

Today, we are resuming our “The Story” sermon series with the first story from the New Testament. Yes, it is a “Christmas Story” in July. According to Matthew, it is the story about the birth of the King (Matthew 2:2); for Mark, of the Servant (Mark 10:45); for Luke, of the Son of Man (Luke 3:31); and for John, of the Son of God (John 17:21).

Heaven had been very quiet for 400 years. No burning bushes. No splitting seas. No visions. No dreams. No prophets. No message from God, but just silence. Then, in a magnificent yet inauspicious way, a word, not just a word, “The Word,” came. The Word of God had taken on flesh and blood and was first heard in a baby’s cry. Jesus’ birth was unspectacular, yet His presence dispelled the darkness and cast an inescapable ray of light across history—past, present, and still unwritten.

God’s promises to Abraham and David had found fulfillment at long last. Jesus would bless all nations and take His rightful place on David’s throne. It is this birth of Jesus, the birth of the King, to which everything thus far in “The Story” of the Bible has pointed. It is the story of joy for those who earn the favor of God.

Mary was the first chosen one for the birth of the King. In the midst of wedding plans and setting up the house, the angel Gabriel pronounced that she had been chosen to give birth to the Son of God. Nothing could have been further from her mind or her to-do list. Mary was engaged and a virgin. “The power of the Most High would take care of everything,” the angel said. So, Mary rejoiced. She accepted her position as God’s servant and praised Him with the purest trust in God’s plan. And then, she became the mother of the Messiah.

A blue-collar *téktōn*, a stonemason or often translated as a carpenter, Joseph was the next chosen one. He considered pursuing a legal dissolution of his relationship with Mary to save them both from the humiliation of an illegitimate pregnancy. But he received his own angelic visitor, who confirmed Mary’s innocence and gave God’s blessing on their marriage. He became the father of the Messiah on earth.

Next, God chose the shepherds in the field to be the welcoming team for the King of the kings. Angels delivered the birth announcement to them while they were

tendering their sheep. After hearing the message, they hurried to see the newborn King for themselves. They found a surprisingly unassuming setting for a king: a baby in a feeding trough, accompanied by His mother, earthly father, and the local livestock.

God also sent signs in the stars, but the only “Magi from the east” noticed this sign and followed the star from the East to Bethlehem in search of a newborn king. There they found the Holy Family with the newborn baby Jesus. Then they worshiped Him with the gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

The Bible does not say why Mary the teenager, Joseph the *téktōn*, shepherds the poor, and the Magi the foreigners, were chosen for the birth of the King. They were very unlikely people in that society to receive the King, yet God had chosen them, and they responded to it with “YES” by following the lead of the Spirit. Their obedient following resulted in the joyful worship of God as they received Jesus as their Lord and Savior—the Messiah!

JOY! That’s the word for today’s story. That’s the outcome of the birth of the King in our lives. Joy to the unlikely chosen people but chosen by God! Joy to the outcasted and the marginalized! “Joy to the World,” we sing. “Joy to the World,” we proclaim. This claim is not just for December, but for today, July, and every day. I feel like it’s worth singing “Joy to the World” now. So, let’s sing.

*Joy to the world, the Lord is come! / Let earth receive her King;  
let every heart prepare him room, / and heaven and nature sing,  
and heaven and nature sing, / and heaven, and heaven, and nature sing.*

Every day we can awaken to joy because of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ in our lives! **Joy is the infallible sign of the presence of God.**<sup>1</sup> Salvation and joy belong together. Being made right with God through Jesus Christ our Lord is cause for joy: Joy on the part of God, joy on the part of Christ, joy on the part of the church, and joy on the part of the one who is redeemed. May today be the day of salvation to receive Jesus Christ, born to us. All God’s children say, “Amen.”

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<sup>1</sup> ...said the French philosopher and scientist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.