**Unique Childhood**  January 1, 2017

Every year at Christmas we focus on the birth of Jesus – the journey his parents made from Nazareth; the barn in Bethlehem where he was born; the manger where he was laid; the angels who announced his coming; the shepherds who came to visit him in the middle of the night.

Throughout the rest of the year, we normally focus on Jesus… after he turned 30.

But what about those early years, after Jesus was born?

What about before he turned 30?

What does the Bible say about him or things he did during those years?

Here’s our coffee/question: share with another person anything that you’ve read or heard about Jesus…when he was a child; a teen; or a young adult.

**Feedback**

**Distribute handout – combined Scripture readings.**

Only Matthew and Luke provide information about Jesus’ early years.

I originally had planned to spend just today on this; but because there is so much material, we are going to study this next week as well.

What we are going to see today, is not things that Jesus said or did, but things that were done to him or for him; how others responded to him, good or bad; and what these responses teach us about who he is and how we relate to him. As we work our way through the text, I will be making application as we go, instead of waiting to the end.

**Matthew 2:9-23**

***9****After they had heard [Herod] the king, [the Magi] went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.****10****When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.****11****On coming to the house...*

When the Magi got to Bethlehem, where did they find Jesus? **In a house.**

What does that mean?

Jesus and his family were not in the stable anymore.

And that means what?

The Magi did not come on the night of Jesus’ birth.

In the retelling of the Christmas story, it is important that we get the details right.

When the Magi visited, Jesus was not a newborn baby.

While it makes for a much more dramatic story to have shepherds and wise men arriving together on the same night, that is not what happened.

***10****When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.****11****On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him.*

**Human beings have always been intuitively religious.**

To this very day, every human culture worships; as does every person.

What differs – is **“who”** or **“what”** is worshipped.

When the Magi saw Jesus, they worshipped him.

We learn from this that Jesus did not become worship-worthy after he became an adult.

The Magi worshipped him when he was a toddler.

But why?

Jesus had not yet accomplished anything with his life.

He had spoken no words; done no miracles.

The Magi worshipped him simply because of who he was.

Our worship is always to be about Jesus – the beauty and the majesty of his person.

We need to be regularly reminded of this, because there is always that temptation to make it about us.

What did the Magi do when they worshipped Jesus?

To answer that, we need to take a few steps back.

Look at the text again.

*…*the Magi were overjoyed when they realized the star was going ahead of them.

*AW Tozer Quote*

Joy is an emotion.

The Magi could not contain the joy they experienced.

This reminds us… that as we watch for and recognize the many ways in which God leads our lives, it is this, which will produce joy in us that then fuels our worship.

…they came to him

There is in our worship, a movement… towards Jesus.

He came near to us in order that we might **come near to him.**

Jesus is everywhere present.

He is not far away.

But the pace at which we live; the number of activities which we pack into our days, the demands placed upon us, by ourselves or others… all of these together, can slowly dull our awareness of him.

…they saw him

In worship, our heart draws near to the Lord… in order to perceive him.

…they bowed down before him.

Bowing is an important posture of worship.

It is an act of humility.

The lesser always bows before the greater.

When we rightly perceive Jesus, we will be gripped by his greatness!

Overflowing with joy, the Magi came to Jesus, saw Jesus, bowed before Jesus…

…and then they worshipped him.

The example of the Magi asks this question of us – how do we prepare ourselves to worship Jesus? What do we do in our homes, before we get here, to make ourselves ready to worship our God?

What did the Magi do as they worshipped?

To worship is to adore.

The Magi delighted in the One they had diligently searched for and finally found.

Is this how we understand worship?

As a heart response that loves and delights in our Savior.

***11****On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.*

Sleepers; blankets; stuffies… these are the typical gifts we give to newborns.

Why gold? frankincense? myrrh?

**bible.org** comments on these gifts:

Some bible commentaries see symbolic meanings in the specific gifts given by the Magi. They say that gold was a gift for a king, that incense was for deity, and that the myrrh was a preparation for Jesus’ suffering.

But Matthew, the writer of the gospel, doesn’t draw such conclusions about the gifts, and so we should be cautious about reading into the text something unintended.

Just as it is surprising to see the Magi worship the infant Jesus; it is equally surprising that they gave him such costly gifts. What is certain is that the gifts given were appropriate for a king. The gifts speak of the homage, the reverence, the respect the Magi had for the child Jesus.

And as we shall see, there was a profound practicality for which these gifts provided. https://bible.org/seriespage/3-visit-wise-men-matthew-21-12

What do we learn here?

Giving to Jesus is an outflow of our worship of him.

Delighting in him leads us to give to him.

***12****And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.* ***13****When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”*

What kind of a person kills a baby?

One who is cruel.

One who is hopelessly lost.

One who has tragically turned in on themselves.

A baby is helpless; powerless - it can’t fight back, nor defend itself.

What does this say to us about the kind of world into which Jesus was born?

It was a dangerous place.

Jesus had loving parents; but even as a toddler he had vicious enemies.

Did Joseph and Mary realize the intensity of the hostility towards their son?

I think they had been given hints of it when they went to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord.

Luke 2:21-38

***21****On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived.* ***22****When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord* ***23****(as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord”),****24****and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: “a pair of doves or two young pigeons.”*

At what age was a firstborn male to be presented to the Lord?

See Leviticus 12:1-4.

Forty-one days after Jesus was born, Joseph and Mary went to Jerusalem.

Joseph and Mary were devoted to God.

They lived their lives in the way God said to live.

This is why they presented Jesus to the Lord.

We will come back to this next week – but those of you who are parents, this does say to you, that the greatest gift you can give to your child, is your own devoted, vibrant relationship with God.

There are many things which you provide for your child – but this is the most important.

Your child/children will have to make up their own minds.

But your walk with God does powerfully influence them.

The presenting of Jesus to the Lord - what was this about?

You have to understand the history behind this consecration.

Exodus 13:1-2, 11-16.

\* The firstborn belonged to God because God had spared the Hebrew people from the final plague he brought upon Egypt.

\* The presenting of the firstborn to God served as a reminder to each generation that *“with a mighty hand the Lord had brought the Hebrew people out of Egypt.”*

It is a tendency for humans to forget.

This presenting and consecrating of the firstborn was one of the ways God helped each new generation to remember the great things he had done for them.

Here’s what happened when Mary and Joseph arrived at the temple to consecrate their firstborn son, Jesus.

***25****Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him.****26****It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah.* ***27****Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required,****28****Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:* ***29****“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace.* ***30****For my eyes have seen your salvation,* ***31****which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:* ***32****a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.”* ***33****The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about him.*

Simeon had walked faithfully with God for a long time.

A distinguishing feature of Simeon’s life was that “the Holy Spirit was on him.”

One of the ways, which the life of God in him, manifested itself, is that Simeon was “moved” by the Spirit; that is, Simeon allowed God’s Spirit to direct his life.

Simeon had been waiting for God’s Messiah.

And finally, the One he had long waited for, appeared to him.

Can you imagine the joy and the excitement that coursed through Simeon’s being?

Simeon reminds us that those who are God’s friends, wait on God, and that those who wait on God are not disappointed.

As Simeon saw the Christ-child, he praised God, affirming to Mary and Joseph that their 41-day old baby was God’s salvation for the world!

After the shepherds left them, Luke tells us that *“Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.”* 2:19.

I can well imagine that Mary added, what Simeon had said, to the things she treasured and thought upon.

We too need to let these statements, spoken about Jesus, seep into our souls;

to ponder them; to marvel at them. They speak to us of Jesus’ uniqueness.

Simeon had more to say.

***34****Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against,****35****so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”*

There was a calling of God upon Jesus, similar to the calling placed by God upon the prophet Jeremiah: *“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born*

*I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”* 1:5.

Simeon said: *“This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel…*

The destiny of Jesus… would impact and determine the destiny of all men and women, beginning with those in Israel, and then to the rest of the world…

There is no one else, who has lived, of whom this can be said.

Jesus was good news of great joy for all the people.

But he would not be received as good news by all people.

Jesus’ destiny… continues to impact the destiny of all.

What a person does with Jesus profoundly and decisively influences the trajectory of their life – now, and in the life, that follows death.

If Jesus is rejected, one remains spiritually dead.

But the person who receives Jesus, is born of God – where they had once been dead to God, they are now made alive to him.

This is what Jesus meant when he said: “*I have come that you might have life to the full.* John 10:10

While many of that day thought, the Messiah would conquer and overthrow Israel’s enemies, what God additionally revealed to Simeon, was that his Messiah would first suffer. This is what Simeon meant when he said to Mary: *And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”*

Jesus would be pierced.

Isaiah the prophet said, *“he would be pierced for our transgressions, and crushed for our iniquities.”* Isaiah 53:5

It was a great blessing to be chosen to be the mother of God’s Messiah.

But there was also a great cost that came with that blessing.

When her son was pierced, what was done to him would also pierce Mary’s soul.

Not in the sense that Mary was somehow a co-Savior.

Her heart would be pierced as a mother, seeing her child, carry and die for the sin of the world.

As soon as Simeon finished speaking, another person approached Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus.

***36****There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage,****37****and then was a widow until she was eighty-four.She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying.****38****Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.*

Angels.

Shepherds.

A devout old man.

An old woman who was a prophet.

Learned men from the east.

All, came to Mary and Joseph, at God’s direction; each revealing and confirming who their amazing son was.

What we’ve looked at today, happened after his birth, in the first 18 months of Jesus’ life. There is no doubt; no question - as a newborn; as a baby, as a toddler – Jesus was revealed to be the Christ, the Savior of the world, the Redeemer.

This is who we remember as we come to the Table.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:16-17

We come regularly – lest we forget.

We come to participate in…

We come with joy – for ours is a great salvation.

We come with gratitude – because Jesus did for us what we could not do for ourselves.

We come in order to re-commit ourselves – for if God loved us this much; how can we not love him and gladly serve him with our entire being?