

## **A SAVIOR IS BORN**

Part 3: How to Worship the Savior  
Matthew 2:1-12

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Words of Encouragement Days 120-126



**Hope** is a powerful force in the human heart. In fact, **Hope** is *THE* essential ingredient for an abundant life, the kind of life that Jesus promised us. It's essential. We need **HOPE** and the good news is **THERE IS HOPE!**

The first Christmas gift brought the greatest **HOPE** of all — a Savior - to people who needed it most. Everyone could use more **HOPE** - You, me, family, neighbors, friends, those you know slightly and those you haven't even met yet. Need some **HOPE** this Christmas? Do you want to know how to share a word of **HOPE** with those around you? Join us online each Sunday to discover how to open God's gift of **HOPE** this Christmas.

**This Week's Memory Verse:**

**1 Peter 2:9**

***"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."***

## MEETING WITH GOD – Day 120

*“The Lord hears His people when they call to Him for help. He rescues them from all their troubles. The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; He rescues those whose spirits are crushed. The righteous person faces many troubles, but the Lord comes to the rescue each time. For the Lord protects the bones of the righteous; not one of them is broken”*  
*Psalms 34:17-20*

## WHEN YOU DON'T HAVE IT IN YOU

**PERHAPS** you've had a great year and can't wait to celebrate Christmas. In fact perhaps for you, Christmas has always been one of the most exciting times of your whole year. If that describes you, that's great! But maybe you fall into another group of people who don't really look forward to Christmas. Maybe this Christmas, you just don't have it in you to celebrate. Maybe this past year has been overshadowed by a heaviness that refuses to budge. For you, it could feel like the joy has been sucked out of you. Sure, you go through the motions - the tree is trimmed, the lights strung, and the treats are baked, but the joy of the season? That's been stolen by the year gone by.

For times when you feel like all your joy is gone, scripture reminds us that Jesus did not come down from heaven for those who have it all together. He came for those who are broken, hurt, and disappointed. He came for the messy and the forgotten. He came to heal the brokenhearted. He came to restore joy. He came to flood your heart with peace that just doesn't make sense in your situation.

Life is full of unpredictable and unexpected moments. Sometimes we are so full of joy, we can't contain it. If that describes you, make sure you stop to thank God for it. The other side is equally true. It could be that your

circumstances haven't changed, and maybe those fissures from the past won't magically mend, but this Christmas, know that Jesus came for you. As broken and messed up as your year may have been, His love is infinitely greater. He is able. Able to restore joy, bring peace, and truly bless your Christmas with the best gift of all – His presence.

## TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Thank you that you are near to me when things go the way I hope they would go as well as when they take a very unexpected and even difficult turn. (Ps. 34:18) During those moments when I can't seem to shake off the gloom and sometimes find myself in a dark place when I think of the past, help me to remember that You bring life and healing and hope to the hopeless. (John 10:10) Thank you for rescuing me from a place of discouragement when I call out to you (Ps. 34:17), for giving me a peace that passes all understanding (Phil. 4:7), and allowing me to know the fullness of joy that comes from being in your presence (Ps. 16:11). In Jesus' Name, Amen.

**Love the way Jesus loves!**

**Pastor Steve**

## MEETING WITH GOD – Day 121

*"The Lord God said to the snake, 'Because you did this, a curse will be put on you. You will be cursed more than any tame animal or wild animal. You will crawl on your stomach, and you will eat dust all the days of your life. I will make you and the woman enemies to each other. Your descendants and her descendants . . .'" Genesis 3:14-15*

### THE START OF CHRISTMAS

"**SOME** people believe that Christmas officially begins when Santa arrives at the Macy's Thanksgiving parade."

That was the line a first grader had to deliver at her school assembly which had a Christmas theme. Her parents helped her to practice the line, but her parents weren't entirely convinced of the veracity of the statement. Sure, some people believe that Christmas begins when Thanksgiving – marked in New York City by the Macy's parade – wraps up. But when did Christmas officially begin? With Mary and Joseph traveling to Bethlehem? Or with angel Gabriel's announcement to Mary?

The more I think about it, the more I believe that Christmas "officially" began with the fall of man found in Genesis 3. After creation, when Adam and Eve chose to deliberately disobey God, it broke the relationship between man and his Creator. **That's when God put His rescue plan into motion. He didn't wait for man to clean up his act.** Right then, God spoke of the birth of the second Adam – Christ – who would crush Satan's head. Years later, God brought about the birth of Christ to fulfill that spoken promise, and once put into motion, His rescue plan rescued you and me. Today, we can enjoy a restored relationship with our creator God all because of His Word fulfilled. He is the incredible promise keeper!

### TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Thank you for being a living, loving God, and thank you for reaching out to us right in the midst of our brokenness and our sinfulness with your plan to restore mankind and, more specifically, to bring me into a right relationship with you. I am grateful that from the very beginning, you put into motion a rescue plan for mankind. Thank you for keeping your incredible promise to send Jesus for all mankind, including me. Thank you for always keeping all of your promises. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

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**Pastor Steve**

## MEETING WITH GOD – Day 122

*"For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:6-8*

### BENEATH THE FOUNTAIN

**TODAY**, let us pause and pour out our hearts in humble adoration for the One who came to redeem us while we were utterly powerless.

If I stop long enough, I see **a love so extravagant, so lavish, so relentless that it broke into the darkness of the world that Christmas morn.** It's a love so unfailing, so divine that it continues to pour down on us, soaking us in His grace and plunging us beneath the fountain of His love. Christmas is the love story of God who loved us so much, He loved us enough to send His one and only Son to the earth. It's the story of a God who would humble Himself and give up His throne for a trough in a stable. **Grace droplets drench our daily lives.** We could write them off as coincidence. We could put it down to good fortune. We could proclaim that it's the result of our hard work. But when I truly pay attention to my world, I see God's grace upon us, moment by moment! You see it in the smile of a baby, find it in the warmth of a hug, hear it in an answer to prayer, watch it in the glimpse of a glorious sunset, discover it in the nourishment from His Word, taste it in a really great homemade meal, and, of course, experience it fresh and new in Christmas. This Christmas, spend some time alone with God who loves you unconditionally and allow him to completely astound you by His love and grace!

## TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Thank you for your abundant, abounding grace. Thank you that we don't have to earn a drop of the mighty river of grace that flows freely for us today, and thank you for the unexpected, unmerited favor you've showered on my life. Help me to put myself in the path of your love and grace. Help me to not neglect the discipline I need to meet with you regularly so I might drink from the water of life you offer to all who trust you. Thank you for your rich love. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

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**Pastor Steve**

## **MEETING WITH GOD – Day 123**

*“Then the Kingdom of Heaven will be like ten bridesmaids who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. The five who were foolish didn’t take enough olive oil for their lamps . . .” Matthew 25:1-2*

### **READY FOR HIS RETURN**

**THE** word ‘Advent’ comes from the Latin ‘adventus’ or coming. Waiting and anticipating various comings has been a part of human history since the beginning of time. Throughout the history of Israel, we know the prophets spoke of waiting for the advent of the promised Messiah. More specifically, the Israelites waited 400 years with silence from God in between the Old and New Testaments for the coming of the promised Messiah. Moving forward in history, the Christian church around the world celebrates Advent during this season as we make preparations to celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. And while we are in this current season of Advent, we are also looking ahead, and in a different kind of waiting room of sorts. Believers today are anxiously awaiting Christ’s return – when He will right all wrong, do away with sickness, and wipe away every tear.

But as we wait, let’s do so in anticipation and readiness like the five wise virgins in today’s passage. As was the custom of the day, virgins prepared to meet the bridegroom. A part of their preparation required them to have lamps ready and trimmed with oil, and because they did not know exactly when the bridegroom would arrive, they needed to take their lamps with them. Ten virgins went to meet the bridegroom. Five wisely took enough oil, but five foolishly did not.

When Christ our Bridegroom returns, let’s not be found unprepared and preoccupied like the five foolish virgins. Like those foolish ones, we can’t buy or borrow spiritual preparedness when the time comes. On the outside, they looked ready for the arrival of the bridegroom, but they clearly did not care enough about his coming to prepare themselves on the inside. Instead, although we don’t know when Christ will return, let us always live in the repentance and redemption Christ offers so that when he comes, we can be ready to greet him and celebrate that day!

### **TODAY'S PRAYER**

Father, The celebration of Christmas is a reminder to me of when You first sent Your Son into a broken world. I do much to prepare for Christmas. In the same way, help me to always prepare myself for the day you will return to claim your bride, the church. As your child, I look forward to your return and anticipate the promise that you will wipe away every tear and heal every broken heart. Until then, I ask that you help me not to live in any pretense, but instead, live in preparedness. Help me be found in Christ when He comes again. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

**Love the way Jesus loves!**

**Pastor Steve**

## MEETING WITH GOD – Day 124

*“Don’t be afraid, Mary,” the angel told her, “for you have found favor with God! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!” Mary asked the angel, “But how can this happen? I am a virgin.” Luke 1:30-34*

## DIFFERENT ATTITUDES

**TODAY** we reflect on two seemingly similar, yet vastly different questions in the passages we read. The messenger – Gabriel – is the same. The message – an announcement of a baby boy’s birth – is similar. Yet, the attitude of the recipient made all the difference.

In Luke 1:11-18, Zechariah receives the promise of a son. A long-awaited, much-prayed-for baby. And yet, he doubted and questioned God. He asks, “How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years.”(vs 18). Zechariah doubted God and His goodness and power. He believed more in his inability than God’s ability. His attitude brought admonition - Zechariah’s mouth was temporarily sealed.

Contrast that with Luke 1:30-31 when Mary received the promise of a son, the long-awaited Messiah. But her attitude is markedly different. “How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?” (Vs 34) She didn’t doubt God’s ability to bring his plan to pass. She was merely asking God how He would accomplish what she believed He would do. **Her attitude brought blessing - more than she asked or imagined!**

As we go into the Christmas season, are we questioning God and doubting His power? Or, are we trusting that He works things out according to His plan and good pleasure

## TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, I come to you humbly, knowing that when You speak, You act, and when You promise, You fulfill. Help me never to doubt Your power or Your goodness. Thank You for fulfilling Your Word and being gracious even when I give in to fear. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

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**Pastor Steve**

## MEETING WITH GOD – Day 125

*“At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David’s ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee.” Luke 2:1-4*

## HE IS ON THE THRONE

**CAESAR** Augustus – the name itself inspires a certain awe and authority. One can be sure that the decrees of this first Roman emperor were not to be trifled with. Joseph probably had little choice but to follow the Caesar’s decree and head to Bethlehem for the census. He *had* to take a long difficult trip with a young, pregnant wife. Imagine Mary riding on the donkey while being nine months pregnant and ready to give birth. Imagine their conversation as they planned this trip. No comforts of home, no closest hospital, no familiar surrounding. Talk about unexpected circumstances.

And yet, despite what it seemed like on the outside, God was orchestrating every detail. Despite the seeming unknowns, God knew every step. He was in perfect control. He knew the exact location, place, time, circumstances, and surroundings when Jesus was to be born. Although Mary would not be able to send out a birth announcement, He prepared a heavenly choir of angels to proclaim the news. Although there probably was not an elaborate baby shower, he sent wise men bearing incredible gifts to greet the child. And even Caesar, as in control of his empire as he seemed to be, was simply being used to fulfill the prophecy found in Micah 5:2 that

the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem - a prophecy written 700 years before Christ was born!

Yes, sometimes our lives may seem a meaningless series of mishaps and misfortunes. It may seem like the “powers that be” are twisting the very fabric of our lives to suit their purposes. But the amazing truth is that God is at work in the background to fulfill His plan. **He has put those powers and authorities in place and He is far above all. Yes, the government shall be upon His shoulders!**

## TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, As I read the Christmas story and the marvelous unfolding of events prophesied hundreds of years before that time, I stand astounded by Your power. You are the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. Nothing and nobody can thwart your plans, Lord. Give me the peace that comes with knowing you know about every detail of my life and are aware of every circumstance I face. Help me to be confident in Your power! In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

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## MEETING WITH GOD – Day 126

*“This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. Joseph, to whom she was engaged, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement. As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. “Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, ” for he will save his people from their sins.” Matthew 1:18-21*

### NOT JUST A REGULAR NICE GUY

**TODAY'S** passage is a familiar one about a really good guy – Joseph, the man pledged to marry Mary. Things must have been going great for Joseph. Perhaps his carpentry business was doing well, and he was ready for the next stage of his life – to marry the woman betrothed to him. Imagine his excitement as he planned and prepared for this new stage of life. You can almost see him planning the home they would live in - he could probably build most of it! Since Mary was raised in a Jewish home, she probably learned some cooking skills from her mother, and Joseph was probably looking forward to Mary's home cooking and sharing life together with her.

Then all of a sudden, with one simple announcement, Joseph's plans fell apart. He found out that his wife-to-be was already with child. Talk about unexpected news! The gospel account in Matthew records that since Joseph was a righteous man, he planned to divorce Mary quietly. That was until God spoke to him in a dream. The moment God spoke to him, Joseph stopped being a regular nice guy. In an instant, He became an obedient follower of God – even

when he didn't know how things would work out. He became a risk taker for God. **He didn't just do the good thing. He did the godly thing. He didn't just do the right or reasonable thing. He did the righteous thing.** This part of the Christmas story provides a pause and an opportunity to ask some pointed questions. What is my response when God calls me to do the unexpected? Do I shrink from obedience because of fear? Or, like Joseph, do I follow the righteous way because I trust that God knows what He's doing?

### TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Thank you for giving me the example of Joseph, who followed you as soon as You asked him to trust You. Thank You that when You call, You also equip. Help me to remember that Your grace is sufficient for me and Your power is made perfect in my weakness, and help me to always choose the path that puts You first, no matter what the consequences. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

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