

JOURNEY THROUGH BETHLEHEM

Good evening. My name is John Adams and I serve as Pastor of First Baptist Church. We're so glad that you have joined us this evening for our *Journey Through Bethlehem*. This is our attempt to share the beautiful story of Christmas in a meaningful and safe way. We invite you and your family to . . . drive through . . . listen . . . see the scenes. . . and experience the love of God in the gift of Jesus Christ. Since we will host this event for 3 nights, you have an opportunity either to return another night OR to share with family and friends so that they might experience this presentation of the greatest love story ever told.

We will have a prayer station after you have driven through Bethlehem. We would treasure an opportunity to pray with you. Simply pull over to the prayer station before exiting our property.

As you begin your journey, please turn off your headlights.

The Christmas story is among the oldest of stories. In the Book of Isaiah, which was written 700 years before the time of Jesus, the prophet Isaiah spoke of a son who would be called Mighty God and Eternal Father. Isaiah also indicated this son would reign on the throne of King David and His reign would be everlasting.

Isaiah was one of several prophets, like Daniel and Micah, who received the amazing message predicting the coming of the Messiah; God's Son, who would save the world.

PLEASE PROCEED TO SCENE 1 – The Birth Announcement

Long before Jesus' birth, prophets had foretold that the only begotten Son of the Father would be born to a virgin. Her name would be Mary. The Heavenly Father appointed the angel, Gabriel, to appear to Mary in Nazareth with the message of what He was asking her to do.

The angel came to her and said, "*Hail, you are highly favored. The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women.*" Gabriel's message left Mary troubled. Understanding her feelings, Gabriel told her, "*Don't be afraid. Mary, you have*

found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son. And you will give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.”

“How could this be?” Mary asked. When she heard that she would give birth to the Son of the Most High God. Gabriel told her that the Holy Spirit would come upon her and the power of the Most High would overshadow her. So, the Holy One to be born would be called the Son of God. For with God, nothing shall be impossible.

PLEASE PROCEED TO SCENE 2 –Studying the Prophecies

Far to the east of Israel, astronomers studied the night sky with astonishment. A new star had appeared and it seemed to be moving. From their studies, these star gazers believed this star was signaling the birth of a king. So, they decided to follow it. They began their journey, following that star across the vast rugged terrain with its many twists and turns. They had to find out where it led and to whom it pointed. They needed to know. They relentlessly made their way until it “stopped over the place where the child was.” Finally, after too many miles to count, they reached their destination, they came into the presence of the new born king.

They came prepared with gifts. They brought their gifts and presented them to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. They offered one more gift. It was perhaps their most important gift. They “bowed down and worshipped Him.”

Suppose you could bring a gift to Christ. What would it be? How would you possibly select a gift for the One who not only has everything, but Who made everything?

PLEASE PROCEED TO SCENE 3 – On the Road to Bethlehem

The long-awaited day was nearing. Mary was almost ready to give birth. Caesar Augustus, the first emperor in the Ancient Roman Empire, issued an order which fulfilled a Biblical prophecy made 600 years before He was born. Caesar’s decree ordered that a census should be taken of the entire Roman Empire. Joseph and Mary had to return to their hometown of Bethlehem to register for the census.

They made the tiring 90-mile trip to Bethlehem by donkey. Once again this was all part of God's plan. This census caused the birth of Jesus Christ to occur in Bethlehem, exactly as prophesied rather than in Nazareth where Joseph and Mary were living.

PLEASE PROCEED TO SCENE 4 – Bethlehem Inn

The noise and the bustle began a little earlier than usual in the village. As night gave way to dawn, people were already on the streets. Vendors positioned themselves on the corners of heavily traveled avenues. Store owners unlocked the doors to their shops. The owner of the inn awakened earlier than most in the town. After all, the inn was full. All the beds were taken. Every available mat or blanket had been put to use. Soon all the customers would be stirring and there would be much work to do.

Mary and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem after a nearly 10-day journey. They were exhausted and in much need of rest. Joseph desperately needed a place to stay because Mary was about to give birth. Although the inn was full, the innkeeper offered to let Mary and Joseph stay in the stable with the animals. This was not where Joseph wanted his expectant wife to spend the night, but there was nothing else to offer her. As he covered her with a cloth to help break the chill of the night, Joseph comforted his wife; "God will be with us. Lie down and rest. The time will be here before you know it."

PLEASE PROCEED TO SCENE 5 – The Holy Family

And, just as God had planned, *"While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them."*

It was a holy time, and it was a fragile time. Mary and Joseph were alone. No extended family waited in the next room, expectantly anticipating a birth. Not even Mary's mother was available to assist her daughter through the birthing process. She longed for her mother's presence as those first birth pains began and grew more intense.

Joseph anxiously and tenderly came beside his wife to comfort her. He was husband, nurse, and encourager. But God was there . . . whispering words of hope, holding their hands, and guiding them through the birth of His Son.

Together, they heard His first whimpers, they tenderly held Him, and they placed their firstborn in a manger, a feeding trough, the first King-sized bed. It was a holy night!

PLEASE PROCEED TO SCENE 6 – Shepherds in the Field

The same night that Mary and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem, a group of shepherds were out in the field tending their sheep. Suddenly a bright light illuminated the darkness. An angel stood before them and said,

“Do not fear! I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be a sign to all people. For to you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. It shall be a sign to you, you will find the baby wrapped in cloths, lying in a manger.”

Shepherds were the first to receive word of the birth of Jesus Christ, our Savior. They were not used to being first; they were more accustomed hearing their names called last, if at all. They were unfit for most everything that involved worship at the Temple. They could raise the sheep for the sacrifices in the Temple; they just could not enter the Temple. They were too dirty, too smelly. They did not fit the “letter of the law.” Everyone socially distanced from them. They lived in isolation; they were their own pandemic. But on this night, the last became first—the first to receive the invitation to come and see.

All of Heaven rejoiced that night. The shepherds were in awe as angels announced His birth to them. The Heavenly Chorus erupted in praise to God and sang, *“Glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace, goodwill to all men.”*

Compelled, the shepherds left their field and made their way to Bethlehem. They found Mary and Joseph AND the baby, who was lying in the manger. Once they had seen and experienced this, they could not keep their mouths shut. They told everyone, and people were amazed at what these shepherds were telling them. An encounter with Jesus changed their lives!

PLEASE PROCEED TO SCENE 7 – Worship at the Stable

If there's one word to describe the night when Jesus came, it would be "ordinary." It was a beautiful night. It was a night to peek out of your bedroom window to admire, but not really an unusual one.

The innkeeper's stable was a small place that smelled like sheep and cows and the hay that littered the ground. The barn animals crowded Mary and Joseph for space, but the stable provided shelter from the cold and for the weary Mary.

During the night, Mary gave birth to baby Jesus. She wrapped Him in swaddling clothes and placed Him in His first crib, a manger. No doubt the shepherds would be surprised to find the Savior in such a setting. After all, Jesus was not just any baby – He was the Son of God. God had sent the most precious gift that could ever be given. He delivered Him especially for you. Take time to seek Him out. Give Him your hope, your time, and your worship. This incredible moment was given just for you. Experience the majesty of the manger as you bow before the King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

PLEASE PROCEED TO SCENE 8 – Cross and the Tomb

Tiny hands that Mary once held were not destined to hold a scepter. Tiny feet that would never walk in a palace, were reserved instead for Roman spikes that would nail him to a cross. This precious child born with a destiny to die would be the Savior of the world.

You wonder how great His love is, you will find your answer on a splintered cross on a hill called Calvary. That is where Christ paid for our sin. It was our death that He died. The tomb reminds us that death holds no eternal power over those who believe and trust Christ. Because He rose and lives, we too can live an abundant life. That is how much God loves you.

PLEASE PROCEED TO SCENE 9 – Prayer Station

Thank you so much for joining us on a *Journey Through Bethlehem*. We pray that if you have not experienced the wonder of this gift of love, that you would take the opportunity tonight to receive Jesus as YOUR personal Savior.

We would love the opportunity to pray with you and to answer any questions you may have. As you leave the cross scene, we invite you to stop by our prayer station. I, John Adams, pastor of First Baptist Church and others will be there to speak to you. If you don't sense the need for prayer or conversation, feel free to exit down Bradley Avenue to your left. Watch for the Easley Police officer who will direct you to exit. Don't forget to turn your headlights back on.

God bless you and have a very merry Christmas!