

The WONDER of It All



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of It All



When we think of Christmas, a lot of different things come to mind. During this season, we see bright lights on houses, the smell of real pine trees, cookies in the oven, and gifts wrapped perfectly with bright red bows. An empty chair at the table that reminds us of someone we miss. It's incredible how one season can evoke such a range of emotions at once. We all experience Christmas music that makes us smile or makes us want to turn it off, the story of Jesus' birth, the quiet ache of loneliness, or the pressure to find the "perfect" gift.

For parents, Christmas may bring stress.
For those who are grieving, Christmas may bring deep sadness.
For many children, Christmas brings the pure wonder of it all.

There is something truly special about Christmas that fills kids with a sense of awe. No matter where we are in life, we all have a reason to rediscover that sense of wonder. The story surrounding Jesus' birth isn't just a sweet scene we put on a mantle. The details tell us something about who He is. A light in dark places. The bread that gives life. The details of His birth point us straight to His nature and His mission, inviting us to stand in wonder.

This Christmas, I encourage you to pause for a moment and reflect on the wonder of it all. The wonder of Jesus entering the world. The wonder of Him being the Christ. The wonder wrapped up in His name itself, Jesus, "The Lord saves." Christmas does not just invite us to remember the story of Jesus' birth, but to stand in wonder of it again. That God so loved the world that he came near.





“**The Wonder of It All**” invites you to slow down and walk a path shaped by awe and reverence as we reflect on four ways to experience the wonder of our Savior drawing near.

- We begin with the **wonder of the promise**, where hope first starts to stir.
- As the promise stirs our hearts, we move to the **wonder of the message**, as heaven breaks into silence to declare good news.
- From there, we see the message taking shape at the **wonder of the birth**, the moment when heaven and earth meet most unexpectedly.
- Our final stop as we shape our hearts in wonder is the **wonder of the response**, as hearts awaken to praise and devotion.

This season invites us to pause, to marvel, and to worship as we consider the wonder of it all. The wonder of all God has done in Christ from the very beginning, to this very moment, and into eternity.

*“And all who heard it **wondered** at what the shepherds told them.”*

Luke 2:18



THE WONDER OF IT ALL

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THE WONDER OF THE PROMISE: Hope Begins to Stir



The First Promise

The wonder of God's rescue plan, even in our failure.

*"I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel."*

Genesis 3:15

This verse is the first hint of good news we see after sin enters the world and death follows closely behind. In the middle of Adam and Eve's failure when they chose not to listen to what God had told them, God already had a plan in motion to deal with the evil and death that had just taken hold.

What God says here in Genesis 3:15 shows that there would be tension and hostility between those who follow God and those who follow the enemy. That was part of the consequence of sin. Even so, there's something wonderful about this moment. Before God even lays out the consequences for Adam and Eve's disobedience, He tells them how the ultimate accuser, Satan, will one day be defeated and, in doing so, offers them hope. Right from the start, He promises them there will be a way out. He provides an early glimpse of redemption before the story has even begun to unfold. This promise points ahead to a Messiah who would defeat Satan, though not without suffering. Isaiah picks up on this when he writes,

*"But he was pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his wounds we are healed."*

Isaiah 53:5

One more detail in this passage warrants reflection: it refers to the "seed of the woman," not the Seed of the man. This unusual phrasing points forward to a miraculous and unique birth. The promised Messiah, who would one day crush the head of the enemy, would enter the world in a way unlike any other.

When we reflect on all that this verse points to, a sense of wonder begins to stir within us. Knowing that Jesus would suffer to save us from the mess we brought on ourselves should leave us on our knees in wonder.

Reflection

- What does it show about God that He gave hope even before dealing with the consequences of sin?
- How should Jesus' sacrifice change the way we live and treat each other as a family?

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for giving hope from the very beginning. Thank You for sending Jesus to defeat sin and bring us life. Help our family love You more and follow You each day. Amen.

A Promise to Abraham

Through one man, blessing for all nations.

“Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

Genesis 12:1-3

In Genesis 12, God promised Abram that through him “all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” That promise comes into full view when Jesus enters the story. When examining the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1:1–17, you’ll notice that it traces back to Abraham. That matters. Every nation, every family, every person is blessed through Christ, Abraham’s descendant, just as God said in Genesis 22:18,

“And in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.”

Matthew’s genealogy confirms that Jesus is the promised “seed” through whom this blessing would come. Paul makes this even clearer in Galatians 3:16 when he writes,

“Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ.”

Christ is the promised Seed, the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham. Now here’s the part that should still take our breath away. Through Christ, we are invited into that same promise.

“And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.”

Galatians 3:29

Think about this verse for a moment. Somehow, we’re included in a promise God made thousands of years ago. We get to share in it. Honestly, that’s something worth sitting with in wonder.

Reflection

- How does it impact you to know that God included us in a promise He made thousands of years ago?
- What does it mean for us that we get to share in this promise because we belong to Christ?

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for keeping all of your promises. Thank you for Jesus, who has fulfilled many of Your promises. Help us walk in Your blessing and trust Your faithfulness every day. Amen.

The Promise of “God With Us”- Immanuel

The wonder of God coming near to us through a miraculous, virgin birth.

“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”

Isaiah 7:14

The promise that the Savior would be born of a virgin is remarkable on its own. To see that promise fulfilled, as we read in Matthew 1:18–23, is nothing short of miraculous. Jesus’ birth was a sign that God had come in the flesh to dwell with humanity. As John 1:14 tells us,

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

It’s interesting to notice the details in God’s miraculous work. Think of Adam, the first man. He had no mother or father; he was created without conception. God simply made him. Yet, through Adam, sin entered the world. Through Jesus, born miraculously of Mary by the Holy Spirit, sin begins to leave the world. Paul explains this in Romans 5.

“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned... as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.”

Romans 5:12, 18-19

If we believe in the miraculous exit of Christ’s resurrection and ascension, why is it so hard for some to believe in the miraculous entrance of Jesus into the world? The virgin birth shows us the incredible lengths the Son of God was willing to go to become our Redeemer. He was born so He could die for us. That truth alone is something we can never grow tired of marveling at. It’s a wonder that invites us to worship, to come near to Him as He came near to us.

Reflection

- How does the miraculous way Jesus entered the world stir your heart toward worship and gratitude today?

- What are ways that you can draw near to God?

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for coming near to us in such a miraculous way. Help us never lose our wonder at Jesus' birth and the salvation He brings. Draw our hearts to worship You each day. Amen.

The Promised Righteous Branch

Hope through a promised Savior.

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The Lord is our righteousness.’” **Jeremiah 23:5-6**

In this passage, we see God making a promise to a people who often struggled with doing what was right. He promised that one day He would send a King to be their righteousness. When we look back at the kings of Israel, many of them failed to lead wisely or justly. This promise of a Lord being their righteousness probably filled them with hope for finally having a king who would rule wisely, execute justice, and act justly in all his actions. This type of king could bring salvation to them. What they may not have known is that it was a salvation for their souls, not necessarily from a physical enemy.

This promise points forward to Jesus, a branch from the line of David. The image of a branch shows new life and growth, and the fact that He comes from David’s line reminds us that God’s promise to David wasn’t just about a family tree; it was about a reign of righteousness that would last forever.

“And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.” **2nd Samuel 7:16**

God kept that promise by having Jesus fulfill it. As we read in Luke 1:32–33, the angel tells Mary:

“He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”

Through Jesus, that long-awaited promise comes to life. Our King reigns with perfect justice and righteousness, offering hope, security, and salvation that will never end. What a wonderful King we serve!

Reflection

- What does it mean to you that God kept His promise to send a perfect and righteous King in Jesus?
- How can we trust and follow Jesus as our King in everyday life?

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for keeping Your promise to send us a perfect and righteous King. Help us trust Jesus, follow His ways, and rest in the hope and security of His forever kingdom. Amen.

The Promise of a Herald

The wonder before Christ came.

“A voice cries:

*“In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord;
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”*

Isaiah 40:3

“Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts.” **Malachi 3:1**

A herald is someone who announces or signals the arrival of another. These verses tell us that God promised that someone would come before the Savior to prepare the way so He could be heard and recognized. One of the clearest prophecies about this herald points to John the Baptist. In Malachi 4:6, God promised that someone would come to prepare the people, and Luke shares how that promise was fulfilled when the angel visited Zechariah to tell him that his wife, Elizabeth, would bear a son named John.

“And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.”

Luke 1:16-17

God didn't just prepare John for his role. He also prepared the circumstances of his birth, which in itself is something to marvel at. Elizabeth had been barren, and both she and Zechariah were elderly. Yet God sent an angel to declare that their son would become the herald for the Savior, who had not yet been born. Zechariah doubted the message, and as a result, he was unable to speak until the birth of John.

Both John's miraculous birth and the fact that his father could not speak until John was born point to God's power and careful planning. He is always at work, preparing the way, even when it seems there is no way. His ways are mighty, and His plans never fail.

Reflection

- How does John the Baptist's story remind us that God prepares the way even when we can't see how things will work out?
- What is one way we can "prepare the way" for Jesus in our hearts and our homes?

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for always working behind the scenes and preparing the way for Your plans. Help us listen to You, trust You, and make room in our hearts for Jesus each day. Amen.

Promised Time

God's perfect timing brings redemption.

"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons." **Galatians 4:4-5**

This passage highlights the humanity of Jesus by reminding us that He was born of a woman. At the same time, it connects to the promise and curse given in Genesis 3:15. Through Adam and Eve, sin entered the world, but God had a plan to rescue humanity and fulfill the promise of blessing to Abraham and his descendants. To save humanity, Jesus became humanity.

"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree'—so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith."

Galatians 3:13-14

Throughout Scripture, we see God working in perfect timing, often described as the "fullness of time."

"For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly."

Romans 5:6

"As a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth in him."

Ephesians 1:10

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

Mark 1:15

Just as God had a perfect time for Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection, we can also look forward in wonder to the time of His final return. One day, He will call us home to be reunited with Him, and all things will be made complete in His presence. What a wonderful day that will be!

Reflection

- What is something right now that you are struggling to wait on in God's timing?

- How does God's perfect timing teach you to trust Him?

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for sending Jesus at just the right time to save us. Help us trust Your perfect timing, especially in the things we find challenging to wait for. Fill us with hope as we look forward to the day You make all things complete. Amen.

The Promise of Waiting

Learning to trust God's timing.

*“Wait for the Lord;
be strong, and let your heart take courage;
wait for the Lord!”*

Psalms 27:14

This verse reminds us to wait for the Lord, which implies there will be times of waiting in life. Just as the Israelites waited around 400 years in silence for their promised righteous King, we too must trust that God keeps His promises. He promised to be with us to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20), and He promised that His Son would return.

“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”

John 14:1-3

Silence does not mean nothing is happening. God was at work behind the scenes, preparing the arrival of the world's Savior, the birth of His one and only Son. Although God's voice seemed silent, He was preparing to make a joyful announcement through the virgin birth of Jesus, with angels proclaiming the good news to the shepherds.

Waiting and anticipation make the arrival of a promised gift even sweeter. Think about Christmas, the excitement of opening gifts, the smell of delicious food, and the joy of time with family. None of it would feel as magical without the anticipation. For children, the wonder is tangible as they count the days until Christmas.

Now imagine that same kind of wonder experienced by a people who had been promised a Savior and a King, yet had waited around 400 years in silence. They longed for deliverance, but God's timing was perfect. What was the message that compelled God to break His silence? The birth of a Savior. What a moment of wonder it must have been when the waiting finally met the arrival of their Savior.

Reflection

- How can you trust God in the moments of your life that feel silent or unanswered?

- How does knowing God kept His promises in the past help you wait with hope today?

Prayer:

Lord, thank You that even in silence You are always at work. Help us trust You while we wait and remember that Your timing is always perfect. Fill our hearts with hope as we look forward to the promises You've made. Amen.



**THE WONDER OF THE
MESSAGE:**
Good News is Declared



Gabriel Visits Zechariah

God's faithfulness remembered.

*"But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared. And Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." And the angel answered him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news." **Luke 1:13-19***

The message delivered by the angel, identified in this passage as Gabriel, marks the moment when God finally breaks His long silence. It serves as a reminder that God is faithful to keep His promises. Gabriel's message fulfills what God said long ago in Malachi 3:1, that someone would come to prepare the way for the Savior. This message of John's coming birth was a way of awakening wonder, reminding His people that the Messiah really was on the way.

As people recalled the promise of a messenger who would prepare the way for the Savior, their hearts must have been stirred with fresh hope that the Messiah was finally drawing near. Imagine the relief they felt after living through years of silence, still trusting God even when they hadn't heard His voice, and then finally receiving a message straight from Him. This was more than a message, this was a promise fulfilled. A promise that was already beginning to unfold before their eyes. You can almost hear the murmurs spreading through the crowd as word traveled that Gabriel had appeared to Zechariah with this good news. What a hopeful sound that must have been.

Reflection

- Can you remember a time when God seemed to break through the silence in your life and remind you that He was near?
- Why is it so important to you that God keeps and fulfills His promises?

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for the moments when You break through the silence and remind us You are still at work. Help us trust Your promises and wait with hope, just as Your people did long ago. Amen.

Gabriel Visits Mary

The wonder of a willing heart.

“In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin’s name was Mary. And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!” But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.” And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.”

Luke 1:26-38

Pause for a moment and sit in the wonder of Mary’s response to the life-altering news she received from Gabriel. Her willingness to submit to the Lord and accept the role of being the mother of the Savior leaves us asking, “How was it so easy for Mary to surrender to God’s plan, especially a plan that would make her look like an outcast, even a social pariah, in her own community?”

Was her response, “*I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word,*” rooted in who she was, or was it flowing out of who she believed God to be? Faithful, trustworthy, and completely sovereign. Maybe Mary’s willing heart speaks less about her own strength and more about the character of God.

No matter what ultimately shaped Mary’s response, God is the one who made a way for Jesus to enter the world. Her willing yes was simply the beautiful means He used.

Reflection

- What does Mary's "yes" to God teach us about trusting Him when His plans are hard to understand?
- How can we show the same kind of faith and surrender in our everyday lives?

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for Mary's trust and obedience. Help us follow You with willing hearts, even when things feel uncertain. Teach us to trust Your goodness in every situation. Amen.

Joseph's Dream

Trusting God's plan when it is hard to understand.

"Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus."

Matthew 1:18-25

Do you ever wonder what God is doing? How could the situation you're in help your spiritual walk, or how to trust when you can't make sense of His ways? Joseph seemed to wrestle with the same thing. He planned to "fix" his situation by divorcing Mary quietly, a response that made sense and was even merciful by the law's standards. However, it was not the way God intended. So God stepped in, sending an angel in a dream to redirect him.

When Joseph woke up, he didn't hesitate. He acted on what God had revealed to him, even knowing it would bring questions, whispers, and challenges for both him and Mary. The wonder of Joseph's trust, choosing God's way over the way that seemed easiest or most logical, speaks volumes about God's character and His determination to fulfill His promise of the coming Messiah. Joseph trusted God so profoundly that he moved in obedience, even when it cost him something.

Reflection

- Read Isaiah 55:8-9. What other Scriptures can you find that encourage us to surrender to God's ways?

- What is one thing this week you can surrender to God that is keeping you from walking closely with Him?

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for Joseph's surrender to Your plan. Help us surrender to Your ways, even when we don't fully understand. Give us faith to believe that Your plans are always better than our own. Amen.

Mary's Song

Worship rising from wonder.

"And Mary said, 'My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.'"

Luke 1:46-55

Mary's song of praise may be one of the earliest Christmas songs, but its tone is far from the cheerful sound often associated with the season. As Bonhoeffer has stated, *"This song has none of the sweet, nostalgic, or even playful tones of some of our Christmas carols."* Instead, Mary speaks of the poor, the hungry, and the homeless. Mary's song echoes the prayer of Hannah after the birth of Samuel in 1 Samuel 2, carrying the same tone of trust, humility, and confidence in God's faithfulness.

Mary's response is to sing. Her praise centers on God's power to lift the humble and bring down the proud. Her focus isn't on herself but on God's faithfulness. She sings these words openly, in Elizabeth's presence, and not tucked away in private. Her whole desire is to magnify the Lord.

She praises God even while knowing the road ahead will not be easy. In her culture, a young, unmarried, pregnant lady would have been dismissed and judged. She was aware of the whispers and scrutiny that would come, but she still chose worship over worry. She saw the blessing in being selected as the Messiah's mother rather than fixating on the "mess" that might follow.

Reflection

- What is one Christmas song about Jesus' birth that you love, and why does it stand out to you?

- What practical steps can you take to begin praising God when you face a difficult circumstance?

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for Mary's example of trust and praise. Help us lift our hearts to You, even in difficult times, and to focus on Your faithfulness instead of our fears. Bring a song to mind and in our hearts in all circumstances. Amen.

The Promised Herald is Born

Preparing the way.

“Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, but his mother answered, “No; he shall be called John.” And they said to her, “None of your relatives is called by this name.” And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, “His name is John.” And they all wondered. And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, “What then will this child be?” For the hand of the Lord was with him.” **Luke 1:57-66**

John's birth is another moment worth marveling at. He was born to a barren woman and aging parents, a miracle in itself. His father, Zechariah, had been rendered mute because of his doubt, but when he finally spoke again at the birth of John, his first words were used to bless God and declare the good news that his son would prepare the way for Christ.

Both Zechariah's and John's lives remind us that we, too, can be messengers of God's truth, through both our words and our actions. John's message was one of repentance and forgiveness, pointing people toward the One who would bring lasting joy, healing, and eternal forgiveness.

So the question becomes: how might you be preparing the way for someone to meet the Savior? What message do your words and deeds send to others? Is it a message that leads to the message of Christ? Your honest response to those questions is worth pausing to consider.

Reflection

- How might you be preparing the way for someone to meet Jesus through your words and actions?

- Does the way you live and speak point others toward Christ, and if not, what could you change?

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for the example of John and Zechariah. Help us use our words and actions to point others to You and prepare hearts to meet Jesus. Amen.

Zechariah's Prophecy

The dawn of mercy.

And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

Luke 1:67-79

Zechariah praises God for fulfilling His covenant promises to David and Abraham. That covenant fulfillment would come through the very one whom John would later announce to the world. As Zechariah continues, he highlights the ministry of the coming Messiah, pointing in verse 79 to the light that breaks into darkness, a clear reference to Isaiah 9:2, *"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone."*

The wonder of this prophecy centers on the Messiah Himself; His forgiveness, His mercy, and the light He brings. With John's birth now a reality, the arrival of the promised Savior was becoming unmistakably real to all who witnessed these events.

From Abraham to David to the birth of John, every covenant reminds us of the wonder of God's power to do precisely what He says He will do. Even when it seems impossible, nothing is impossible with God. The Savior **will** be born.

Reflection

- Is there anything about God's light exposing the darkness in your life that makes you feel scared? Are there areas you're hesitant to let Him bring into the light, and why?

- What part of Jesus' coming, His forgiveness, mercy, or light, do you most need to experience right now?

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for keeping every promise and sending Your light into our darkness. Give us the courage to allow Your light to expose the darkest parts of our hearts and the strength to take action to make changes for Your glory and good. Amen.

The Word Became Flesh

The wonder of God with us.

*“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” **John 1:1-14***

Jesus **is** the Word. He is the message. In the Gospel of John, the story of Jesus doesn't begin with His birth in Bethlehem but goes all the way back to the very beginning of creation. John tells us that Jesus was present when the world was formed, that He has always existed. Verses 1 and 14 of this passage work together to show us that Jesus, the Word, was present from the very beginning.

The Word of God became a person. That person was Jesus. God's message took on flesh. It is only by being made flesh, by being born, that He can die and shed His blood, fulfilling the symbolism of the sacrificial lamb required by the law to atone for sin. His message is that Jesus is the Son of God and the Son of Man. Jesus always was, yet was also born into flesh to enter our world so that He could die for us and bring light into our darkness.

The wonder of a Savior who has always existed yet was also born in human flesh is enough to make anyone stand in awe of the God who makes this possible.

Reflection

- What amazes you most about the fact that Jesus, who has always existed, was born as a human?

- What thoughts or emotions rise in you when you reflect on the truth that Jesus had to be born to die for us?

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for sending Jesus, who has always existed, yet became human to live among us and die for our sins. Help us stand in awe of Your amazing love and trust in Your plan of salvation. Amen.



THE WONDER OF THE BIRTH: Heaven Touches Earth



Journey to Bethlehem

God working through ordinary events.

“In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.”

Luke 2:1-5

Who would have imagined that a census, a simple registration of the people, would play such a monumental role in the birth of Jesus? An ordinary event set in motion the journey that brought Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem at just the right time. The Messiah being born in this small town had already been prophesied.

“But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.” **Micah 5:2**

Another prophecy connected to Bethlehem was fulfilled as well. Being born there affirmed Jesus’ rightful claim as the greater Son of David, the promised ruler of Isaiah 9. Gabriel reinforced this when he spoke to Mary.

“He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

Luke 1:32-33

Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem, the city of David, also aligned with both His legal lineage through Joseph and His physical lineage through Mary.

An ordinary town and an ordinary census served as the backdrop for the extraordinary arrival of the Savior. The simple requirement to travel for a census became part of God’s plan to reveal Christ’s identity. That alone is a wonder. May we never dismiss the ordinary in our lives. Who knows what extraordinary thing God could be working on?

Reflection

- How does knowing God uses ordinary events, like a census, to accomplish His plan encourage you to trust Him in everyday life?

- What is something ordinary in your life, or in the life of someone close to you, that God has used greatly?

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for using ordinary events to bring about Your extraordinary plan. Help us trust You in the everyday moments and notice the wonders You are working all around us. Amen.

No Room in the Inn

Humility of the King of Glory.

“And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.”

Luke 1:6-7

Many scholars believe that a more accurate translation for the word “inn” in this text is actually “guest room.” What we picture today as a hotel with multiple rooms would not match what an “inn” looked like in that time. Instead, it was most likely a guest room within a family home, perhaps even the home of a relative.

In Greek, Luke uses the word *kataluma* in this passage when talking about the inn. The Greek word *kataluma* refers to a guest room or space in a family home, typically reserved for honored guests or travelers. Luke uses this same word in Luke 22 to describe the “upper room” where Jesus observed the Passover with His disciples.

When Luke wants to describe a public lodging place, what we would think of as an inn, he uses an entirely different Greek word, *pandocheion*, as seen in the story of the Good Samaritan found in Luke 10:34.

Since the *kataluma* was full, Mary and Joseph stayed in a space where a manger was available. A manger was a feeding trough for animals. The King who came to save the world was born where animals stayed, and He was laid in the very place where they fed. It’s a quiet piece of foreshadowing, hinting at the truth Jesus would later proclaim that we must “feed on” Him, the bread of life.

“Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.’” **John 6:35**

What wonder there is in knowing that our Savior is not some distant God ruling from afar. Instead, He draws near and invites us to be filled by Him. He humbled Himself, entering the world in the most unexpected and lowly way, so He could love and save us.

Reflection

- What does it teach you about God that Jesus, the King, chose to be born in a humble place like a manger?

- How can we remember to “feed on” Jesus, the Bread of Life, in our daily lives?

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for humbling Yourself to come near to us in Jesus. Help us seek Him each day, be filled by Him, and share His love with others. May we feed on every word that You have shared with us. Amen.

The Angels Appear

The light of the whole world has come.

“And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

Luke 2:8-14

In those days, shepherds would have been considered among the lowest in society. So for the very first announcement of Jesus’ birth to be given to them is a bold and surprising statement. Have you ever paused to wonder why God chose the lowly and overlooked as the first to hear the good news that the Savior had finally arrived?

Perhaps God wanted to make it unmistakably clear that Jesus is for everyone. Not just a particular nation, not just the wealthy or influential, not just those we might expect a king to associate with, and not just those who seem to “get it right.” He came for all people.

This bold declaration, that He is a King for everyone, is surrounded by the glory of the Lord shining around the shepherds. Light breaks into the darkness, revealing that this message is meant for all, echoing Jesus’ own words that He is the light of the world.

“Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” **John 8:12**

His invitation to leave the darkness and enter His light is for all the world. Not a portion of the world. Not a favored corner of it. The whole world. We must be willing to follow Him into His light.

Reflection

- Why do you think God chose shepherds who were considered lowly and overlooked to be the first to hear about Jesus' birth?
- How can you respond to Jesus' invitation to leave darkness and follow Him into His light?

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for sending Jesus for everyone, regardless of who we are. Help us follow Him into Your light and share His love with others. Amen.

The Shepherds Visit

Awe that leads to action.

“When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.”

Luke 2:15-20

The shepherds took the angels' announcement to heart. They believed the “good news of great joy” really was for all people, not just for them. Trusting that the message from the angel of the Lord was true, they acted on it. They got up and went to the place they had been told they would find the Savior.

Once they saw Jesus lying in that manger, they couldn't keep quiet. They shared what they had been told and seen, that Christ had come. They didn't overthink it or worry about how people might respond. They simply spoke from what they had seen and heard. In doing so, these humble shepherds became the very first evangelists of Jesus the Savior. The lowest on society's ladder were entrusted with the highest message ever given.

And when people heard them, Scripture says they “wondered.” Some translations say they “marveled.” No strategy, no polished presentation, no program, just the simple, honest testimony of people who had encountered the truth.

That's really all sharing the gospel is. The message itself is enough. God uses ordinary people who are willing to speak with joy about what they have seen, what they have heard, and what they know to be true of Jesus. Let the wonder that still stirs in your heart at the reality of a Savior be the very invitation you offer to others.

Reflection

- How can you, like the shepherds, share the joy of Jesus simply by speaking about what you've seen, heard, and experienced?

- What stops you from sharing the good news of Jesus with others?

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for the example of the shepherds who shared the good news with joy. Help me speak boldly about Jesus and invite others to experience the wonder of Your salvation. Amen.

The Star and the Wise Men

Seeking the Savior.

“Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, ‘Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.’ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: ‘And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’” Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.” After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was.”

Matthew 2:1-9

Again, we see light woven throughout this passage. The star becomes more than a celestial sign; it is a guide. God uses a literal light in the sky to lead the wise men to the Savior, who calls Himself “the light of the world.”

“Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.’” **John 8:12**

This star miraculously guided the wise men from the regions east of Jerusalem all the way to Bethlehem. It lit their path and led them straight to Jesus, just as Jesus is now the light who shows us the way to walk. How fitting and wondrous that God chose a star, a bright light, to lead the wise men to the light of the world. Isaiah 60:3 supports this truth about Jesus being the light, “*And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.*” Even in His birth, you can already see the power of His light, people from far away being drawn to Him, drawn to His light.

Reflection

- How does the story of the star guiding the wise men help you understand how Jesus, the Light of the World, can guide your life?
- In what ways can you follow Jesus' light more closely each day?

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for sending Jesus, the Light of the World, to guide us through life. Help us all to see Your light, follow it faithfully, and point others toward Him. Amen.

The Wise Men's Gifts

Worship expressed through giving.

“When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.”

Matthew 2:10-12

Bringing gifts was a long-standing tradition, a way of paying tribute when visiting a king. We see this in Psalm 72:10 and 2 Chronicles 32:23, where gifts were brought to earthly kings. So the fact that the wise men brought Jesus gifts shows they truly believed Him to be their King. Their gifts reflected the admiration and wonder they felt toward this King, Jesus.

Gold was associated with anything of great value and was often required as an offering when worshiping God, precisely what the wise men were doing as they fell before Him. Frankincense was used in the temple, and Scripture indicates that priests used it in many of their meal offerings. It was both costly and precious. Myrrh was used both ceremonially and practically, as seen in Exodus 30:23, Psalm 45:8, and Proverbs 7:17. It was renowned for its medicinal qualities and was also employed for embalming purposes. Though it may seem like an unusual gift for a baby, it carried deep meaning and value.

Many scholars believe these gifts were chosen to represent different aspects of who Jesus is: gold portraying His kingship, frankincense His deity, and myrrh pointing toward His future suffering and death, as it was used in the embalming process. Others believe the gifts may have been God's provision to help fund the family's escape to Egypt.

Regardless of why these gifts were offered, the heart behind them is clear. They were expressions of admiration and sincere worship for the Savior of the world.

Reflection

- What do the gifts of the wise men teach us about honoring Jesus with our own gifts and actions?
- How can you express admiration and worship for Jesus in everyday life, not just during special occasions?

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for the example of the wise men who honored Jesus with their gifts. Help us offer You our hearts, time, money, and talents as acts of worship and admiration. Amen.

The Flight to Egypt

God's protection and providence.

*"Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son." **Matthew 2:13-15***

We read here another account of an angel of the Lord visiting Joseph in a dream, and once again, he obeys. Obedience is a key thread running through the entire story of Jesus coming to earth. Many people chose to obey as we've read about the wonders surrounding Jesus' birth. Abraham obeyed. Mary obeyed. Joseph obeyed. Zechariah obeyed. The shepherds obeyed. The wise men obeyed. And Joseph obeyed yet again.

This doesn't take away from the wonder of God or the power He displayed; if anything, it magnifies our awe. It shows us the power of God to bring about His plans through ordinary people who have the choice to obey or not. He is so powerful that whatever He intends to accomplish *will* be accomplished, and yet He invites us to be part of it through our obedience.

As Hosea 11:1 prophesied that God would call His Son out of Egypt, God warned Joseph about Herod's danger, and Joseph obeyed. Because he chose to follow, God's protection and providence surrounded him and his family, allowing him to step fully into the fulfillment of God's prophecy.

God still invites us into His mighty works. When we choose to step out in obedience, we often discover that He has wonderful things in store for us, such as His protection and providence, just as He faithfully provided for and protected Joseph, Mary, and Jesus.

Reflection

- What excites you about the idea that your obedience could allow you to be part of something greater that God is doing?
- What is one area in your life where God might be inviting you to step out in obedience this week?

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for the faithful obedience of many in the story of Jesus' birth. Thank You for inviting us to join in Your mighty work, just as You invited many to be part of the story of Jesus' birth. Help us to trust and obey You, even when it's difficult or unclear. Amen.



THE WONDER OF THE RESPONSE:

Hearts Awaken to Praise



Simeon's Song

Eyes that have seen salvation.

“Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”

And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”

Luke 2:25-35

When we are in the presence of the Lord, we can rest in the peace He provides. Simeon had been told he would see the Lord's Christ before he died. He waited not only to see the Messiah but also so he could depart in peace. Seeing salvation in human form, Jesus, meant that his long-awaited promise had been fulfilled and that he could now die. Yet even with that knowledge, Simeon chose to sing a song of praise. He did not let the reality of the nearness of his own death diminish the joy of seeing the Savior of the world.

We, too, should take time to praise the Lord and marvel at His wondrous works, even in circumstances that may feel difficult or are less than desirable. Our wonder with who Jesus is should always redirect our fears and concerns for ourselves.

Who He is matters above all else.

Reflection

- How does Simeon's joy in seeing Jesus, even knowing his life was nearly over, inspire you to focus on who God is rather than your own worries?

- What is one way you or your family can pause this week to praise God and marvel at His wondrous works?

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for the example of Simeon, who praised You even when faced with his own mortality. Help us focus on who You are above all else and find joy and wonder in Your presence, no matter the circumstances. Amen.

Anna, the Prophetess

A lifetime of worship fulfilled.

“And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.” **Luke 2:36-38**

We read here that Anna had been a widow for most of her life. During that time, she devoted herself entirely to the Lord at the temple, spending her days worshiping, fasting, and praying. Even after losing her husband, she chose worship. She kept her focus on the Lord and on the peace He provides.

I often wonder if Anna didn't leave the temple because she longed so deeply to be as close as possible to God, the only one who could bring her peace in the midst of her difficult times. Her devotion and desire to draw near to God led her to spend time in the temple, which at that time was believed to be the place where God's presence dwelt, especially in the Holy of Holies. Her devotion and desire to be near Him positioned her to have an encounter with the Savior. When we draw near to God, even in the midst of hard times, we too can be rewarded with seeing the wonderful things He is doing, just as Anna saw.

Anna was among some of the first to honor the newborn King, but her worship came from someone whose social status as a widow would have made her one of the “lower” people in society, much like the shepherds. Yet God revealed His child, the Savior, to her just the same.

The good news inspired her to go and share with those who had been waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem, proclaiming that their Savior had been born. What a beautiful response Anna had. The wonder and joy she found, despite her own hardships, and the urgency with which she shared them, serve as a powerful example for us.

Reflection

- What is something you do that helps you draw near to God?

- What is one way you can share the joy of Jesus with others, even when life feels challenging?

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for Anna's example of devotion and worship. Help us draw near to You in every circumstance and share the joy of Jesus with those around us. Amen.

The Wonder of Mary's Heart

Treasuring every moment of God's faithfulness.

"But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart." **Luke 2:19**

"And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart."
Luke 2:51

Just as we have been traveling through the wonders surrounding the birth of Jesus, Mary is also seen treasuring the events of His birth and the knowledge of His future as the Savior of the world. The phrase "treasured up" originates from the Greek word *syntēreō*, which implies careful preservation or guarding of something considered very valuable. Mary did not merely remember the events around her Son's birth; she recognized their significance, held them in high regard, and pondered their meaning.

Even though Gabriel had already told her that her child would be the Savior, Mary still stood in wonder, reflecting on what had happened and what was yet to come when the shepherds shared what the angels had told them concerning her Son. She continued to treasure all she learned about Jesus, even many years later, as we see when He was twelve and went to the temple. When Mary and Joseph could not find Him, Mary asked why, and Jesus responded, *"Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"* (Luke 2:49). Even with this knowledge, Mary continued to *"treasure up all these things in her heart."*

In both instances, Mary already knew who Jesus was and acknowledged Him as the Christ. Yet she still took time to treasure what she already knew, to hold it in high regard, and to sit in wonder of it. We should be encouraged to do the same. May our knowledge of who Jesus is never stop us from treasuring Him, reflecting on His works, and being in awe of who He is and what He has done. Let us be intentional in pausing to remember and preserving the ways we have seen God at work in our lives and in the lives of those around us.

Reflection

- How can you, like Mary, intentionally treasure and reflect on the ways God has worked in your life?

- What is one thing you can do that will help create a habit of slowing down to marvel at who Jesus is and what He has done?

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for the example of Mary, who treasured Your works and held them in her heart. Help me to never lose that child-like wonder when it comes to who Jesus is and what He has done. Amen.

The Wonder of It All

The greatest gift: God's love revealed in Christ.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

John 3:16-17

The wonder of this gracious gift of a Savior is truly something to be in awe of all year long, not just at Christmas. The Son of God became one of us for our salvation. His birth is significant because it allowed Him to fully share in our humanity so that He could die on our behalf. Jesus was born so that He could die, for you, for me, for all.

While many of the events surrounding His birth are awe-inspiring and fill us with wonder, we must never forget the greatest wonder of all: Who Jesus is and what He does. He is the Son of the Most High, the Savior. He is named Jesus, which means "The Lord Saves," and that is exactly what He does. He saves.

Take a moment to read aloud John 3:16-17 and, as you do, replace the words "the world" with your own name.

"For God so loved _____, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn _____, but in order that _____ might be saved through him."

John 3:16-17

As you hear your own name spoken in the story of God's rescue, let the wonder settle deeply into your heart: He came for you. The wonder that steadies us. The wonder that shapes us. The wonder that saves us.

Oh, the wonder of it all! Christ has come, and because He came, everything is different.

