

# Surprises at the Birth of Christ

by William MacDonald

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*William MacDonald explores the unexpected elements surrounding the birth of Christ, emphasizing God's sovereignty and the significance of worshiping Jesus alone.*

**Duration:** 25:16

**Scripture:** Psalm 41:9, Isaiah 60:6, Isaiah 66:20, Matthew 26:56, Luke 22:44, John 17:17, Galatians 3:13

**Topics:** "Birth Of Christ"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the possibility of the preaching of the word of God happening today. He emphasizes that for this to occur, a person must genuinely desire to know the truth, as God will reveal it to them. The preacher highlights that no one is without excuse in the world, as God has revealed himself through creation and conscience. If individuals live up to the light they have been given, God will ensure they receive the gospel light. The sermon also mentions the story of the wise men who presented gifts to Jesus, emphasizing the bitterness Jesus experienced in his life and the redemption he offers to those who come to him in faith. The preacher concludes by emphasizing that salvation is still available to all who repent of their sins and accept Jesus as their Savior.

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## Transcript

Could we turn in our Bibles to Matthew chapter 2 and verse 11. Matthew 2 verse 11. A verse filled with surprises for us this morning.

When they had come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down and worshiped him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to him, gold, frankincense, and myrrh. It says when they had come into the house, the they of course refers to the wise men, doesn't it? Who were the wise men? They were priests of a heathen religion, probably involved in a great deal of superstition and even magic.

They're called magi, from which we get our word magician. They came from Iran. You could hardly have anything more contemporary than that.

Of course it was called Persia or Media in those days, but these men were Iranians. Amazing, isn't it? How did they ever get to the holy land? It's interesting to me, God has his ways of moving checkers on the checkerboard, doesn't he? God has his ways of taking some priest of a heathen religion. They were Gentiles, obviously, and bringing them to the very spot where the Lord Jesus was.

People say, what about the heathen who've never heard the gospel? I want to tell you something today. You don't have to worry about the heathen who've never heard the gospel. God can work in the minds, the intellect, the emotions, the will of people, and cause them to do things.

God can appear to Muslims in a vision, and God can raise up men and women from Christian churches to go out to the heathen with the gospel. God had worked in the minds of these men, and he had prepared a star to lead them to the appointed place. God is sovereign.

God is over all, and God worked in the lives of these men to bring them there. It's interesting to me, God is saying in this, if I can't get people of my own choice, Jewish people, to worship my son, I'll get pagan Gentiles to do it. That's what he did.

The Lord Jesus came to the Jewish people primarily. He came unto his own. His own received him not.

So God said, all right, I'll get Gentiles to worship him. And this is very, very significant. At the very outset of the Savior's life, coming events cast their shadows before them.

And here you have Gentiles coming to the rising of the light while there's no room for him in the inn, while his own people won't have him. It's a reminder to us that very often the most privileged people often miss the blessing. Jesus said that to the religious people of his day, you won't have me, the harlots and publicans crowd into the kingdom.

What a message for the United States today, the most privileged nation on the face of the earth as far as the gospel is concerned. And people spurn the son of God. In other countries of the world, people gladly come to him and bow at his pierced feet.

The second surprise that I noticed here, it says, when they, the wise men, had come into the house, not into the stable, not to the manger as the Christmas cards tell us, they came into the house. In other words, this was some time after the birth of the Lord Jesus. Joseph and Mary were living in a house by this time.

It may have been in Bethlehem. I'd rather think it was in Nazareth. When the Lord Jesus was 40 days old, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord.

And they went to Galilee, to Nazareth, which became his home. I know it's a debated point, but I think it's good to notice here that it was not to the stable that the wise men came, but to the house. It may have been quite a long time after the birth of the Lord Jesus.

The reason we say that is when Herod ordered the execution of the children, he set the age as two years of age or under. Why did he do that two years? If the baby had just been born, if that baby that was causing him sleepless nights was still an infant, why did he say two years and under? A third surprise in the verse is how it says they saw the young child with Mary, his mother. You'd think it would have said they saw Mary holding the young child.

That would be our normal way of saying it, wouldn't it? Putting the mother first and then the infant second. No, it doesn't say that. It says they saw the young child with Mary, his mother.

I think this is a gentle rebuke to the worship of Mary. I think it's a gentle rebuke to any who would put statues of Mary above statues of Jesus. The Bible puts the Lord Jesus first, then Mary, his mother.

But let's think about the young child that they saw there in the house. It has often been pointed out that most children are born to live. This child was born to die.

This child was a unique child. In him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. Just think of that.

In that little body dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead that could never have been said about any child that would ever live. In fact, it's so marvelous that the human mind can't take it in, that the great God of the universe should compress himself as it were into the body of that wonderful infant. It's wonderful that that young child that they saw was the eternal one, and yet he began to count his age by years.

That's wonderful, isn't it? And every year his birth is celebrated, and he doesn't get any older. How marvelous. The eternal one counting his age in years.

It's interesting to me that here he is in Mary's arms, and yet he created Mary. Mary actually looked down into the face of her creator, because we learn that in John chapter one, Colossians chapter one, Hebrews chapter one, all things were made by him. Without him was not anything made that was made.

What a paradox that those eyes of an infant looked up into the face of a Jewish mother whom he had created. Amazing that he, the owner of all, should come into this world, this young child, and face a condition where there was no room for him. He was unwelcome.

No room in the inn. The no vacancy sign was posted. It's wonderful that this child was the omniscient one.

God, omniscient, knows all things, and yet we read he grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man. You say, how can one who knows everything grow in wisdom? It's a mystery. We accept it by faith.

The person of Christ, God and man in one person, is incomprehensible to these minds of ours. But that's good. It's good that it is incomprehensible.

If we could understand everything about God, we would be as great as God. So it's very appropriate that the person of the Lord Jesus should be beyond human understanding, but acceptable by faith. Here is the one who is omnipresent.

He is in all places at one and the same time, and yet in marvelous grace he comes and limits himself to Bethlehem or Nazareth or Egypt, as the case may be. I think it's wonderful that he's the omnipotent one. He has all power, and yet he's a helpless babe, as it were, growing up normally.

I think it's wonderful every time I see a baby to think the Lord Jesus went through this process of growth. I'm sure parents, Christian parents, must think of that often as they see their child developing, and remember that Jesus Christ started off and grew normally among men, just as their little baby is doing. They saw the young child with Mary, his mother.

What an experience that must have been for Mary, bringing into this world a unique child, a child without sin, a child with no trace of rebellion in his heart, a child who never sat her, never spoke back to her. It must have been an interesting home, especially when the other children came along, and the contrast was so glaring. And yet the Bible presents the story very normally and without the use of superlatives.

It's wonderful, isn't it? Mary, his mother. Mary was privileged beyond other women. Jewish women down through the years had longed to be the one to bring the Messiah into the world, and now the privilege

came to this young Jewish maiden.

It was a blessing to be the mother of the Messiah, but I've often pointed out that Mary was more blessed in believing in the Lord Jesus than she was in giving him birth. One day someone said to Jesus, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the pacts that gave thee suck. And Jesus said, Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and do it.

So Mary's blessedness, it wasn't a wonderful privilege to be the mother of our Lord, but it was a more wonderful privilege to be a believer on him. And every one of us has that privilege if we want it. Every one of us can be more privileged than Mary in that natural sense, but we can join with her in believing in him.

Then it says the wise men fell down and worshiped him. Notice they didn't worship Mary, they worshiped Jesus. It was a true spiritual instinct that caused them to do this.

And you wonder why? Their religion was probably Zoroastrianism. It had a lot to do with the stars and everything. But they didn't have the hope of the Messiah.

They didn't have the hope of Christ coming into the world. And yet here they make that trip from Iran all the way to Bethlehem or Nazareth, and they find a child and they bow down and worship him. How do you account for that? There's only one answer.

That is the Holy Spirit. They were guided by the Holy Spirit. Say, could that happen today? Yes, it's happening all the time today.

The important thing is a person must really want to know the truth. If a person wants to know the truth, God will reveal it to him. John 7.17. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God or whether I speak of himself.

If a man lives up to the light that God gives him, God will send him gospel light. No one is without excuse in the world. It says that in Romans 1. So then they are without excuse.

Why? Because God has revealed himself to men in creation and in conscience, and if they live up to that light, God will ensure that they get the gospel light. 2. They fell down and worshiped him, and then they opened their treasures, it says, and they presented to him gold and frankincense and myrrh. You know, times haven't changed very much.

If you looked over the catalogs that came to your house this Christmas, you'd find that most of the things that were advertised were gold, right? Gold jewelry and perfume. That's what this is. Gold and perfume.

Of course, gold speaks to us of deity, doesn't it? It speaks to us of the glory of the Godhead. It's interesting, isn't it? The value that gold has with man. More than silver, more than platinum.

They brought gifts of gold to him. How much they realize the spiritual significance of it, I do not know. But it's very clear that in the scriptures gold does speak of deity.

That one they fell down and worshiped was God, manifest in the flesh. 3. And then they presented gifts of frankincense, frankincense was a perfume, an ointment, and it speaks to me of the fragrance of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Incense, frankincense, pure incense is what it means, pure incense.

How that speaks of the wonderful Lord Jesus, of that perfect light lived here below, and that death on Calvary's cross. The fragrance fills the universe today. 4. And then myrrh.

Myrrh has several different meanings in the Bible. First of all, here it was obviously a precious gift. It was very valuable, as were the gold and the frankincense.

It was a painkiller. It was a sedative, an opiate. Remember on the cross they gave Jesus sour wine mingled with myrrh, but he would not drink it.

It was an opiate given to a dying man to relieve his distress. But the Lord Jesus must bear your sins and my sins with full consciousness, and he would not take it. 5. And then myrrh was also used in embalming.

Isn't that interesting, that the shadow of the cross and of his burial was over him from the very outset. They gave him myrrh, a precious gift, a fragrance, an embalming ointment, and a painkiller. The word myrrh itself means bitter.

Think of the bitterness that there was in the life of the Lord Jesus. He was known as a man of sorrows who knew what grief was. Think of the bitterness of coming into a world that was his own and facing no room in the inn.

Think of the bitterness of Herod's attempt to kill him and his having to flee into Egypt for safety. Despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief. Think of the bitterness of his betrayal by Judas.

He could say, my own familiar friend has lifted up his heel against me. Think of the bitterness of being denied by Peter, the bitterness of having the disciples forsaking him and fleeing in his hour of deepest need. Think of the bitterness of Gethsemane when he sweat as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground, and think of the bitterness of Calvary when he bore in his body the curse for your sins and my sins.

What a marvelous intelligence that the wise men would come and present to the child gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Now, you know, there's a companion verse to our verse back in Isaiah chapter 66. I'll read the verse to you.

It's in the 60s somewhere. It says, The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Esau. All from Sheba shall come.

They shall bring gold and incense, and they shall show forth the praises of the Lord. Sorry, I don't have the exact number of the verse. Chapter 60, verse 6. Yes, there it is.

The multitude of camels shall cover your land, the dromedaries of Midian and Esau. All those from Sheba shall come. Notice, they shall bring gold and incense.

Where is the myrrh? The answer, of course, is that this verse is referring to the second coming of the Lord Jesus when he comes in power and great glory and sets up his kingdom on the earth. How wonderful the scripture is. No more myrrh in that day.

The head that once was crowned with thorns is crowned with glory now. Heaven's royal diadem adorns the mighty victor's brow. We sing, Lord, we joy thy toils are ended.

Glad thy suffering time is o'er. To thy father's throne ascended. There thou lives to die no more.

Near again shall God Jehovah smite the shepherd with the sword. Near again shall cruel sinners set at naught their glorious Lord. Then, of course, we read of the wise men that they went back another way.

All who come to the Lord Jesus in simple trusting faith go back another way. They go back redeemed by his blood, new creation in Christ Jesus. Years ago, our friend Tom Olson wrote a tract that really impressed me.

The title of the tract was The Gift Still Waiting at the Tree. The gift is eternal life. The tree is Calvary.

And after all these centuries, dear friends, the gift is still waiting at the tree. God is still offering salvation to sinful men and women if they will simply come, repent of their sins, and receive this wonderful Savior as their only hope for heaven. I wonder if he's speaking to some here at this Christmas time and saying, come.

Come the way those wise men came. Bow at his feet. Worship him as your Lord and your God.

Shall we pray? Father, we thank you for these simple lessons from your holy word. We pray that the true meaning of Christmas might not be lost on us, that we might see beyond all the tinsel and paper to the Lord Jesus himself, that we might fall at his feet and worship him, Lord and Savior, King of kings and Lord of lords. We ask it in his name and for his sake.

Amen.

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