigeons escaped, each extremely thankful for their kind and brave leader who had risked his life by coming to join them and help them.

We Like Heroes

This story shows the heart of a true hero. A hero is someone who is willing to give up his safety and comfort in order to help those who are in trouble. We love to hear stories about generals who risked their lives to help the soldiers fight and save their country. Our hearts are touched when we hear

of someone who jumped into a flooded river to save someone who was drowning. We deeply respect a person who gives up comfort and risks his life. This is the true compassion of a hero.

Do you ever feel the need for someone to rescue you from a certain problem? Wouldn't it be nice to have a friend you could depend on who would sacrifice everything to help you? The problem is that most friends only want to be friends if we have lots of money and can make them happy. When a person suddenly has troubles, he often sees his so-called friends disappear. Is there anyone who is willing to come close to us when our problems are like a net, trapping us and making us miserable?

There is another story that beautifully shows the sacrifice and bravery of a special hero. It is the fascinating story behind the worldwide celebration called Christmas. It is the story of Jesus' birth.

Gifts at Christmas

Perhaps you've wondered why so many people around the world give gifts at Christmas time right before the international New Year. When Jesus was born, wise men traveled from Asia to give Jesus three special gifts. They give Him gold, frankincense and myrrh. At that time, these were gifts given only to a king. They believed Jesus was someone very special and they wanted to give Him respect and honor through their gifts. Today people continue to give gifts to show their appreciation of one another.

These wise men traveled very far to find Jesus. Why did

they come and why were they convinced that Jesus was important enough to receive such special gifts? People around the world had been reading ancient prophecies which predicted that someone great would be born around this time. The prophecies said He would help the poor and teach people how to live at peace with each other. His presence would transform people's hearts from hatred to compassion. These people had learned about the Great Compassionate One who created us and is like a Father. They believed that He had a plan to save people from sin.

The wise men saw a bright light, like a star that seemed to move slowly across the sky. They decided this was a sign that this great one had been born. They followed this light clear to Jerusalem in the country of Israel, the very place where the ancient scriptures had been written.

They told the people, "We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him" (Matthew 2:2). "Where is this King?"

The people didn't know, but the religious teachers said, "The scriptures predict He will be born in Bethlehem."

Surprise in a Manger

These wealthy wise men attracted much attention throughout the city of Jerusalem. Soon the King, called Herod, heard about them and sent for them. He asked them to go and find this baby. He pretended that he also wanted to worship Him. All he really wanted to do was kill any person who might take away his authority and power.

The wise men followed the light until it stopped in the town of Bethlehem over the place where baby Jesus and his parents were staying. Surprisingly, they found them very poor. The people in Bethlehem had seen this young couple come into

their village looking for a place to stay. The woman, whose name was Mary was about to deliver her baby. The King had demanded that everyone return to the place of their grandfather's birth for a census. This is why Joseph, Mary's husband, had been forced to travel to Bethlehem at this difficult time of pregnancy.

Because they did not have any relatives living there, they had to look for a guest house to stay in. So many people were visiting that there was no room anywhere. Seeing that his wife was close to giving birth Joseph desperately pleaded to stay in an animal barn. No one took them into their home, but one man allowed him to use his smelly barn. Mary gave birth to her first child, a son. There was no midwife, doctor or family to help her. Instead she was surrounded by animals.

Despite the poverty, the wise men came inside, bowed down, worshipped Him and gave their gifts. When the villagers saw this, they were very shocked. All they could see was a very poor family with a new baby. They wondered why these wise men would consider Jesus like royalty.

Who was this Baby?

Many have wondered, if Jesus was sent from God, why He was born so poor. What did the wise men know that others couldn't see? Months before, when Joseph and Mary were engaged, something very unusual happened. An angel appeared to Mary. She was very frightened. The angel reassured her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High."

Mary moved from fear to confusion. The religion of her

country was very strict and immorality was very uncommon. “How can this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?” The angel answered, “Nothing is impossible with God.” “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God”

It sounded so strange. It sounded unbelievable, but it was the angel of the Father of Life who was speaking to her. God had a mighty plan in which He Himself would come to earth to bring wisdom, peace and salvation to this war-torn world. He would give up living among the peacefulness and beauty of heaven, where He received the adoration of angels. He would come and live as a poor person, suffering what all humans suffer, that He might lift them to a better state. He would be like a king, going among his peasants, to help them improve their lives.

Mary moved from fear, to confusion to trust in God’s word. “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May it be to me as you have said” (Luke 1:38). Then the angel left her.

How did Mary feel? Surely she was excited to know she had been chosen to receive the Savior who was coming from heaven. Perhaps she was also afraid of what people would say. Would they think that she was pregnant through God’s power? And what would her fiancé think?

Joseph was very upset. He had trusted that Mary was a good and pure girl. Now she was pregnant. He was very disappointed. Matthew 1:19-21 says that, “Joseph was a man who always did what was right, but he did not want to disgrace Mary publicly; so he made plans to break the engagement privately. While he was thinking about this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph, descendant of David, do not be afraid to take Mary to be your wife. For it is

by the Holy Spirit that she has conceived. She will have a son, and you will name him Jesus-because he will save his people from their sins.’” Joseph moved from anger to understanding, to an acceptance of God’s amazing plan to help the world.

Now we can begin to understand why wise men appeared from the East to worship Jesus and why King Herod was worried and upset. Joseph and Mary were not surprised like the villagers. Surely they were excited, thinking that both rich and poor could have peace from Him.

A Time for Singing

Have you heard people singing at Christmas time? There are hundreds of special Christmas carols that people sing to celebrate this amazing story. This singing goes back in history clear until the time of incredibly joyful singing in the fields under the stars.

On the same night some shepherds came running through the streets. They came from where they had been watching their sheep out in the open fields. They shouted to everyone they met along the road, “An important baby has been born tonight! We were startled by a bright light and we suddenly saw an angel appear saying, ‘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’” (Luke 2:10-12). The shepherds said that after this many angels appeared in the sky and began singing, “Glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace, good-will to men.”

The shepherds found the baby wrapped in pieces of cloth, lying in a manger, just as the angel had said. Is it surprising

that angels would appear to such poor people as shepherds? No. This is the very reason that Jesus was born poor instead of rich. He wanted all people to be able to come to Him, to know God's love and receive God's help. If He had been born in a palace, the poor would have feared to approach Him.

An Angry King and a Close Escape

King Herod was anxiously waiting to hear back from the wise men. As the wise men slept, an angel appeared to them in a dream and told them to go back to their country using a different route. They were not to stop to tell King Herod. The angel also told Joseph to take Mary and Jesus and escape to another country because Herod would try to kill the baby.

What was happening? Satan and the evil spirits recognized that the Father of Life had sent Jesus into the world to rescue people from the power of Satan. They were determined to keep this world under their rule. They must find a way to destroy Jesus and so they worked on the heart of King Herod to make him jealous.

The Bible, in Matthew 2:16, says, "When Herod realized that the visitors from the East had tricked him, he was furious. He gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its neighborhood who were two years old and younger-this was done in accordance with what he had learned from the visitors about the time when the star had appeared." What a horribly wicked plan. How awful are the results that come from the greed of humans and evil spirits.

For us though, there is great joy, because the wickedness of Herod and Satan could not win over the power of this little baby. God had decided to save people from sin. Therefore

there was nothing that could destroy His plan. When Herod died, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in Egypt saying, "Get up take the child and his mother, and go back to the land of Israel, because those who tried to kill the child are dead" (Matthew 2:20).

Joseph took Mary and the baby back to the country of Israel. The Bible records, "The child grew and became strong; He was full of wisdom, and God's blessings were upon Him" (Luke 2:40).

Will You be Like Herod or Jesus?

When King Herod died there was no one who mourned his death except his immediate family. In fact his subjects were happy the king had died because he was very unkind and overly selfish. Today, very few people know his name or his accomplishments.

On the other hand, millions know about Jesus and praise Him as the one who has helped them greatly. They believe that this little baby was not an ordinary baby. They look at the life of Jesus when He grew up and they speak confidently that what the shepherds and wise men and angels said is true and accurate. They believe that Jesus is the Son of the Father of Life.

This shows us again the great benefits that come from choosing self-sacrifice and kindness instead of greed and selfishness. We have seen that Jesus was God from eternity with all power and knowledge. We have learned the great sacrifice He made to become a man to help us! He chose to leave that behind and become a poor child in this world. The Bible teaches that His life was full of suffering in order to help others. What a great example He is to all of us. Millions of lives have been changed by His story. How different from Herod who lived

only for his own benefit.

We also must choose which way we will live. Will we seek our own pleasures and positions of power like Herod? Or will we choose to help others and to sacrifice time and money to make our families, our villages and our country a place of peace?

We can start on the right path by choosing to do one simple act of kindness this week. Try it and see if your life can be a blessing to someone. You will find great joy in this. It is the right thing to do.

A Relationship with the King of the Universe

There is one ancient Khmer story that speaks of a king who wanted to find a wife from among his subjects. The king disguised himself as a commoner in order to walk and live among his people and not be recognized. Finally he met one young lady who respected and served him even though she did not know he was a king. He took her and made her a queen and brought her into his palace.

God has done something similar. He came to earth, disguised as a poor human. He did this so we could learn about God's true heart of love. He wanted everyone to feel comfortable in coming to Him, knowing that God understands all of our troubles because He has experienced them. Surely He has a good plan for our lives just as the king in the Khmer story had a good plan for the young lady.

The Bible describes Jesus as having the same powers as the Father of Life we have been learning about. Jesus is described as the Judge who knows all things, the Creator who made all things and as the One who came to save and help us. He is described as eternal, always existing. In fact the Bible says that

there is One true and eternal God who could be described as the "great Three in One Full of Mercy and Grace." Perhaps you have heard of them as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. They are completely one in unity, thought and purpose. Perhaps this is difficult to understand now, but simply look at what it could mean to you.

The Christian Bible clearly claims that this God who made the world, who judges all people according to their sin also has a love for them as a parent loves His children. He chose to receive suffering with them also. It is written, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). The Bible suggests that He did this in order to come close to the people so that He could help them. He became a person in order that all could approach Him and receive salvation. As in the bird and net illustration, He came into our net to help us.

The Bible, in Philippians 2:5-7, declares that "Christ Jesus, who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness."

Will you seek to know and follow this God who has sacrificed so much for you? Will you worship Him as the wise men and shepherds did? Will you live your life to help others and make this world more peaceful? The choice is yours. Such good choices will bring you and others wonderful peace and joy.

Points to Remember

- * If you love, you must be willing to sacrifice.
- * If you have merit, they will respect you.

* The birth of those with merit will be special.

* We know the love of others by their sacrifice.

* Physical strength cannot overcome the strength of righteousness.

Matthew 1:21 "She will have a son, and you will name him Jesus-because he will save his people from their sins."

Questions

1--Answer the questions below:

Do you want to help others? Why?

Have you ever sacrificed in order to help others? If so, please describe.

2--Please circle the answers that are correct.

Where was Jesus born?

In a palace

In a mansion

In an animal barn

Why was Jesus born as a poor person?

He couldn't be born from a rich person.

He loved the poor.

In order that both the rich and the poor could approach Him.

3--How did the shepherds know that Jesus had been born?

4--How were the wise men able to find Jesus?

5--Put T before the sentences that are correct and F before the ones that are wrong.

_____ There were many prophecies that foretold about the Saviors birth.

_____ The Savior sacrificed peace in heaven and came to suffer with people.

_____ The mother of Jesus was a virgin.

_____ Many people are born to virgins.

6--If this statement is true of your choice today, check it:

_____ I want to live a life of sacrifice to help other people. I will choose to help other

people with their needs even if it is difficult for me.

_____ I believe that Jesus was the eternal God who came into this world to help us. I want

to ask Him to help me escape the net of sin.