

THE SEASON THAT STILL TOUCHES HEARTS

STUDY THREE

The Magnet That Still Draws Us Close

Luke 2:1–20

When all the necessary and predicted events had fallen into place, the Savior came exactly where God appointed Him to be born and at the time God wanted Him to come.

—Charles R. Swindoll

JESUS' birth was no last-minute, hope-it-works plan! Jesus was born exactly where and when God intended. God's predetermined plan was like a magnet, pulling together the events surrounding Christ's birth so that Jesus was born at just the right time, in just the right place.

This study for Christmas reminds us that God sovereignly gets His way, often through circumstances no one expected. The magnetism of God's plan drew Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem; it summoned the shepherds to the manger to worship Jesus; and it shone the way for the wise men on their quest to find the King of Kings. It still draws us to Jesus like a heavenly magnet as we come together and worship our Lord and Savior at Christmas.

On that first Christmas, the divine Son of God took His first human breath as He entered humanity as one of us. The moment of Jesus' birth was an event like none other in history, and it changed the world forever. Its appeal was . . . and still is . . . irresistible!



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

The Magnet That Still Draws Us Close

Luke 2:1–20



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Let's prepare our hearts by reflecting on Micah's prophecy of the birth of our Savior.

*But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,
are only a small village among all the people of Judah.
Yet a ruler of Israel
whose origins are in the distant past,
will come from you on my behalf. (Micah 5:2)*

Most people assume great kings come from great cities where important people live and royals rule. Yet, according to Micah's astonishing prophecy, the greatest King would be born in the "small village" of Bethlehem.

Like small, ordinary Bethlehem, we're "small," ordinary folks. And yet, the ruler of the universe inhabits us with His presence. Take a moment to thank the Lord not just for coming into the *world* but into our *hearts* through the Holy Spirit. Invite Him this Christmas to fill you with His light, joy, and peace and to guide you to a closer walk with Him.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Turn to Luke's telling of the Christmas story in [Luke 2:1–20](#) and read his account slowly, noting four sections: Augustus' decree and Mary and Joseph's trip (Luke 2:1–5); the birth of Jesus (2:6–7); the angels' announcement (2:8–14); and the shepherds' response and praise (2:15–20).



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Observation: God's Surprises

The *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study includes the skills of observation, interpretation, correlation, and application.¹ Let's begin by observing how God pulled together the events surrounding Jesus' birth. God was the *invisible* and *invincible* force that turned the wheels of history so that Jesus was born at the appointed time and in just the right location.

Augustus' Edict and the Decrees of God

On the human level, what was the reason Joseph and Mary had to travel to Bethlehem (*Luke 2:1–5*)? On the divine level, why did God want them to be in Bethlehem (*Micah 5:2*)?

Behind the scenes of Jesus' birth are the “eternal decrees” of God, comprised of His sovereign plan for all things He determined before time began. These plans even include the census edict of Augustus, the great emperor of Rome, who, unbeknownst to him, was merely God's errand boy for fulfilling Old Testament prophecy. Like a magnet, God's eternal plan drew Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem so that Jesus could be born in “David's ancient home” (*Luke 2:4*).

The Birth of Jesus

Likely, the Jewish Bible scholars who studied the messianic prophecies assumed the royal descendent of King David would be born in a palace. What details of Jesus' humble birth would have shocked the Bible scholars of Jesus' day (*Luke 2:6–7*)?



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Jesus' lowly birth identified Him with society's underclass. "There was no lodging available" (for someone who was an outcast). And Jesus was swaddled "in strips of cloth" (as the dead were wrapped). How do these foreshadow Jesus' future life and ministry (*Isaiah 53:3; Luke 23:53*)?

There was no flare to Jesus' birth. We live in a day of dazzling spotlights, light shows, and ear-splitting performances. Not with God. Jesus was born with understated simplicity and the muted tones of humility and obscurity. —Chuck Swindoll

The Announcement of the Angels

God's heavenly "magnet" kept pulling world events and aligning people around the birth of God's Son. After drawing Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem via Augustus' imperial edict, God called upon His celestial angels to draw the shepherds to the manger. How did the "angel of the Lord" first appear, and what did he say (*Luke 2:8–12*)?

No one in Judea would have expected God to announce the Messiah's arrival to shoddy shepherds. But then, neither would anyone expect the Messiah to be born among animals, swaddled in cloths, and laying in a feeding trough!



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The Response and Praise of the Shepherds

For centuries, artists have attempted to capture the moment the shepherds saw the newborn Savior and His mother treasuring her baby with Joseph looking on. View the online image of the 1622 painting, *The Adoration of the Shepherds*, by Gerard van Honthorst, which is exhibited at the Wallraf-Richartz Museum in Cologne, Germany. Put yourself in this painting as one of the shepherds.

If you were one of them, how do you think this rustic, simple setting would have inspired your praise?

Don't miss "all people" in Luke 2:10, starting with you! You're not unknown to God. You're not uninfluential before God. He knows you by name, knows every hair on your head. He cares about you, just as He cared for the shepherds who received the message first.
—Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: “The Fullness of the Time”

Observing God’s sovereign plan at work in the details of Luke’s Christmas narrative leads us to a better understanding of “the fullness of time” in Galatians 4:4. Read the following verses and reflect on the meaning of this phrase.

But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. (Galatians 4:4–5 NASB)



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How had biblical history culminated according to God’s timetable and reached its “fullness” at the coming of Christ? For a hint, turn back one chapter in Luke and read Zacharias’ prophecy of Jesus’ birth as the fulfillment of God’s promises to David and Abraham (*Luke 1:68–73*) and the ultimate fulfillment of God’s rescue of His people (*1:74–79*). Based on this passage, what promises were fulfilled when Jesus was born?

By fulfilling the teaching and prophecies of the Old Testament, the coming of Christ signaled a new era in God’s redemptive plan—a new era radiantly marked by the Messiah’s star rising in the east!



Correlation: How God’s Heavenly Magnet Drew the Magi

A review of the attractive power of God’s plan at Christmas wouldn’t be complete without considering the Magi. What drew the wise men to travel from Eastern lands to Bethlehem (Matthew 2:1–2)? Who did they hope to find, and why did their quest threaten King Herod (2:2–6)?



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What was the wise men's response when the star led them to Jesus and they entered His home (Matthew 2:9–12).

The angel of the Lord brought the shepherds “great joy” (Luke 2:10) and, at seeing the star, the Magi were “filled with joy” (Matthew 2:10). Joy is our heart's natural response when we praise God. *Joy to the world, our Savior is born!*

It's a wonderful Christmas tradition to give gifts to those we love. This is a wonderful moment to complete your Christmas giving list by giving yourself to Christ.
—Chuck Swindoll



Application: Giving Ourselves to Christ

How can we adequately respond to the gift of Jesus? We can give Him ourselves in return. As you close this Christmas study, express your heart of adoration and joy by worshiping the Child. Pick out your favorite carol to sing in joyful praise, or you can close meditatively with the final lines from “Angels We Have Heard on High.”

*Come to Bethlehem, and see
Him whose birth the angels sing;
Come, adore on bended knee
Christ the Lord, the newborn King.
Gloria in excelsis Deo,
Gloria in excelsis Deo.²*



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A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for drawing me to Your Son through the power of the Holy Spirit. Like the shepherds and the wise men, I feel the pull of Your redemptive grace announced by the angels and revealed by the rising star. I come to the manger in worship and with no gift to give my Savior but my heart. Receive my love and worship today! Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn about Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, visit the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. Traditional French carol, public domain.



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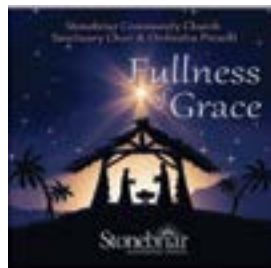
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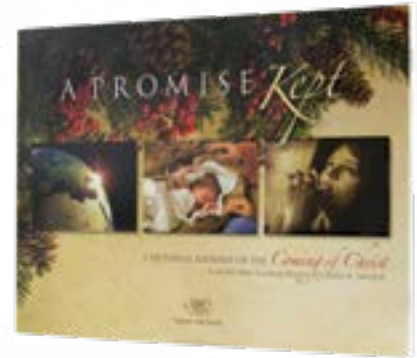
Tools for Digging Deeper



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For the 2019 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Pastoral Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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